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KHULNA POWER PLANT Tender process turns awkward

Ministry to leave the decision to cabinet committee amid controversy

SHARIER KHAN

The power ministry is set to seek decision of the cabinet's purchase committee to either cancel an on-going power tender because of controversy surrounding it or award its contract to a Chinese consortium that created the controversy.

This move is very unusual because the ministry is supposed to seek approval of one specific proposal from the purchase committee instead of offering it with contradictory choices, says a power ministry official.

The official explains that the ministry is doing so as there is tremendous pressure to award the contract to the Chinese consortium. But as there are strong allegations about manipulating the tender process to favour that Chinese consortium, the ministry is not willing to take the onus of this decision.

This tender to build a 200 to 300 megawatt dual fuel power plant in Khulna was floated in mid 2015. The Power Development Board (PDB) selected Chinese consortium Harbin-Jiangsu as the lowest bidder in August, but the decision was instantly challenged by some co-bidders, officially and unofficially.

When the bid was opened on July 13 last year, the read out price of Harbin-Jiangsu was \$292 million to construct the power plant. But this price is higher than that of five other bidders. For instance, Shanghai Electric-Alsaldo consortium offered \$183 million.

The bid was also participated by Chinese Guangdong Power Engineering Co, Guangdong Electric Power Design

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The early morning juice of the date palm trees could be had fresh. The juice can be made into molasses and sold, inset. Molasses is used in making a variety of traditional cakes, badam papri (a sweet made with peanuts), and it could be had with puffed or parched or flattened rice. But date palm trees are becoming rare. The photos were taken last month in Khajura of Jessore.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Jessore's signature date juice gets scarce

MOKAMMEL SHUIVO with ANDREW EAGLE

As the Bangla saying goes, "Khejurer rosh, Jessorer josh," roughly meaning, "Wild date palm syrup is the pride of Jessore."

Alternately known as the wild, sugar or silver date palm, phoenix sylvestris has been cultivated in its native subcontinent for centuries. In Bangladesh its sap is tapped to be consumed fresh, or processed into either syrup or the jaggery known as "gur". Nowhere is the wild date palm more synonymous with local identity than in Jessore, but with the number of trees in decline, how long the age-old saying will hold true is uncertain.

The juice with its earthy, sweet botanic taste, is widely loved. "The taste of wild date palm syrup of a winter's morning is heavenly," says Yasmin Akhtar Jesmin of Jessore's Bejpara. "Winter is worthless without palm syrup and gur cakes."

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Free footpaths by March 1

Annisul asks grabbers; says walkways to be reclaimed before April

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Annisul Huq yesterday asked grabbers to free city footpaths by March 1.

Footpaths are meant for pedestrians' movement, not for doing business, he said at a closing programme at DNCC zonal office in the capital's Mirpur of a seven-day special cleaning drive across Dhaka north.

"We are going to reclaim all the illegally occupied footpaths by April 1," he said, adding that shop owners since then would not be allowed to occupy a single inch of the public places anymore.

He called upon the businesses and companies to remove commercial signs and graffiti from the flyovers and walls in public places by the end of this

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Now improve train services

Passengers demand as hiked fares take effect

PANKAG KARMAKAR

Passengers were looking for better train services as they started buying tickets at higher prices yesterday.

The railways ministry has hiked the ticket fares and freight charges by 7.23 percent on average to cut losses.

Shortage of tickets, uncomfortable seats, filthy toilets, delay in schedule and overcrowding are some major problems facing the railway.

Talking to The Daily Star at Kamalapur Railway Station yesterday, passengers said the railway authorities must improve services to justify the hike.

As per the revised fares, a Showon Chair passenger has to pay Tk 345 for a trip to Chittagong from Dhaka against the previous fare of Tk 320. A journey from Dhaka to Khulna would now cost a passenger Tk 505, up from Tk 465.

People will have to pay Tk 9,650 for carrying 15 tonnes of goods on a 20-foot-long wagon from Dhaka to Chittagong Port. Previously, the charge was Tk 9,000.

Shariat Ahmed, passenger of a Khulna-bound train, said most of the seats in coaches are worn and dirty.

"Toilets are sometimes so filthy that I would throw up. There is hardly any water," said Rumi Ahkter, before leaving Dhaka for Bhairab of Kishoreganj.

Due to the perennial seat crisis, the railway authorities sell standing tickets on many routes.

"Most of the time I used to travel standing all the way to Mymensingh as I don't get any seat ticket. Standing for several hours make me tired. Besides, there are too many passengers for comfort," said government employee Jahurul Islam who frequents Mymensingh.

Almost all the trains run at least half an hour behind schedule, complained passengers.

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Militants' den busted in city

Claim detectives; 'powerful explosives seized'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives claimed to have busted an "Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) den" in the capital's Mohammadpur early yesterday, hours after a detective was stabbed during a raid on a "militant hideout" in Badda.

"Powerful" explosives and bomb-making materials were recovered from a top-floor flat of a five-storey building in Nobodoy Housing area of Mohammadpur, said Monirul Islam, deputy inspector general of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

"Some of the bombs were so powerful that those could easily blow up an entire building."

Monirul, who became the chief of the newly formed Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit of the DMP, told reporters that they had recovered five types of explosives from the flat in Mohammadpur.

There were improvised explosive devices and liquid bombs among the explosives, said Additional Deputy Commissioner Sanwar Hossain who heads the DMP's bomb disposal unit.

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Mysterious boiling river discovered in Amazon



BUSINESS INSIDER

Scientists have discovered a mysterious river in the Amazon rainforest, and the average temperature of its water is around 86 degree Celsius, reports Business Insider.

For centuries, Peruvian locals have talked about a river in the Amazon that burns so hot it can kill.

According to legend, Spanish conquistadors foolishly ventured into the rainforest in search of gold, and the few men that returned told stories of poisoned water, man-eating snakes, and a river that boiled from below.

For Peruvian geoscientist, Andrés Ruzo, the myth had fascinated him since childhood. But it wasn't

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Cop killed by bullet from colleague's gun

STAR REPORT

A police constable was accidentally shot dead by his colleague at Sukhi Nilganj Police Lines of Rangamati yesterday.

The dead, Purna Barua, 22, hailed from Raujan of Chittagong.

Purna sustained wounds as a bullet was fired mistakenly from the gun of constable Sourav Barua, 24,

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PRAYER TIMING

FEBRUARY 21

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5-20 12-45 4-30 6-03 7-30
JAMAAT 5-55 1-15 4-45 6-07 8-00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



People catching fish in the shallow waters of a lake in Kaliganj of Jhenidah as the dry season draws closer and the winter ends. The photo was taken last month.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Minor maid set afire by housewife

Critically hurt; 2 held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

A minor girl, who worked as a domestic help at a house in Rangpur city, suffered severe burns after her employer allegedly set her on fire Friday morning.

The victim is Purnima, 12, daughter of Prokhat Chandra Roy of Kachua village in Gangachara upazila of the district.

Police arrested the girl's employers -- Popi Sarker and her husband Khokon Sarker -- Friday night. Popi was arrested at her home in Rangpur city's Mulatol area.

Purnima is now undergoing treatment at the Burn and Plastic Surgery unit at Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH).

According to police and the victim's family, Purnima started working for Khokon, manager of a chewing tobacco firm, around two years ago.

The victim's family said Purnima told them that Popi used to beat her up often.

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Russia fails at UN to rein in Turkey

Obama calls Erdogan, urges restraint as France warns of 'dangerous escalation' in Syria crisis

AFP, United Nations

Western powers rejected a Russian bid at the United Nations to halt Turkey's military actions in Syria, as France warned of a dangerous escalation in the nearly five-year conflict.

The emergency Security Council meeting came on Friday as US Secretary of State John Kerry cautioned there was "a lot more work to do" for a ceasefire to take hold in Syria, following talks in Geneva between American and Russian officials.

Meanwhile President Barack Obama, in a phone call with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, urged the Ankara government and Kurdish YPG forces to "show reciprocal restraint" in northern Syria.

The elusive truce was meant to begin Friday, but failed to materialize as fighting raged in Syria with Kurdish-led forces backed by US-led air power seizing a key town from the Islamic State group.

Russia, which has been carrying out air strikes in support of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad's forces, has urged the UN to press Turkey to halt its shelling of Kurdish forces in the country's north.

Moscow presented a draft resolution that "strongly demands" an immediate end to cross-border shellings and plans -- supported by Turkey -- for foreign ground intervention in Syria.

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