



An artist's impression of a Rapid Bus Transit station.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Cost doubles, 20pc progress in 6 years

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However, by the time the project ends, the country's economic condition and transport demand will both change. This means the project is unlikely to serve the intended purpose, said Prof Shamsul. The government initiated the airport-Gazipur BRT scheme in 2012 as an extension of the system recommended by the Strategic Transport Plan. The success of the scheme, occupying two central lanes of a national highway, would depend on the effective implementation of the original BRT system, from the airport to Keraniganj, he said. But with the original section implementable only in part, the extended section looks irrelevant, he added. The BRT system, designed for urban implementation, is not compatible with the purpose, functions, and specifications of a highway, he said. "It may inflict an irreparable damage to a vital economic gateway of the capital and the national highway with half a dozen flyovers and overpasses," said Prof Shamsul.

Project Director Sanaul Haque attributed the delay to lengthy bidding and design processes and a time-consuming data collection survey. The BRT system is the first of its kind in the country. It took four years just to hire the consultant and prepare the detailed design, he said. "Besides, we are implementing the scheme keeping the highway and its adjoining service roads fully functional," he said, adding, "Our job is heavily impeded as the highway remains mostly submerged in rainwater for nearly half the year and local factories dump effluent on the road for a lack of drainage facilities." The number of elevated structures, areas of stations, earth-moving work, pavement laying, and storm drainage work increased significantly in the detailed design compared to what was in the draft. The number of articulated buses that would ply the route has also been increased to 120 from 50, he said explaining the rise in the project cost. Officials were planning to place a revised project plan to the Planning Commission soon for approval of the

increased cost and a fresh completion deadline of June 2020. But project insiders said the extended section of BRT line-3 would take even more time to complete. The extended BRT line-3 is being implemented in four packages with development loan from the Asian Development Bank, French Development Agency and Global Environment Facility. They will commit Tk 1,651 crore while Tk 389 crore will come from tax money. The Roads and Highways Department (RHD), Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA), and the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) are jointly implementing the packages of the project titled "Greater Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport". The project includes construction of 25 BRT stations, a depot in Gazipur, two terminals (one in Gazipur and another at the airport end), six overpasses, improvement of 56km link road, 20.5km footpath development, development of 24km storm drainage facility and building 10 kitchen markets. The BBA is assigned to build 4.5km

of elevated roadway for the BRT from Uttara to Cherag Ali market and a 12-lane Tongi Bridge. Liaquat Ali, project director for this package, said they were doing test piling, survey, soil test and equipment mobilisation. The RHD is building 16km of BRT lane and six overpasses while the LGED is building the depot, kitchen markets and improving the link roads. This section was meant to provide a fast mass transport service to the people of Gazipur, Tongi and Uttara so they could commute to Dhaka in modern articulated buses arriving at stations every three to five minutes. An interchange at Joydevpur intersection and overpasses at Bhogra, Abdullahpur and airport intersections would greatly ease traffic movement, said Sanaul. In its previous tenure, the Awami League government made repeated pledges that it would open rapid bus service between the airport and Keraniganj by 2013 and between Gazipur and the airport by 2014.

Wired for development

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"Meters are installed to measure usage," he explains. "The current price of Tk 20 per electricity unit is due to rise shortly to Tk 30, and there is a Tk 2,500 connection fee." The project in Rupsha Bazar is but one of a growing number nationwide designed to cater to the country's electricity requirements into the future. "Bangladesh has one of the world's lowest per capita electricity consumption rates," explained Mahmud Malik, IDCOL's director and CEO. "The government's target is to provide electricity to all citizens by 2021. Given that a large portion of the population lives in rural and often isolated areas removed from existing transmission lines, expanding the national grid alone will make it hard to achieve this goal. Solar mini-grids have an important role to play." "IDCOL plans to make mini-grid electricity available to all sizeable river and sea island communities in the near future," he said. "We have 17 mini-grids in operation so far with a further ten approved. Our target is to have 200 mini-grid projects financed by 2025." To establish a mini-grid with IDCOL financial assistance, an investor need only contribute twenty percent of the project cost upfront. A further fifty percent is provided by IDCOL as a grant, with the remaining thirty percent offered

as a soft loan, at an interest rate of six percent over ten years. "A mini-grid brings major change to a project area," Malik said. "Affordable, reliable electricity is invaluable to educational institutions and hospitals. New business and employment opportunities are created, and the availability of battery-powered vehicles facilitates connectivity, not least improving the mobility of rural women." Household in Rupsha Bazar are indeed witness to the change a mini-grid can bring. "I used to rely on my own solar panel at home," says dairy farmer, Mohir Uddin. "That powered two lights and a fan. But appliances like a television and a fridge weren't possible. Now we have both. More importantly, I run a motor to supply water to my farm and can refrigerate the milk." "We used to buy perishables like fish and milk from the market daily," notes household manager Shahina Begum. "Now we purchase in bulk from the weekly market and store them in our freezer." "The lifestyles and socio-economic conditions of the shoal-dwellers have developed a lot since the mini-grid was installed," observes the chairman of the local Mesra union council, Abdul Mazid. "In accessing utilities, the gap between them and city-dwellers is considerably less."

Take in stranded

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been blocked at the Sicilian port of Catania on the Diciotti vessel since Monday night because the Italian government is refusing to allow them to disembark without commitments from the EU to take some of them in. Italy on Friday said it would pull its funding for the EU as a "compensatory measure" if the bloc refused to come forward and help with relocating the migrants. The UNHCR on Saturday said EU member states should "urgently" offer places to some of the migrants on the vessel, adding: "In the meantime, UNHCR urges Italian authorities to allow the immediate disembarkation of those on board." A high-level meeting of a dozen EU member states in Brussels on Friday, held to discuss what officials said was the broader issue of the disembarkation of migrants rescued at sea, failed to produce an immediate solution for the Diciotti migrants. "The European Union has decided to turn its back on Italy once again," Deputy Prime Minister Luigi Di Maio wrote on his Facebook page, adding that his country had no choice but to "take a compensatory measure in a unilateral way... we are ready to reduce the funds that we give to the European Union". "They want the 20 billion euros (\$23 billion) paid by Italian citizens? Then let them demonstrate that they deserve it and that they are taking charge of a problem that we can no longer face alone. The borders of Italy are the borders of Europe," he added. Migration is a hot-button issue in Italy, where hundreds of thousands of people have arrived since 2013 fleeing war, persecution and poverty in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Under EU rules people must seek asylum in their country of arrival, but Italy's new government has increasingly barred boats from docking at its ports. Brussels quickly hit back at Di Maio's comments. "Unconstructive comments, let alone threats, are not helpful and they will not get us any closer to a solution," European Commission spokesman Alexander Winterstein told a briefing. "The EU is a community of rules and it operates on the basis of rules, not threats." No deal was struck about the Diciotti migrants at the talks, as a source at the European Commission said "this was not a meeting where decisions were taken".

However, the source said they discussed "the need for a shared and rapid solution for the migrants on board of the Diciotti as well as those most recently disembarked in Spain and Malta." EU figures for 2016 say Italy contributed just under 14 billion euros to the EU budget -- less than one percent of its gross national income -- while the bloc spent 11.6 billion euros in Italy. Di Maio, who heads the anti-establishment Five Star, said Italy didn't want the "mickey taken out of us by the union's other countries" on the distribution of migrants. "The EU was born of principles like solidarity. If it is not capable of redistributing 170 people it has serious problems with its founding principles," he said in an interview with state broadcaster RAI. Prosecutors from Sicily were travelling to Rome to question officials, including Italy's hardline Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, about the illegal detention of those on board. "If a judge wants to arrest me, I expect it, no problem," Salvini said Friday. Salvini stopped the majority of the migrants disembarking from the ship after they were rescued on August 15. His only concession was to allow 27 unaccompanied minors off the boat Wednesday. Opinion polls suggest that Salvini's stance has boosted his far-right League party's approval rating to around 30 percent -- a more than 10 point jump from its showing in March's election -- and is now level with the Five Star Movement with which it has governed Italy since early June. However, according to Salvini's own ministry, migrant arrivals are more than 80 percent down on the same period last year, with just over 19,500 arriving up to August 23, compared to 98,000 in 2017. In France, meanwhile, the presidency called for a "co-ordinated, long-term European mechanism" to distribute migrants that would include Italy. "There are forces in Italy that are looking to cooperate, we want to believe Italy wishes to play the game," the Elysee palace said.

Trump braces for more troubles

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comment. Alan Futerfas, an outside lawyer for the New York-based company, declined to comment. Cohen - who arranged hush-money payments shortly before the November 2016 US presidential election to two women who said they had had sex with Trump in 2006 - on Tuesday pleaded guilty in New York to campaign finance violations and other criminal charges. Trump has denied having sex with either woman. Cohen said that Trump directed him to arrange a \$150,000 payment to former Playboy model Karen McDougal and a \$130,000 payment to adult-film actress Stormy Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford. Such payments could be considered illegal campaign contributions under federal election law, according to experts. American Media Inc's National Enquirer supermarket tabloid was involved in making the payments, according to news reports. American Media Chief Executive David Pecker, a longtime friend of Trump, and the company's chief content officer, Dylan Howard, have also been granted immunity, Vanity Fair magazine reported. Experts said the deals were a sign

Weisselberg, Pecker and Howard faced criminal exposure because the government did not grant immunity lightly. "This is bad for Trump because the more witnesses you have, in terms of people who can testify, not just about what happened but why it happened, the more likely it is for the prosecution to establish the motive behind Trump's participating in this deal," said Jens Ohlin, a professor at Cornell Law School. Most legal experts agree that a president cannot be indicted while in office, but allegations that Trump was involved in a crime could factor in a debate over whether he should face impeachment. Cohen mentioned Weisselberg on a secret recording of the Trump attorney made in September 2016 and which was aired on CNN last month. On the recording, Cohen and Trump appeared to discuss reimbursing American Media for the payment to McDougal, who has said she had a yearlong affair with Trump. Cohen is heard saying, "I've spoken to Allen Weisselberg about how to set the whole thing up." McDougal sold her story to American Media for \$150,000 in August 2016, but the National Enquirer never published it, in a practice known as

"catch and kill" aimed at suppressing potentially damaging stories. Giuliani has said the payments were personal matters not subject to campaign finance law. Federal campaign finance law limits individual donations to \$2,700 per election, requires the disclosure of any donation over \$200, and defines a contribution as anything of value given, loaned or advanced to influence a federal election. The Trump Organization is the umbrella group for dozens of Trump businesses, including real estate development, management of hotels and golf courses, and production of the reality TV shows "The Apprentice" and "Celebrity Apprentice." Under a reorganization plan announced before Trump's January 2017 inauguration, the business was placed into a trust now controlled by Weisselberg and the president's two adult sons, Donald Trump Jr and Eric Trump. The Cohen investigation was referred to federal prosecutors in New York by US Special Counsel Robert Mueller, who is looking into Russian interference in the 2016 election and possible coordination between Trump's Republican campaign and

Russian officials. Trump has repeatedly denied there was coordination between Moscow and his campaign. Moscow has denied it meddled in the election. US intelligence agencies concluded that Russia did interfere. AI to teach FROM PAGE 16
we are planning other measures" such as using tablet apps and having online lessons with native speakers, he said. The move comes ahead of a change in the national curriculum in two years that will require children from the age of 10 to learn English. Japanese schools struggle to find qualified teachers for English classes and generally lack the cash to hire trained language assistants. Some primary and middle schools have already turned to technology to bolster English teaching, introducing English-speaking AI robots in the classroom. English classes are currently compulsory for Japanese students aged between 12 and 15 but the starting age will be lowered to primary school children in 2020.

Rivers

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"It costs around Tk 15,000 to set one up. In it, I can raise about 1,000 fish, with little cage maintenance required for five years. Anyone can do it. The best part is there's no need to have your own ponds or water bodies." Fish farmer Kamrul Dewan of Sheraulia village said most of the tilapia fish in the local market were farmed in cages in open water bodies these days. "The fish are large in size and tasty; the fish sells for around Tk 130 a kilogram. Many local people are taking up this style of farming, inspired by our success." Indeed many locals are surprised at the bounty being created in the nearby Arial Kha River and Padma Beel wetland. "We never realised that fish could be cultivated in such a way," says one Sheraulia resident, Apubo Chowdhury. Ronojit Kumar, the upazila fisheries officer, notes the activity's rising popularity. Day by day more people are taking up fish farming in public waterways, he says. "The fish from those farms can be raised to a good size without it taking too long."

Suicide blast kills two in eastern Afghanistan

AFP, Jalalabad
A suicide bomb blast killed at least two people yesterday outside an election commission office in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad, officials said. The latest attack in the war-torn country appeared to target a protest camp outside the building in Nangarhar province, where a group of people were rallying in support of a candidate disqualified from parliamentary elections due in October. The blast follows what has already been a bloody month in Afghanistan with the Taliban ramping up assaults on security forces across the country and the Islamic State group targeting Kabul, with hundreds killed according to estimates. "It killed two people, and four others were wounded," provincial governor spokesman Attaullah Khogyani told AFP, adding that a suicide attacker was responsible for the explosion. Provincial health director Najib Kamawal confirmed the two deaths. An eyewitness who saw the bloody aftermath of the blast said it was caused by a suicide bomber detonating near a tent full of protesters outside the

office, and that security forces had cordoned off the area. "It was very big blast and it shook our home," said witness Mirza Amin, who added he lived 50 metres (160 feet) from the site of the explosion. Earlier this month Afghanistan's Independent Electoral Complaints Commission disqualified 35 candidates from running in upcoming parliamentary election for having direct links to illegal armed groups. The protest in Jalalabad was against the disqualification of candidate Javed Zaman Ghamsharik, who was barred for allegedly possessing illegal arms and for having ties with illicit land deals. The blast comes nearly a week after President Ashraf Ghani offered a conditional three-month ceasefire to the Taliban, a move welcomed by the United States and NATO after nearly 17 years of war. The Taliban have yet to officially respond to the offer. The surge in violence this month comes after Afghans marked an unprecedented nationwide ceasefire between the Taliban and government forces in June, giving some relief to war-weary civilians. For three days, thousands of insur-

gents poured into cities across Afghanistan, eating ice cream and taking celebratory selfies with security forces. The brief respite spurred hopes a new path was opening for peace talks in the country. The Taliban have long insisted on direct talks with Washington and refused to negotiate with the Afghan government, which they see as illegitimate. Earlier this week top commander for US and NATO forces in Afghanistan General John Nicholson said that warring parties now have an "unprecedented" opportunity for peace, citing the June ceasefire as a step forward. Half FROM PAGE 2
He also urged the international community to step up and find a long-lasting solution to the crisis that allows a safe, dignified and voluntary repatriation of Rohingya refugees, which respects the basic rights of children and their families and is underpinned by international law."

Police

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Another accused Nayek Rabiul allegedly stood guard as they were raped. A three member medical team yesterday examined the girls at Bandarban Sadar Hospital. Aung Swi Prue Marma, civil surgeon of the district, said the girls were referred to the Chittagong Medical College and Hospital for tests. He declined to make more comments until seeing the reports. Bandarban Sadar Hospital remained heavily guarded by police while the girls were admitted there. Police restricted the entry of reporters and NGO officials. Asked, SP Zakir Hossain declined to comment on the matter. The three-member team that examined the girls at Bandarban hospital consisted of Junior Consultant (gynaecologist) Sharmin Nahar, Medical Officer Ching Mra Sing and Nurse Riba Thanchangya, said the Civil Surgeon. According to the case statement, the BGB men first offered the girls money for sex. They raped the girls after they rejected the offer. Residents of the remote area told this correspondent that they knew the accused BGB men. Jahurlal, a grocery storekeeper of Banfur Bazar, said the three accused BGB men often came to his shop. Lt Col Asaduzzaman, commanding officer of 11 BGB Battalion in Naikkhayghhari, could not be reached over phone despite repeated attempts.

Two 'robbers'

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four for abduction filed with different police stations in the district. He added locals noticed the body lying on Chalabhora field at Hogoldanga village in the morning and informed them. A team of law enforcers recovered the body around 11:00am and sent it to Chuadanga Sadar Hospital for autopsy. Bari's wife Anjira Khatun claimed to reporters that several plainclothes men, identifying themselves as policemen, picked up her husband from nearby Karimpur village around 2:30pm on Friday. He had been missing since then, reports our Kushtia correspondent. The OC however claimed that he had no idea about arrest of Bari by law enforcers. This correspondent talked to some of the high officials of the district police, but all of them categorically denied knowing anything about the arrest. Admitting Bari's involvement with an outlawed party, Bari's wife said the police often looked for him, though her husband had left that outlawed party long ago. In Magura, the deceased were identified as Sibadul Islam Sheba, 42, and Kamal Mollah, 32, writes our Jhenaidah correspondent quoting Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Magura Sadar police. "Two gangs of robbers had an altercation over distribution of looted goods. At one stage, they exchanged gunshots in the early hours today. On information, a team of police reached the spot and recovered two injured robbers," the OC said. The duo were rushed to Magura Sadar Hospital where doctors declared them dead, he added. The police recovered seven bullets, four machetes and other weapons from their possession. Sheba is an accused in eight cases of robbery and Kamal is an accused in six cases for robbery and mugging, the police said.