



Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus in dialogue with Economics Nobel Laureate Sir James Mirrlees on Social Business at the Chinese University of Hong Kong on Wednesday.

PHOTO: YUNUS CENTRE

Bus service via Dhaka

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service at the Tripura Road Transport Corp international bus terminus depot.

A 45-seater Volvo bus, carrying 18 passengers, including two Canadians, left in the afternoon for Kolkata via Dhaka. Six of the passengers were bound for Kolkata and 12 for Bangladesh, according to Indian media report.

The buses, scheduled to ply twice a week, have a fare ranging between Rs 1,800 and Rs 2,000.

The route connecting West Bengal's capital with Tripura's capital through Indian soil is 1,675 kilometres, and the journey takes around 36 hours. However, the 515km journey via Dhaka will not take more than 16 hours, sources said.

Earlier, Hasina and Modi jointly inaugurated the Dhaka-Shillong-Guwahati and Kolkata-Dhaka-

Agartala bus services during Modi's visit to Bangladesh on June 6.

The two countries have long been operating Dhaka-Kolkata and Dhaka-Agartala bus services and Dhaka-Kolkata train services.

The Dhaka-Kolkata bus service began in June 1999. And a separate Agartala-Dhaka service started in September 2003.

Both the countries are also in consultations to introduce new bus services on Khulna-Kolkata and Jessore-Kolkata routes.

During his visit to Bangladesh, Modi agreed to consider Bangladesh's proposal to introduce the 2nd Maitree Express between Khulna and Kolkata.

Bangladesh and India are also working in the railway sector development to establish the Akhaura-Agartala railway link and the revival of the old railway links.

Send back Nur

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The court order came after the Indian home ministry had accepted a request from the Bangladesh government to send Hossain back to face trial. In view of the request, the ministry decided to withdraw the case.

A senior home ministry official in New Delhi said they would wait for the formal court order before making a decision as to how to send Hossain back.

A decision has to be made after a

careful analysis of legal implications whether to deported Hossain as an illegal alien or send him back under the extradition treaty between India and Bangladesh, he noted.

Hossain, a former Awami League leader, has been charged with masterminding the murder of his party rival Nazrul Islam, his lawyer Chandan Sarkar, and five others.

The seven were abducted on April 27 last year. Later, their bodies were found floating in the Shitalakkhya river.

Tender rules 'bent' to award power plant contract

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bidders' proposal and determine whose bid is the lowest.

As per the tender requirements, the contractor will arrange the finance for the project for the government.

According to official papers, the BPDB's tender evaluation calculates the per kilowatt project cost of Harbin-Jiangsu at \$1,022 -- this is the highest among all the six bidders. The lowest per kilowatt construction cost of \$718 was offered by Shanghai-Alsaldo.

But surprisingly, the evaluation committee ranked Harbin-Jiangsu as the lowest bidder by giving it high marks on its financial and other components of proposal.

On August 24, the BPDB recommended to award the dual fuel combined cycle power project to the Harbin-Jiangsu consortium.

The Greek firm J&P-AVAX formally wrote a letter to the prime minister last month, complaining about the anomalies that took place in the tender evaluation.

The company said: "We are of the firm opinion that our consortium is the preferred bidder if the authority evaluates the offers as per the tender specifications."

"Unfortunately, we feel that there

is an effort within the authority to try to accept and evaluate the consortium of Harbin-Jiangsu and bring them in the position of the preferred bidder which did not offer the guaranteed data as per tender specifications, and therefore should be immediately rejected."

The letter, signed by Theodoros Arseniou, director of energy of J&P-AVAX SA, said the Harbin-Jiangsu consortium also offered a \$27-million higher price than J&P-AVAX SA.

The J&P-AVAX SA letter sought the prime minister's intervention in resolving the issue. It also threatened to take legal actions in order to protect its rights. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) sought the ministry's comment on the letter. Accordingly the ministry sought the version of the BPDB.

The BPDB Chairman replied that the Harbin-Jiangsu consortium turned out as the lowest responsive bidder in case of technical and financial proposals evaluation. The bidders' proposals were evaluated in line with rules and regulations. The proposal (of the consortium) under consideration is not contrary to the rules and regulations, he wrote in the letter.

BPDB floated the tender in May this year. The deadline for submit-

ting bid proposal was July 2, which was later extended to July 13. Twenty-four companies or joint ventures initially bought tender documents, but only seven submitted bid proposals.

QUESTIONS ABOUT TENDER EVALUATION

The Harbin-Jiangsu consortium proposed to produce 357 MW of electricity, but the tender limit was 300 MW, a condition the other bidders followed. One of the requirements said the tender evaluation committee would not consider the proposal if any company proposed to produce less than 200 MW or more than 300 MW.

Clause 25 of the tender term described that "...Excess Net Output of more than 300 MW at site conditions shall not be considered for evaluation of per kW cost."

This means that if a bidder proposes more than 300 MW, the additional production capacity will not be considered in the evaluation. But it did not happen while evaluating the proposal of the consortium, said a number of bidders.

In case of the Harbin-Jiangsu's offer, the BPDB committee calculated the potential cost of per kilowatt-hour of electricity on the basis of the "heat rate" of 357 MW—while

showing it as a 300 MW plant. Consequently, the BPDB calculated Harbin-Jiangsu plant's heat rate at 6,382 kilojoule per kilowatt-hour when it should actually be 7784 kilojoule.

In power plant technology, a higher heat rate means it is less energy efficient. Therefore the BPDB evaluation showed Harbin-Jiangsu's plant to be more energy efficient and cheaper than it actually was.

Co-bidder J&P Avax in its complaint letter to the Prime Minister noted this anomaly saying, "It means this bidder, acting against the tender specification, is trying to offer a much larger combined cycle power plant output in order to be evaluated at the better heat rate.... This is not allowed by the tender specifications and therefore this tenderer should be excluded from any further step of the evaluation...."

According to a complaint filed with the power ministry, this anomaly alone will pass a hidden cost of at least Tk 500 crore on the country.

Besides, another bidder alleged that the BPDB miscalculated the interest rate of at least one bidder to give Harbin an upper hand in the financing part of the project. In this case, it refrained from using its formula to

calculate the net present value of the debt servicing cost for one bidder, while using the same for Harbin-Jiangsu.

This bidder had proposed to mobilise funds from three sources. While calculating how much the BPDB would pay back for the loan from these three sources in 30 instalments, the BPDB did not take into consideration currency devaluation for all three sources. It just considered devaluation of funding from just one of the three sources. This resulted in making its loan proposal unattractive.

But Harbin-Jiangsu's financing proposal was calculated properly.

PERFORMANCE RECORD OF HARBIN

Harbin repeatedly made the headlines back in 2005 when it completed the 80 MW Tongi power plant with more than 450 technical glitches. The plant tripped on the day of inauguration and continued to perform poorly for the next couple of years.

During the caretaker government regime, a corruption case was filed against Tarique Rahman's friend Giasuddin Al Mamun, charging him of taking bribe in exchange of the Tongi contract to Harbin.

In 2006, Harbin was blacklisted by state-run Eastern Refinery Ltd for failing to install and launch a 3 MW

power plant.

The tender document also mentions that if a company, jointly or individually, failed to show satisfactory result in setting up any power plant in Bangladesh, its proposal would not be taken into account by BPDB.

In 2014, the BPDB had disqualified Harbin in the 400 MW power project in Bibiyana for submitting false information. As per the tender evaluation report of the BPDB, Harbin had claimed that it had experience of building a 400 MW power plant citing an experience certificate. But the BPDB found out that the 400 MW plant consisted of two power plants built in different times.

RESPONSES FROM AUTHORITIES
Minhajuddin Ahmed, a member of BPDB, and head of the tender evaluation committee, did not receive mobile phone calls or reply to messages.

BPDB Chairman Khandker Maksudul Hassan did not receive phone calls or reply to messages sent by The Daily Star.

Power Secretary Monowarul Islam said the project proposal would come to his division before it goes to the cabinet committee on purchase for final approval. "We will look into it if there is any anomaly."

Cox's Bazar clash kills 1

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A youth was killed and at least five others were injured in a clash between two local groups of criminals over establishing supremacy in Cox's Bazar's Dakkhin Rumaliarchhara area yesterday.

The dead is Sheikh Abdullah, 20, son of Ohidul Alam in the area.

Police said followers of the two groups -- "Rocky Bahini" and "Hasnat Bahini" -- locked in a clash in Samity Bazar area around 7:00pm. They also

fired shots at each other in the hour-long clash.

Ohidul alleged that criminals loyal to Rocky dragged his son out of a tea stall and stabbed him during the clash.

Abdullah was taken to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

Later, a police team went there and brought the situation under control, said Aslam Hossain, officer-in-charge of Cox's Bazar Sadar Police Station.

A step forward in rice research

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Rice Research Institute (BIRRI).

"Now that I'm getting complete genome sequences of some of these germplasm (24 to be precise), it'll be helpful for me to try developing the CO2 efficient rice in future," hoped Sazzad, a senior scientific officer (SSO) at BIRRI Plant Physiology Division.

CO2 is a potent greenhouse gas and plays a vital role in regulating the earth's surface temperature, currently constituting about 0.04% or in other words, 400 parts per million (ppm) of the atmosphere.

"There are some projections that CO2 concentration may reach 600 ppm by 2050. So we've to prepare now for developing rice varieties that are able to withstand high temperature in future," said the BIRRI scientist.

The genome sequencing of 186 Bangladeshi rice varieties comes as part of an international collaboration -- 3K RGP (3,000 Rice Genomes Project) -- that accomplished the decoding of 3,000 rice varieties of 89 countries.

Three research institutions -- the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS), the Beijing Genomics Institute (BGI) Shenzhen and the IRRI -- collaborated to sequence the genomes of 3,000 rice varieties and lines stored in the IRRI (82%) and the CAAS (18%) gene banks.

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology jointly funded the sequencing and the initial analysis.

Of the 186 decoded Bangladeshi rice breeds, seeds of 179 germplasm and four advanced breeding lines were taken from the IRRI gene bank while seeds of two high-yielding varieties (BR11 and BR24) and one



Sample seeds from among the 127,000 rice accessions stored in the International Rice Genebank at the International Rice Research Institute.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF IRRI

advanced line were taken from the CAAS collection.

The homegrown traditional varieties include Binnaful, Hijol Digha, Jabor Sail, Kalabokri, Lal Moti, Pankhiraj, Badshabbog, Kushiara, Dhola Aman, Birui Sail and Sada Jira.

BIRRI has a collection of about 8,000 rice germplasm in its own gene depository and duplicate copies of this gene pool are also stored at the IRRI gene bank, Seed Storage Laboratory at Fort Collins, Colorado in USA and Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Norway.

With 127,000 rice accessions the IRRI maintains the biggest collection of rice genetic diversity in the world at the International Rice Genebank in the Philippines. Countries from all over the world send their rice to the IRRI for safe keeping and common

public good.

Last week, the Philippines-based IRRI formally placed all the genome maps of 3,000 rice varieties with the UN FAO-based International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) in Rome in a move to set up a global data exchange system for crop genetic resources.

This new 3K RGP data analysis set is massive at 120 terabytes, which is well beyond the computing capacities of most research institutions. However, these new results are now publicly available online as an Amazon Web Services (AWS) Public Data Set.

BIRRI sources said they have so far downloaded genome maps of 10 varieties and would access others gradually.

Some BIRRI scientists said they would not be able to make the best out of the huge genome resources unless they are equipped with powerful internet servers, computers and better trained manpower in bioinformatics.

Bioinformatics is an interdisciplinary field that combines computer science, statistics, mathematics and engineering to analyse and interpret biological data.

There is not a single bioinformatician at the BIRRI at the moment.

Dr Zeba Islam Seraj, who teaches biochemistry and molecular biology at the University of Dhaka, told The Daily Star that her lab has got two bioinformaticians.

"Soon we're going to offer bioinformatics training from the newly set up Centre for Bioinformatics Learning Advancement and Systematic Training," she said.

Dr Zeba, the scientist behind developing the country's first transgenic salt-tolerant rice, said establishment of a genomic institute could help provide lab facilities for genome sequencing and data analysing of varied plants.

On completion of 3,000 rice genome sequencing, CAAS President Jia-Yang Li, BGI Chief Executive Jun Wang and IRRI Director General Robert Stewart Zeigler wrote a joint commentary in the UK-based Giga Science journal.

They said, "For this ambitious effort to be meaningful beyond the scientific community, significant investments will have to be made in measuring plant performance under a wide range of conditions, as well as the development of data management approaches that can apply the genetic knowledge to practical uses."

Abed receives

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Capitol Building in Iowa, USA.

John Ruan III, chairman of the World Food Prize, handed over the award to Abed. The award includes a cash prize of \$ 250,000, said a Brac statement.

"I must acknowledge that the award does not belong to me alone, it is the recognition of Brac's work over the last 43 years in providing pathways out of poverty for millions of people in Bangladesh and other countries in Africa and Asia," said Abed, receiving the award.

The real heroes are the poor themselves and in particular, the poverty-hit women who overcome enormous challenges each day of their lives, he added.

"Throughout our work across the world, we have learnt that countries and culture vary; but realities, struggles, aspirations and dreams of poor and marginalised people are remarkably similar."

"In the coming decades we must refine methods of delivery at scale, placing solutions at the hands of poor people themselves and track progress. Only by putting the poor specially

women in charge of their own lives and destinies poverty and deprivation can be removed from the face of the earth," observed the Brac chief.

US Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, President of World Food Prize Foundation Ambassador Kenneth Quinn, President of Iowa senate Pam Jochum, Speaker of Iowa house Linda Upmeyer and former president of the republic of Malawi and founder of the Joyce Banda Foundation Joyce Banda was present at the programme, chaired by Iowa Governor Terry Branstad.

Brac is widely credited as a major contributor to Bangladesh's achievement in halving poverty and hunger levels since 1990, in line with the UN's Millennium Development Goals, through its sustained efforts in the fields of poverty and hunger eradication and food security, according to the statement.

The organisation, said the release, has helped nearly 150 million people worldwide with the opportunity for enhanced food security.

Earlier this year, Ambassador Kenneth M Quinn in Washington, DC announced Abed as the winner of this year's prize.