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## BTCL'S TK 463CR 5G PROJECT Huawei's win marred by controversy

MAHMUDUL HASAN

It is often said that government files move at a snail's pace in Bangladesh, slowing down the speed of project implementation.

But when it came to awarding the Chinese telecom giant Huawei the tender for a 5G network infrastructure project, files moved at a record speed.

From notifying the financial opening date to awarding the tender, everything proceeded at an unprecedented pace, according to documents obtained by The Daily Star.

In so doing, the board of the Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Limited (BTCL), the project implementing agency, violated laws stated in the standard tender documents of the Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU), the agency responsible for managing procurement by government bodies.

The haste and series of rule violations have raised concerns about transparency and fairness in the awarding of the work to Huawei, which faced resistance in most of the advanced nations in its bid to supply equipment for the 5G networks.

"It is unprecedented and impossible as well -- the government should investigate it," said AKM Fazlul Karim, a former director general of the CPTU.

In February last year, the telecom ministry tasked the BTCL to install an optical fibre transmission network in a Tk 463 crore project as part of the preparations for the ultra-fast 5G roll-out.

The tender floated by the BTCL in

**"The malpractice is obvious in every step of this project. It is surprising that the Anti-Corruption Commission has not taken any action yet."**

ABU SAEED KHAN  
A senior policy fellow  
at LIRNEAsia.

December last year had three takers: Huawei, ZTE and Nokia.

All the participants were allowed to clear the technical evaluation -- the first step of the process -- even though they did not fully meet the technical requirements of the project.

Documents pieced together by The Daily Star show that Asaduzzaman Chowdhury, the managing director of BTCL then, was penalised for not signing off on the technical evaluation report and calling for a fresh tender.

In October, he was demoted to the post of general manager of the Department of Telecommunications.

Then on November 7, he was suspended by the Posts and Telecommunications Division, and the next day, departmental proceedings were initiated against him -- only for both the moves to be overturned by the court.

Meanwhile, on November 6, project director Md Monjur Ahmed asked the participants to come to the opening of the financial offers of the tender to be held on November 8 at 9:30 am at his office in Dhaka.

The companies were given less than 48 hours to send an authorised representative to the event when the rule stipulates at least seven days' notice.

A day after receiving the letter, ZTE, another Chinese telecom giant, sent a letter to Ahmed objecting to the irregularity in the tender process.

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## EARTHQUAKE Least prepared as spectre of the big one looms

STAR REPORT

Frequent earthquakes are a sign that a mega shock may be in the offing, but the densely populated capital seems to be the least prepared for such an event, experts say.

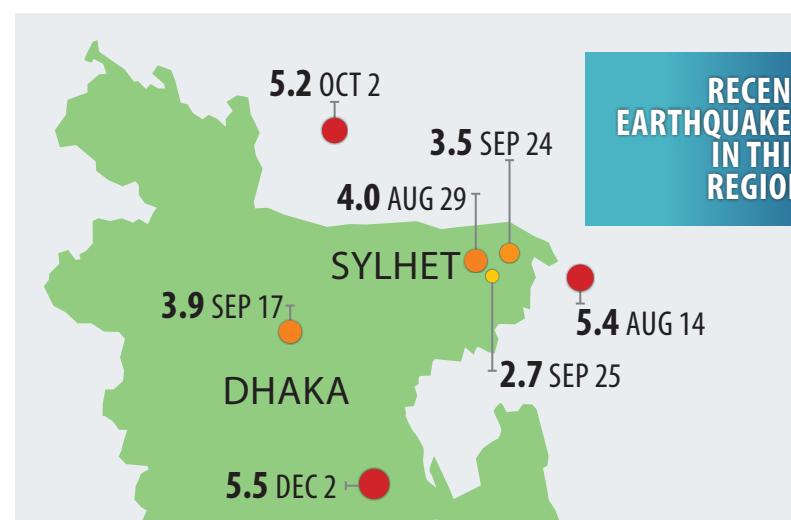
As yesterday morning's 5.6 magnitude tremor triggered widespread panic, at least 76 garment workers and a Dhaka University student were injured while fleeing buildings.

Seismic activities often occur near Dhaka as the city sits close to a geological fault line, but due to the lack of preparedness, a major tremor will be catastrophic.

Almost 100 quakes, mostly 3.0- to 4.5 magnitude minor jolts, hit Bangladesh this year, but five of those were magnitude 5 and above, according to data from the US Geological Survey (USGS) and India Meteorological Department.

Epcentres of eight of the tremors were within Bangladesh. Yesterday's quake, which was the highest on the Richter scale in recent years, struck at a depth of 10km near Ramganj upazila of Lakshmipur, according to the USGS.

The location is 86 km south east of the BMD Seismic Centre in



Dhaka's Agargaon.

"These are matters of great concern," says Syed Humayun Akther, a former professor of geology at Dhaka University.

"Bangladesh is actually sitting on a subduction zone. Our research shows that the energy accumulated in the plates may cause a more than 8-magnitude earthquake, and the energy can get released anytime. All the recent tremors along the fault

line is an indication of it," he adds. A mega shock is almost inevitable, he says, urging the government to focus on short-term preparedness programmes that can begin with educating people about ways to survive and lower damage during a convulsion.

"The government is taking preparations. But proper preparation takes a very long time. That's why

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## TRANSFER OF UNOS, OCS Field-level officials 'discontent' with EC directive

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and BAHARAM KHAN

A large number of field-level administration officials are dissatisfied with the Election Commission's instructions for the transfer of all upazila nirbahi officers and officers in-charge of police stations ahead of the national election, several officials said.

With the election barely a month away, the wholesale transfer of officials could create a setback to the administration's plan for conducting the polls, they said.

The UNOs and the OCSs are already working on identifying the important polling centres and carrying out other polls-related works.

Getting transferred and taking charge at new stations will take at least a week. Keeping this in mind, the public administration ministry is mulling transferring the UNOs to the nearest districts, said officials.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, at least six UNOs said they thought that some officials could be transferred ahead of the January 7 polls due to some valid reasons, but they could not even imagine there

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## AL assures allies of seat-sharing

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

The ruling Awami League yesterday told its alliance partners that decisions would be made about the share of seats in parliament, and then the 14-party alliance will participate in the election as a unit.

There is growing unease in the alliance over which partner gets to vie for how many constituencies, sources said.

As the AL asked, four parties of the alliance yesterday provided lists of their desired constituencies.

The parties are the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Workers Party, Bangladesh Tarikat Federation and Jatiya Party (Manji).

Sources say the parties remain firm in their demand for 20 seats in parliament.

Before the 2018 national election, AL's partners were given 11

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PHOTO: STAR

Six organisations and three individuals yesterday won the third "Bangladesh Sustainability Excellence Awards" by The Daily Star and the CSR Window Bangladesh for their contributions to the betterment of people's lives. The individuals and representatives of the organisations pose for a photo with chief guest Syed Manzur Elahi, chairman of Syed Manzur Elahi Enterprise, during the event at Le Méridien Dhaka.

## Sustainability stalwarts crowned

6 firms, 3 individuals awarded by The Daily Star and CSR Window Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Six companies and three young humanitarians were felicitated yesterday at the 3rd Bangladesh Sustainability Excellence Awards for their sustainable and socially impactful initiatives.

The Daily Star and the CSR Window Bangladesh honoured the firms to encourage corporates and individuals to take on projects that serve society and the environment.

Unilever Bangladesh's Plastic Circularity for a Sustainable Bangladesh project won the award in the environment category, while Bata Shoe Company's (Bangladesh) Bata Children's program bagged the top award in the education segment.

Cement maker LafargeHolcim's initiative Integrated Support in Chhatak Community took home the accolade in the Community



Engagement, while Ashulia Women and Children Hospital, a project of Shanta Holdings, won the award in the healthcare category.

The Bangladesh Sustainability Excellence Awards in Financial Inclusion went to Grameenphone for its GP Accelerator and GP Academy, while Banglalink Digital

Communication won the award in the Disaster Response category.

Three young changemakers were also awarded as the Young Humanitarian of the Year: Arifur Rahman Shihab founder of Valo Kajer Hotel; Lamia Tanzim Tanha, founder and chief executive officer of TransEnd; and Arian Arif, founder of Mojarr School.

Syed Manzur Elahi, chairman of Apex Group, handed over the awards to the winners at a ceremony held at Le Méridien Dhaka, the hospitality partner for the event.

"Sustainability is part of SDGs and this is very important -- every company should prepare a sustainability report."

Five years ago, design, capacity and payment terms were important to foreign buyers. Now, sustainability has become important.

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