



The Daily Star

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20 PAGES PLUS SHOUT PRICE : Tk 12.00

REGD. NO. DA 781 | VOL. XXVIII No. 108 | BAISHAKH 20, 1425 BS | SHABAN 16, 1439 HJIRI

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SCANNING AT CTG PORT

Govt settles for costlier option

Private firm gets Tk 29cr a year for the job Custom House can do with Tk 4cr

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, Chittagong

Scanning operation is a sensitive job for any port around the world. It examines imports through misdeclaration and the presence of explosives that could jeopardize national security. Once released, there is little scope for reexamining the containers.

Yet the Chittagong Custom House (CCH) is relying on private operators for the delicate job as it failed to establish a permanent scanning department of its own to do this.

While the government is losing money in the process, it also poses a threat to national security, port sources have said.

In 2009, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) made scanning of all containers mandatory to check imports through misdeclaration and smuggling of arms and ammunition.

As the CCH had no experience in scanning then, it hired SGS, a Swiss private company, for the job in September that year for Tk 12.23 crore a year. One condition was that during the six-year contract the company would train CCH officials on scanner operations.

The operator had a 63-man workforce for handling four scanners at as many gates at the port.

However, by the time the contract ended in 2015, many of the trained CCH officials got transferred. As a result, the CCH failed to build capacity to handle the scanners.

Later, the CCH extended the contract with SGS for three years in two phases, which ended on April 22 with the same results.

The CCH has recently given the job to a new firm, Five R Associates, for Tk 28.86 crore a year. A local distributor of a Chinese company, Five R Associates is expected to start the operations today.

Interestingly, in a draft proposal the CCH said the same job can be done with only about Tk 4 crore, nearly Tk 25 crore less than what the private company is charging.

For that, the CCH proposed establishing a permanent scanning department with a 185-strong workforce and setting up 12 scanners at as many gates at the port.

At the moment, there are only four scanners at as many gates.

The CCH sent the proposal to the Internal Resource Department under the finance ministry on January 2 last year, but has yet to receive any response.

In the meantime, as the deadline of the contract with the SGS neared, the CCH

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Chickens seem to be enjoying their fair share of the ripe paddy as the Boro harvesting season begins. The golden fields, especially after a year of crop loss due to flashfloods, have brought smiles to farmers' faces across the country. The pictures were taken in Anandapara village in Tangail's Ghatail on Sunday.

PHOTO:
SK ENAMUL HAQ



INDIAN LINE OF CREDIT Priority on completion of projects in election year

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

With the general elections in Bangladesh slated for later this year, Bangladesh and India are in talks to fast-track implementation of the development projects under the second and third lines of credit totalling seven billion dollars.

Before the general elections in India due early next year, the two countries have turned their focus on projects related to power, connectivity and river dredging, sources told The Daily Star.

Bangladesh has conveyed to India, through government as well as political channels, the development projects in their list of priority and diplomats of the two countries have stepped up their engagement for this, they said.

Indian Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale is reported to have called back India's Ambassador to South Korea, Vikram Doraiswami, to lead the drive to complete as many projects as possible. It is hoped that the development partnership between

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Can't force any party to join election: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said it was up to a political party to decide whether it would participate in an election.

"I cannot impose my decision on any party... I cannot say to any party that you have to participate in the election," she said at a press conference at the Gono Bhavan.

She was responding to a question whether the government would take any initiative to bring the BNP to the next parliamentary election.

The event was organised to inform the media about the outcome of her just-concluded visits to Saudi Arabia, Australia

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OIC ON ROHINGYA CRISIS

A unifying cause despite many rifts

INAM AHMED and SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), although facing a wide rift within, may find in the Dhaka foreign ministers conference a unifying cause to act on the Rohingya issue.

The plight of the Rohingyas had caught the attention of the OIC but not as a big challenge as much as the Saudi-Iran spat has emerged in recent times, leaving the mission of the organisation weak and vulnerable.

But as the foreign ministers will take up its own recommendations on what to do about Rohingyas on Sunday, second day of the conference, this would give the Muslim countries to focus on unifying its Ummah once again for a broad cause.

After all, when the OIC was conceived in 1969 following the arson of the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, the goal was to form a platform of Islamic nations who would work together to solve their problems and work as a common lobby.

So as its charter was drawn up in 1972, "solidarity and cooperation" was the main



cornerstone of the organisation with the aspiration that "all member states shall settle their disputes through peaceful means and refrain from use of threat or force in their relations."

Some 47 years down the line, the organisation that spans over four continents with 57 member countries, the largest inter-governmental body after the UN, finds little of that cohesion and peaceful efforts to resolve crises that today grapples the most influential geopolitical footprint of the OIC -- the Middle East.

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Attacks against journos made with impunity

Article 19 also finds violations against free speech hit 5-year high in Bangladesh last year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

World Press Freedom Day is being observed in Bangladesh and elsewhere today amid a growing animosity towards journalists across the globe.

With 335 incidents last year, violations of the right to freedom of expression in Bangladesh reached their highest point in five years, according to new figures released by British rights organisation Article 19.

A journalist was killed, 28 suffered serious injuries, and a further 75 suffered serious assaults last year, it said in a statement.

The attacks were carried out with impunity, it observed. World Press Freedom Index-2018, published on April 25 by Reporters Sans Frontières, said self censorship among journalists in Bangladesh was increasing as a result of violence against them and media outlets.

Moreover, the day is being observed at a time when newspaper editors, journalist union leaders and human rights

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Hindu teacher granted leave for Hajj!

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prof Arun Chandra Biswas, of Government Bangabandhu College in Gopalganj, had applied for a leave in advance to visit India.

Although the leave application was approved by the authorities concerned, the circular issued approving his leave of 50 days cited "performing Hajj in Saudi Arabia" as the reason for leave.

This mistake made by the education ministry has been making the rounds on social media for the last few days with many taunting the professor about his religion.

"After the news spread, many called me over the phone asking whether I had converted to Islam," Arun, head of the accounting department of the college, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"I applied for leave from June 1 to June 21 to visit India. But in the

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<http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/104009-largest-motorcycle-logo-image>