



'BREACH OF CONTRACT' Probe lingers, locomotives remain idle

Railway ministry now recasts probe committee

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The railways ministry has reconstituted a committee investigating a South Korean company for violating some clauses of the contract under which 10 locomotives have been supplied to the Bangladesh Railway.

The changes in the probe committee came more than three months after Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujon ordered the formation of the committee, which was supposed to complete the work within 15 working days.

In the meantime, the locomotives have been lying idle at a railways workshop in Chattogram's Pahartoli for around five months, at a time when the BR is struggling to run its operation with a big number of outdated engines.

Moreover, the locomotives are unlikely to be added to the railway fleets until the probe is complete, officials said.

The reconstituted committee was asked to complete the probe within another 15 working days.

Hyundai Rotem Company (HRC), the company in question, has sent their written reply to the probe committee on January 20. It said it was ready to send officials to clarify its stance, sources said.

At least two members of the previous committee earlier told this correspondent that their probe is being delayed

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TIGERS RETURN WITH WHITEWASH... Bangladesh players are in jubilant mood as they pose behind the champions' banner following a 120-run victory over the West Indies in the third ODI at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday. Having won all three matches of the series, the Tigers completed a spotless return to international cricket after a gap of more than 10 months.

PK HALDER, HIS AIDES ACC files five more cases for Tk 350cr graft

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission has filed five cases against 33 people, including former NRB Global Bank managing director PK Halder, for allegedly laundering over Tk 350 crore of International Leasing and Financial Services Limited (ILFSL).

ACC Deputy Director Gulshan Anwar Prodhan filed the cases in the last two days.

Briefing reporters at the ACC's Segunbagicha headquarters yesterday, its Secretary Md Anwar Hossain Howlader said they have already arrested the former chairman of People's Leasing and Financial Services Limited (PLFSL), Uzzal Nandi, and former ILFSL MD Rashedul Haque in connection with the cases.

He said Tk 70.82 crore loan was sanctioned

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Curtailed SSC syllabus now on website

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has published the shortened syllabuses for the examinees of this year's SSC and equivalent examinations.

The syllabuses were uploaded on the website of Dhaka education board yesterday.

The curtailed syllabuses were forwarded to all head teachers of secondary educational institutions under the education board, according to a letter signed by its controller of examinations, Prof SM Amirul Islam.

The notice asked the teachers to take necessary steps in this regard.

Meanwhile, Education Minister Dipu Moni yesterday said the shortened syllabuses were prepared keeping in mind that students can get three to four months for preparing for the SSC and HSC exams.

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Robot 'jellyfish' to protect coral reefs



AFP, London

A robot inspired by the shape and delicate underwater movements of a jellyfish, allowing it to safely explore endangered coral reefs, was unveiled by British scientists.

According to research by teams at the universities of Southampton and Edinburgh and published in the journal Science Robotics, the small robot mimics "nature's most efficient swimmer -- the Aurelia aurita jellyfish", more often referred to as the common jellyfish.

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Ekushey book fair to begin on March 18

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Not virtually, Amar Ekushey Boi Mela-2021 will be held as usual from March 18 after a long delay due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Habibullah Sirajee, director general of Bangla Academy, confirmed the date yesterday.

He said, "The book fair will start on March 18. I can't say more at this moment."

"We will give details on the duration of the book fair. Many people were in confusion, so I am just confirming the date."

"Our designers will make design of locations of the stalls, considering the coronavirus situation," he added.

Usually, the book fair begins on February 1 each year.

The decision of holding the book fair at the usual venue was made earlier, but the date was not confirmed.

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UNRELENTING COVID THREAT Borders tightened around the world

EU urges AstraZeneca to speed up vaccine deliveries amid 'supply shock'; Australia approves Pfizer vaccine

AGENCIES

Border restrictions were being tightened around the world yesterday in the face of an unrelenting coronavirus threat, after a weekend in which anger at social distancing rules bubbled over into fiery clashes in the Netherlands.

The United States was set to join France, Israel and Sweden in pulling up the drawbridge to certain arrivals, with special concern about new strains of the pathogen that originated in Britain and South Africa.

"It's up to us to show that we are civic-minded," Spaniard Claudio Barraza told AFP upon arrival at Paris's main international airport, after new rules on tests for EU arrivals came into force.

The stipulations came as Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador became the latest public figure to test positive for the disease, and New Zealand reported its first community case for more than two months.

In Washington, President Joe Biden was set to reimpose a ban yesterday on most non-US citizens who have been in Britain, Brazil, Ireland and much of Europe, as well as adding South Africa to the list, a senior White House official said.

Biden last week tightened mask-wearing rules and ordered quarantine for people flying into the country, which on Sunday topped 25 million cases.

Since it emerged in late 2019, Covid-19 has killed more than 2.1 million people, with almost 99 million cases registered, according to an AFP tally

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Sanjida Khatun, Col Zahir picked for Padma Shri

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Two Bangladeshis have been chosen by the Indian government for the prestigious Padma Shri award on the eve of India's Republic Day.

The two are Sanjida Khatun, Bangladesh's renowned musician and founder of Chhayanaut Institute, and Liberation War veteran Col Quazi Sajjad Ali Zahir.

While Sanjida was chosen in the category of Art, Col Zahir was selected for the award in the category of "public affairs," a home ministry statement said last night.

Sanjida Khatun, 88, was one of the founders of Bangladesh Mukti Sangrami Shilpi Sangstha during the Liberation War in 1971 and of Chhayanaut in the early 1960s.

Having obtained her bachelor's degree in Bengali literature from Dhaka University in 1955, she did her master's in Bangla from Visva Bharati University in 1957.

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ROHINGYA RELOCATION 3rd batch goes to Bhasan Char on Jan 29-30

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Almost 3,000 Rohingyas will be relocated to Bhasan Char by the end of this month, a top official said.

This would be the 3rd batch of the refugees to be relocated to the island.

"The relocation will take place on January 29 and 30," said the top official of Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), wishing not to be named.

The RRRRC is undertaking the relocation process amid concerns from the international community that the island is a risky place to live.

The first batch of 1,642

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Teachers and authorities of Brojomohun Biddyalaya (Barishal Zilla) school on Barishal's Kalibari road are dusting off tables in their institution. After a long closure since March last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, schools are finally set to open next month.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Poor suffer in widening Covid divide

Says Oxfam, demands steps to tackle inequality

THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION, London

Billionaires including Amazon's Jeff Bezos and Tesla founder Elon Musk have seen their wealth soar during the Covid-19 pandemic while the world's poor face years of hardship, charity Oxfam said yesterday as it demanded steps to tackle inequality.

Nations have a "shrinking window of opportunity" to build a fair, green recovery, according to "The Inequality Virus" report, published as global leaders tune in for the World Economic Forum's virtual "Davos Dialogue" meeting.

"We stand to witness the greatest rise in inequality since records began," Gabriela Bucher, executive director of Oxfam International, said in a statement as the charity called for higher wealth taxes and stronger protections for workers.

"Rigged economies are funneling wealth to a rich elite who are riding out the pandemic in luxury, while those on the frontline of the pandemic -- shop assistants, healthcare workers, and market vendors -- are struggling to pay the bills."

Covid-19 has unleashed an economic storm that hit the poor and vulnerable hardest, with women and marginalised workers facing the worst of job losses and the World Bank warning more than 100 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty.

It could take more than a decade to reduce the number

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PRAYER TIMING JANUARY 26
Fazr Juma Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5:35 12:45 4:15 5:46 7:15
JAMAT 6:10 1:15 4:30 5:50 7:45
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION