

ROOPOPUR NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

11 PWD officials held over 31.24cr embezzlement

2 businessmen also arrested

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Estimation, tender floating, and receiving of goods -- these are generally the three consecutive steps of government procurement. But at least in two purchases for Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant housing project, the receiving of the goods came first.

The Public Works Department (PWD) of Pabna first received furniture and electrical appliances for one of its 20-storey buildings in late October 2017. About five to six months later in 2018, it made an estimation and floated tender.

"They [PWD officials] assessed the price of the goods and floated tender to cover up irregularities and corruption. That's not all. The officials misappropriated about Tk 31.24 crore in various ways," said an Anti-Corruption Commission official yesterday, wishing not to be named.

The ACC yesterday arrested 11 PWD officials, including former executive engineer Masudul Alam, and two businessmen at the capital's Segunbagicha in connection with four cases filed over embezzlement of about Tk 31.24 crore from the housing project.

Other accused are: sub-divisional engineers Tahazzud Hossain, Ahmed Sazzad Khan, Mostafa Kamal, assistant engineers Suman Kumar Nandi, Morshed Tarek, Aminul Islam, deputy assistant engineers Abu Sayeed, Jahidul Haque, Shafiqul Islam, Rawshan Ali, proprietor of Sajin Construction Sahadat Hossain, and proprietor of Mazid Sons Construction Asif Hossain.

SEE PAGE 17 COL 2



Policemen check if the people in a car have IDs provided by the Supreme Court Bar Association yesterday before the vehicle is allowed inside the court premises. Security at the court was beefed up centring the delivery of the verdict in a case involving BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

SQUABBLE AT EC

TIB urges president to step in

Calls for removal of CEC, commissioners

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday sought intervention of President Abdul Hamid in removing chief election commissioner and other commissioners as the Election Commission kept drawing scandals one after another.

There is no alternative to revamping the Election Commission to stop the defamation of the state, a TIB press release said.

The Bangladesh chapter of the Berlin-based graft watchdog also demanded an Anti-Corruption Commission investigation into all the scams of the Election Commission.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said, "Events of mud-slinging among the CEC, the EC secretariat and election commissioners, published in almost all the media outlets of the country, are

SEE PAGE 17 COL 2



On this day in 1971

DECEMBER 13 The advance party of the allied force reaches near Dhaka, only 5-6 miles away, crossing the Balu and the Shitalakkhya rivers. Pakistan troops take firm defense on the eastern bank of Balu River. Khilgaon and Basabo are rigid field defense areas for the Pakistani raiders.

The allied force change their tactics to prompt Dhaka's fall. Meanwhile, Eastern and Northern advance parties of the allied force reach within 15 miles of Dhaka.

SEE PAGE 17 COL 6

Brexit or no Brexit?

UK decides in historic vote; surveys put ruling Conservatives ahead by a narrow margin

AFP, London

Britain yesterday voted in a deeply divisive election that posed a historic choice between an imminent split from the European Union or another referendum that could scrap the entire Brexit project.

A decisive victory for Prime Minister Boris Johnson in the third poll in less than five years would almost certainly end Britain's 46-year involvement in the European project at the end of next month.

But a win for the opposition could still reverse the Brexit process and give Britain its most leftist government in decades, led by Jeremy Corbyn -- a veteran socialist committed to renationalisation and massive public sector spending.

Britons braved winter storms and howling winds as they lined up to cast ballots in what Johnson and Corbyn have both described as the most important vote in a generation.

"I think that the government has just been stuck for a long time and we need to

get things moving now," Londoner Naomi Buthe said.

Opinion polls show Johnson's ruling Conservatives leading by a narrow margin.

But they were almost unanimously wrong about the last general election in 2017 and Johnson -- who picked up his dog and gave it a kiss after voting -- said the outcome rested on a "knife edge".

The British parliament has been deadlocked since the 2016 referendum on EU membership saw a narrow majority vote to leave.

The outcome stunned financial markets and paralysed Britain's political process.

Parliament's splintered parties -- some seeking broader independence and others wanting to keep Britain's European ties -- repeatedly rejected the divorce terms former prime minister Theresa May struck with Brussels last year.

Johnson took over in July but was also stymied. The 2016 Brexit campaign's figurehead now hopes to secure both a

SEE PAGE 17 COL 1



GANGTOK, DARJEELING

Dhaka starts trial run of bus service

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The trial run of direct bus services on Dhaka-Gangtok and Dhaka-Darjeeling routes via Siliguri kicked off last night aiming to boost cross-border passenger services.

The run was inaugurated by Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation Chairman Ehsan Elahi.

A team including 18 government officials, led by Joint Secretary (toll and axle) Shafiqul Karim of road transport and highway division, left Gabtoli Bus Terminal in two buses around 8:15pm. Five Indian officials will join them at Siliguri.

They will return home on December 16 after visiting Darjeeling and Gangtok, said Shafiqul before the journey.

The run was scheduled yesterday morning, but delayed as the government did not issue necessary

SEE PAGE 17 COL 6

World's 'oldest artwork' found



AFP, Jakarta

An Indonesian cave painting that depicts a prehistoric hunting scene could be the world's oldest figurative artwork dating back nearly 44,000 years, a discovery that points to an advanced artistic culture, according to new research.

Spotted two years ago on the island of Sulawesi, the 4.5 metre wide painting features wild animals being chased by half-human hunters wielding what appear to be spears and ropes, said the study published in the journal Nature on Wednesday.

Using dating technology, the team at Australia's Griffith University said it had confirmed that the limestone cave painting dated back at least 43,900 years during the Upper Palaeolithic period.

"This hunting scene is -- to our knowledge -- currently the oldest pictorial record of storytelling

SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

Take steps to stop filling up of Feni dighi

Bela serves notice on authorities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) served a notice to authorities concerned to prevent the filling up of a century-old waterbody at Feni Sadar upazila.

The notice was served following a report titled "Century-old dighi being filled up" published in The Daily Star on December 2.

The association requested the attention of secretaries of land and

SEE PAGE 17 COL 6



PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 13

Fazr Juma Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5-15 12-30 3-45 5-19 7-00
JAMAAT 5-50 1-15 4-00 5-22 7-30

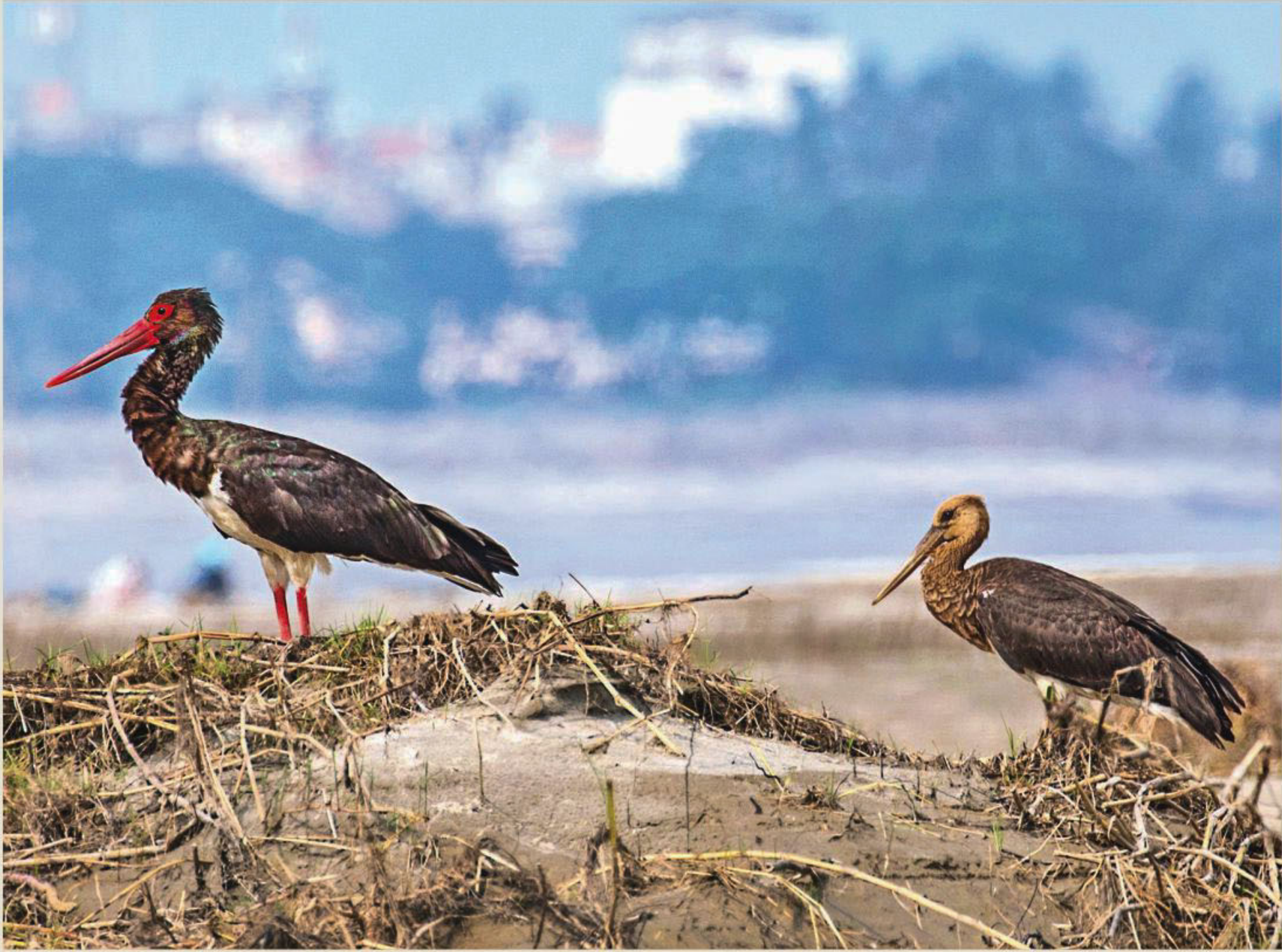
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



BLACK BEAUTY

A black stork with its juvenile spotted on a char in the Padma in Rajshahi. The stork (Ciconia nigra) is a large bird in Ciconiidae family. This rare winter visitor was seen earlier than usual this year. The black stork prefers more wooded areas than the better-known white stork, and breeds in large marshy wetlands. The black stork avoids contact with people. They are usually found alone or in pairs, or in flocks of up to a hundred birds when migrating, or during winter.

PHOTO: ALI ASHRAF BHUYAN



SHORTAGE OF PASSPORT BOOKS

Govt to buy 20 lakh MRPs

Launch of e-passports delayed by 2-3 months, says finance minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Due to the delay in introducing electronic passports, the government is going to purchase another 20 lakh Machine Readable Passport (MRP) books to meet the immediate requirement.

The cabinet committee on purchase yesterday approved a project in this regard costing around Tk 53.4 crore.

The government had a plan to introduce e-passports with 10 years' validity from July 1 this year. The launch was delayed twice since then.

In September, the cabinet committee okayed a purchase of 20 lakh MRP books.

Talking to the reporters, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal yesterday said they could not introduce the e-passport due to some problems, however, he did not detail the problems.

"It might take another two to three months to introduce e-passports on trial basis," the minister said, adding that initially, some 500 to 1000 e-passports would be issued.

"Supply of MRP books is inadequate compared to the huge demand for passports. Especially our embassies are complaining on a regular basis that they are not getting the passports on time," said the finance minister.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) approved a project on June this year to introduce e-passports, which many countries of the world are using nowadays.

In July, the government signed an agreement with

SEE PAGE 17 COL 1