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## OFFSHORE SMART CITY A self-serving, dubious initiative

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY, RASHIDUL HASAN and ZINA TASREEN

Can a parliamentary standing committee recommend a project directly to the prime minister without any due diligence? The law explicitly does not permit it.

But that is what the parliamentary standing committee on housing and public works ministry has done recently -- in an instance not witnessed in the recent history of the parliament, according to parliament secretariat officials.

The committee recommended the proposal of a smart city on the Bay of Bengal from a consortium of two local and two Chinese companies to the prime minister without consulting with the law ministry, the foreign ministry or any of the national security agencies. There was no environmental impact assessment (ELA), either.

Coincidentally, the chief of the parliamentary body, who is the Chattogram-1 Awami League MP Mosharraf Hossain, and his family own about 42 percent stakes in one of the companies of the consortium: The

has learnt from people involved with the project.

It is not known what would be the share of the four companies in the joint venture company.

CCECC is working on several development projects in Bangladesh, including the expansion of Cox's Bazar Airport and the construction of Chattogram-Cox's Bazar rail link.

The company last year had expressed an interest to implement the Bangladesh Railway's proposed high-speed rail line project on the Dhaka-Chattogram corridor.

But it was CRDC along with Mazumder Enterprise that ended up carrying out the feasibility study and detail designing for the project, which has now gone on the back burner.

Established in 1998, Mazumder Enterprise is an integrated consulting, engineering and contracting services firm. Its Chief Executive Officer Mohammed Jashim Uddin Chowdhury is a member of AL's sub-committee on relief and social welfare since 2014, according to his Facebook page.



Children playing football in Tentultala playground in the capital's Kalabagan hours after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday ordered the authorities not to construct a police station there. Locals demonstrating against the construction thanked the prime minister for her decision.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

### NAHID MURDER

## 5 Dhaka College students arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives arrested five students of Dhaka College in different areas of the capital on charges of killing the delivery person of a courier service during a recent clash between students and shopkeepers of New Market.

A Dhaka court yesterday placed each of them on a two-day remand.

The arrestees are final-year students of Dhaka College Abdul Kaiyum, 24, of accounting; Palash Mia, 24, and Mahmud Irfan, 24, of social sciences; Faisal Islam, 24, of Bangla; and first-year student Zunaid Bugdadi, 19, of Islamic history.

"The five students took part in the clashes wearing helmets. All of them had local weapons," said AKM Hafiz Akhter, additional commissioner of the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, at a press briefing.

Detectives recovered the helmets and the clothes they wore on April 19 when they attacked Nahid Mia, 19, the delivery person.

About the suspects' reported affiliation to Chhatra League, Hafiz said, "We saw many students involved in the incident. We can't accuse a specific party."

"We often hear about Helmet Bahini. We interrogated the arrested students about the helmets. They tell us that many students of Dhaka College use motorcycles. They took part in the

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### TENTULTALA PLAYGROUND

## Freed at last, as PM steps in

Rights activists thank Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday ordered keeping the Tentultala field in the capital's Kalabagan area as a playground, bringing a happy end to environmentalists and locals' protests of the construction of a police station on the ground.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal announced the PM's instruction at a press conference at his office. He said the playground would be open to everyone, but would be under the jurisdiction of police.

He said since there was no playground, open space or recreation facility in the area the prime minister instructed that the place be kept open.

Asked about the construction of a wall in the field for the police station, Asaduzzaman said not much of the wall was constructed.

Locals, rights activists and environmentalists have been

demonstrating to save the playground for several days. On April 24, Kalabagan police picked up Syeda Ratna, who was leading the protests, along with her son. Police released the mother and son around 13 hours later, with an undertaking that she would not get involved in any protests to protect the playground.

Yesterday, news of the PM's announcement came at a time when leaders of different organisations were about to start a press conference on Tentultala playground.

After getting the news, there was happiness and relief among the leaders, who stood up and showed their gratitude to the prime minister, saying the announcement was an Eid-ul-Fitr gift to children of the area.

Syeda Ratna said she had faith that if their demands reached the prime minister, she would definitely save the playground.

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Peninsula Chittagong.

His son Mahboob-Ur-Rahman is the chairman of the company incorporated in 2002.

Also on the board are Hossain's wife, Ayesha Sultana, and her brothers Mustafa Tahir Arshad and Mustafa Tahseen Arshad, who is the managing director of the company; his wife Bilkis Arshad is a director, too.

The other companies in the consortium are China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC), China Railway Design Corporation (CRDC) -- both big beneficiaries of construction projects financed with Chinese development loans abroad -- and Mazumder Enterprise, The Daily Star

The consortium of four is lobbying for reclaiming about 60 square kilometres of land from the sea and developing a smart city, according to a document presented at the parliamentary standing committee's meeting on February 22.

The Daily Star has a copy of the document, which does not contain enough details to warrant recommending the proposal straight to the prime minister.

Starting from the Sagarika Point of the Patenga Beach, the smart city will stretch up to Bangabandhu Shilpa Nagar in Mirsarai -- redrawing the map of Bangladesh.

It was not part of any long-term plan of the government until January 9,

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Farmers take home their harvest of paddy on buffalo carts through a field in Bishwambarpur, Sunamganj. Many in the region are counting losses as flash floods ruined paddy fields. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## EDIBLE OIL Supply crunch worsens crisis

Prices rise by up to Tk 15 a litre soon after Indonesian export ban takes effect

MOHAMMAD SUMAN and SHAHEEN MOLLA

The retail prices of non-bottled and bottled soybean and palm oil have gone up by Tk 10-15 per litre overnight due to a supply crunch in the aftermath of Indonesia's export ban on crude and refined palm oil imposed on Wednesday.

Indonesia is the world's biggest supplier of vegetable oil. About 53 percent of the cooking oil used in Bangladesh is palm oil and 80 percent of it comes from Indonesia.

Wholesalers and retailers in Chattogram city yesterday said the prices of both palm and soybean oil were going up due to a supply dearth.

The scenario was almost similar all over the country, including the capital, according to traders.

The Daily Star visited the wholesale and retail hubs in Dhaka, Chattogram and Bagerhat and found most of the shops had no edible oil for sale.

Taking advantage of the situation, some shops were selling one-litre bottled soybean oil for Tk180-190 and two-litre for Tk 355-360.

Three-litre and five-litre bottled oil was not available in the markets.

Non-bottled soybean oil was sold for Tk 180-182 per litre in wholesale markets and Tk 190-200 in retail markets yesterday.

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