

Rejoinders, our replies

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is damaging to the reputation of our company.

Firstly, the article and the headline states that the contact value is "taka 28.86cr a year" whereas this value covers Operation and maintenance for two years.

Secondly, the contract for full operation and maintenance covers salaries of personnel including factory trained engineers, electricity and diesel fuel, spare parts for the entire period, connectivity, Bangladesh Atomic Energy costs and all other O&M charges. It is not known what costs were included in the purported Tk 4 cr quoted here without reference. Thus, the comparison is misleading and mischievous as it is not like with like.

Thirdly, the current contract price of taka 14.43 cr yearly compares very favorable to the taka 12.33 paid from 2008 to the previous service provider. It is to be noted that the reporter failed to mention that while the previous service provider was fully paid in converted foreign currency.

Fourthly, it is surprising that the unnamed port source find source finds alleged security risk with a local operator while not having voiced security risk's during the tenure of the foreign company.

Lastly, to the best of our knowledge the previous service provider submitted a complaint and Appeal not to the Planning Commission but to the review panel, a quasi-judicial entity, who after hearing both sides rejected the Appeal thus negating any suggestion of irregularity or wrong doing.

OUR REPLIES

Firstly, we have rechecked all the facts and found that the firm will receive Tk 29 crore for its service for two years, and not for one year as we wrongly mentioned in our report. We regret this error.

Secondly, true that our report did not mention what expenses the Five-R Associates will cover with the Tk

29 crore (for two years), we clearly mentioned that in a draft proposal, the Chittagong Custom House said the scanning job can be done with about Tk 4 crore by establishing a permanent scanning department.

Thirdly, we did not make any comparison between the contract values of the SGS and the Five-R Associates. We only mentioned as a matter of fact that the SGS, the previous contractor, charged Tk 12.33 crore a year. Also, we used all figures in local currency. So we did not think it was necessary to mention that the SGS was paid in converted foreign currency, as the Five-R Associates says in its rejoinder.

Fourthly, The Daily Star did not make any assumption about the potential risk of handling the scanners by one private firm or the other. The paper only reported what officials told us and we could not name them because they sought anonymity. The CCH draft also said that if the scanning operations are handled by the CCH, it will be possible "to prevent imports of explosives and other items that might threaten national security."

Lastly, we clearly mentioned that the Planning Commission did not entertain the SGS complaint about alleged irregularities in the tender process and that it cleared the CCH move to hire Five-R Associates for the job.

CHITTAGONG CUSTOM HOUSE REJOINDER

This is to clarify that the News Headline "scanning at port - Govt settles for costlier option -Private firm gets Tk 29cr a year for the job Custom House can do with Tk 4cr" published in the Daily Star on May 3 was wrong misinterpreted. The procurement of scanning at CTG port was made in competitive open tender manner. The CPTU has already rejected all the complaints lodged by SGS. The complainant, SGS, already withdrew all the allegation from Anti-Corruption as well.



A demonstrator places a flyer on an improvised memorial with the names of Palestinians killed during clashes with Israeli troops on the Gaza-Israel border, during a protest demanding the freedom and dignity of Palestine, in the Manhattan borough of New York City on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Disproportionate'

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injured in a single day of protests that coincided with Monday's move of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, "on the Israeli side, one soldier was reportedly wounded, slightly, by a stone."

"The stark contrast in casualties on both sides is ... suggestive of a wholly disproportionate response," he told the council.

Zeid said he supported the call for an investigation "that is international, independent and impartial, in the hope the truth regarding these matters will lead to justice."

Israel, US slammed the special session, saying it was "politically motivated and won't improve the situation on the ground by even iota."

In another development, Kuwait yesterday circulated to members of the UN Security Council a draft resolution calling for the dispatch of an "international protec-

tion mission" to shield Palestinian civilians, according to a copy obtained by AFP.

The draft "calls for measures to be taken to guarantee the safety and protection of the Palestinian civilian population" and for "the dispatch of an international protection mission."

No details were offered on what form such a mission might take, or whether they would be made up of UN peacekeepers or observers.

The draft calls on the UN secretary-general to submit a report within 30 days of any adoption of the resolution on his recommendations "on ways and means for ensuring the safety, protection and well-being" of Palestinian civilians.

Kuwait, a non-permanent member of the Security Council, circulated the draft after Israel killed 60 Palestinians during protests on the Gaza border Monday as the

US relocated its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

The text risks being vetoed by the United States. Earlier this week, the US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, vigorously defended Israel's "restraint" in responding to the protests.

Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday hosted for the second time in half a year a summit of the world's main pan-Islamic group seeking to show solidarity with the Palestinians and condemn Israel. Erdogan has accused Israel of "genocide" and being run as an "apartheid state".

However, as in the 2017 meeting, disputes between the OIC's key players – notably between Sunni kingpin Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran – may prevent the adoption of any measures going beyond harsh rhetoric.

Hasina, Modi

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hope of any headway being made on the matter during Hasina's upcoming tour of India.

They said the three leaders would attend the inaugural ceremony and join the convocation ceremony of Visva-Bharati University. Besides, Hasina and Modi will hold a meeting at the Bangladesh Bhaban.

The Bangladesh PM will be staying in Kolkata for two days, but there is no slot for any meeting between Hasina and Mamata.

"No formal talks have been scheduled between Mamata and Hasina on the Teesta issue," a diplomatic source in New Delhi told The Daily Star yesterday.

As there was no indication of shift in stance on the Teesta issue, fixing a schedule of a formal meeting between Hasina and Mamata would be a futile exercise, said diplomatic sources. The two governments were trying to avoid holding any such meeting as it would create much hype in both the countries.

Signing of the Teesta treaty was postponed during former Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka in September 2011 as Mamata threw a spanner in the works.

According to officials, Hasina and Modi will have a formal meeting at the Bangladesh Bhaban which houses a museum showcasing Rabindranath Tagore's association with Bangladesh, its Liberation War and Indo-Bangla relations. The Bhaban has been built with funds from the Bangladesh government.

On May 26, the Bangladesh PM will leave Kolkata for Asansole to receive an honorary D Litt degree to be conferred on her by Kazi Nazrul University at its third convocation.

Veteran Indian actress Sharmila Tagore would also be honoured with D Litt and renowned physicist SM Yusuf of Bhaba Atomic Research Centre will also be conferred an honorary D.Sc degree at the programme.

Sharmila, however, will not be able to attend the function. Vice-Chancellor Sadhan Chakraborty said the 73-year-old would be handed over a citation, a scroll and a memento on a

later date at a place of her convenience, reports The Statesman.

Mamata Banerjee will be present at the programme as the chief guest while West Bengal Governor Keshari Nath Tripathi will address the ceremony as the chancellor.

PM'S PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

As per the draft programme schedule, Hasina will leave Dhaka in the morning of May 25. She will arrive at Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport. Indian premier Modi will also reach the airport almost at the same time.

The two leaders will leave Kolkata for Bolpur subdivision in Birbhum by helicopter and will join the convocation of Visva-Bharati in Santiniketan. Later, they will inaugurate the Bangladesh Bhaban and hold a bilateral meeting at the conference room of the bhaban.

After attending the programme, Modi will depart for New Delhi and Hasina will return to Kolkata. She will visit Netaji Bhawan in Kolkata, the ancestral home of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, a great patriot of the freedom movement in India.

Netaji Bhawan on Lala Lajpat Rai Sarani, formerly known as Elgin Road in Kolkata, was the childhood residence of Bose.

On the same day, Hasina will attend an iftar party, to be hosted by Bangladesh High Commissioner in New Delhi Syed Moazzem Ali, at Taj Bengal Hotel in Kolkata. Mamata has been invited to attend the iftar. After the programme, the premier is likely to hold a meeting with local businessmen.

On May 26, the PM will travel to Asansole to join the convocation at Kazi Nazrul University. From there, she will go to Jorasanko Thakur Bari, Rabindranath Tagore's ancestral home, which has been turned into a museum dedicated to the life and works of the Nobel laureate.

The premier is expected to depart Kolkata for Dhaka at 9:30pm.

Meanwhile, Hasina is also scheduled to fly to Canada on June 6 to attend the G-7 Outreach Meeting at the invitation of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

A lesson not learnt

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Apart from this, no other initiative has been taken to free canals and floodplains within the city from grabbers.

Multiple development works in different parts of the capital have worsened the situation. The works include road improvement in Uttara, construction of metro rail piers along Rokeya Sarani and relocation of underground utility service lines along Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue.

On July 26 last year, Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Minister Khandker Mosharrif Hossain said that waterlogging in Dhaka city would not recur in 2018 as the government had learnt a lesson.

Following his promise, Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) had asked for an additional allocation of Tk 60cr for cleaning up the canals, said Wasa adviser Abul Kashem.

As there was no response and the current fiscal year is drawing to a close, they revised the amount to Tk 40cr. The money is yet to be released.

ASM Mahabubul Alam, director general of Local Government Division, said they requested the finance ministry for additional allocations.

"We don't exactly know the rationale for the delay," he said. "I think Wasa will get some money."

Asked what Wasa would do with the money at the last moment when monsoon is almost here, Alam said, "They will spend as much as they can and return the rest or keep it with them for next year."

Contacted, Wasa Managing Director Tazsem A Khan said, "We are taking some routine, piecemeal measures of cleaning the scanty artificial drainage lines and maintaining pump machines to pump out accumulated rainwater."

Most of the flood flow zones, canals and low-lying water retention areas, earmarked in the Detailed Area Plan (DAP) for conservation, have been destroyed to make way for real estate business and "development" leading to today's deplorable drainage situation, he said.

"Dhaka city's storm drainage problem cannot be permanently solved without reclaiming designated flood flow zones

and water retention areas," he noted.

On the other hand, ground percolation as a means of rainwater management has also been made difficult as 90 percent of the 400sqkm Wasa area of the city is paved with concrete.

The ministry usually allocates Tk 5.5cr on top of Wasa's own allocation of around Tk 11cr every monsoon. This money is needed only for the routine cleaning and maintenance of Wasa drainage service, he said.

Shahid Uddin, former Wasa chief engineer, who is currently a contractual Wasa director, said they wanted to re-excavate 30km length of 19 canals within this month to enhance water passage capacity. They started the work in some places and hoped for extra allocations.

SEVEN AUTHORITIES FOR ONE JOB

Apart from Wasa, six other authorities deal with Dhaka's drainage system on a piecemeal basis without much knowledge about who is doing what.

They are: the two city corporations, the water development board, Rajuk, the cantonment board and big private housing developers like Bashundhara.

As a result, Dhaka plunges into a nightmare of public misery every time there is a normal monsoon shower that instantly floods the city roads, town planners say.

The two city corporations maintain over 2,000km feeder drains (open and small diameter pipes) to drain water from homes and rainwater to take them to canals and wide diameter (Wasa) storm sewer system.

The government made a storm drainage master plan for Dhaka in 2016 but it could not be implemented as they did not assign any authority for the job, officials said.

THE PRESENT SCENARIO

Wasa, with 370km storm drainage pipelines of 750mm to 1,830mm diameter, covers only one-fifth of its 400sqkm service area.

At present, rainfall above 40mm at a time in Dhaka city floods the city with water which takes at least three hours to recede. The available pumping facility can drain out up to 20mm rain, according to officials.

Rain water is supposed to be carried away instantly to low-lying retention

areas by a well-networked storm drainage system. But with the network destroyed and the artificial pipelines clogged with solid wastes, it takes hours for rainwater to pass.

Wasa maintains 26 canals, each 75km long, as part of its storm drainage system. But they mostly remain clogged with uncollected solid wastes. Ten km of the canals have been turned into concrete box culverts to build roads on them, significantly reducing their capacity to carry water.

According to leading urban planners, low-lying wetlands, flood flow zones, storm water retention ponds, ditches and canals have all been filled up in the name of development. All of this has blocked the natural passage of monsoon rainwater.

Time and again, authorities have been warned of grim consequence in urban storm water management but they paid no heed.

According to the Flood Action Plan and DAP, the city should have conserved 5,523 acres of water retention area (which is only 1.57 percent of the 1,528sqkm of Dhaka's master plan), 20,093 acres of canals and rivers (5.7 percent) and 74,598 acres (21 percent) flood flow zones.

SCHEME TO BUY 'PRIVATE LAND'

With most of the surviving 26 city canals under illegal occupation, the government has taken up a Tk 607cr project for land acquisition and excavation of five canals to ease the capital's waterlogging problem.

The five canals are Hazzarbagh, Baisakte, Sangbadak Colony, Begunbari and Manda Khal across south and north Dhaka cities.

The canals are public property.

Over 82 percent of the money will be spent on the acquisition of 30.5 acres of "private land" and the rest on compensation for structures, excavation and bank development.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council with the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair approved the draft proposal on April 4.

The local government ministry proposed the two-year scheme to be implemented by Dhaka Wasa by December next year.

PARLIAMENT WATCH

TIB gives clarification

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) sent a clarification regarding its study report on parliament published in The Daily Star yesterday headlined "Only 24 hrs spent on lawmaking in 2017".

The corruption watchdog said it sent the clarification to avoid misunderstanding on the content of the report and discussions held during the question and answer session while releasing the study, titled "Parliament Watch: 10th Jatiya Sangsad [14th to 18th session] 2017", at a press conference at its office in the capital on Thursday.

In reply to a question on the role of the main opposition party at the press conference, TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said he still stands by TIB's earlier comment that the party has all along faced a crisis of identity and a lack of clarity about its role in parliament as it is both a ruling and an opposition party, according to the clarification.

The only difference this time is that it has now been vindicated by the party itself, whose leaders are quoted to have said, "people do not consider us to be an

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Two Tripura girls found dead in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police recovered the bodies of two Tripura girls from a home in the district's Sitakunda upazila yesterday evening, hours after the two were found hanging from the iron grill of a window in a room.

Locals said the dead -- Sukhloti Tripura, 13, and Chobi Rani Tripura, 15, -- were friends in Tripura Para. The bodies were found at Chobi's home.

Sub-Inspector Md Joynal of Sitakunda Police Station said Chobi's younger brother noticed that the door of the room was locked from outside around 11:30am. Being informed about it, neighbours rushed to the house and found the two friends dead.

"The girls were found in sitting position. There were no injury marks on