

Govt to ramp up LNG spot purchase for low prices

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Petrobangla is set to purchase three more cargoes of liquefied natural gas this month as the government looks to ramp up gas imports taking advantage of the favourable prices in the global spot market.

The cabinet committee on government purchase yesterday approved the procurement of the three cargoes at the unit prices of \$9.68, \$9.89 and \$9.50 respectively. The total cost would be about Tk 418 crore, Tk 428 crore and Tk 410 crore respectively.

The LNG cargoes, having 33.60 lakh MMBtu each, will be supplied by Singapore's Vitol Asia, Switzerland's TotalEnergies Gas and Power and Gunvor Singapore.

With the three cargoes, the government has approved a total of 15 LNG cargoes from the spot market this year.

Petrobangla Chairman Zanendra Nath Sarker recently told Reuters that they have plans to purchase 48 cargoes of LNG this year other than the long term contracts, up from 23 cargoes last year.



Bangladesh women's cricket team players pose for a picture with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban yesterday at an event where the PM met members of the Australia women's cricket team as well ahead of the two sides' third and final T20I in Mirpur today.

PHOTO: BCB

ACC sues 5 Janata Bank officials for embezzling Tk 5.22cr

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

The Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday filed a case against five officials of Janata Bank for embezzling Tk 5.22 crore from Tamai branch in Sirajganj.

The accused are Al Amin Sheikh, 42, principal officer of the Tamai branch in Belkuchi; Rezaul Karim, 34, assistant manager; Khaled Eunos, 31, former cash officer of the branch; Rashedul Hasan, 34, officer of the branch; and Shah Mokhdum Doula, 29, cash officer.

They misappropriated Tk 5.22 crore from the branch's vault, according to the case statement.

The matter came to light after an investigation by the bank.

Nazrul Islam, deputy general manager of Janata Bank, visited the branch last month and found evidence of misappropriation after an internal enquiry.

Subsequently, a case was filed with Belkuchi Police Station last month.

The case was handed over to the ACC for investigation.

Khairul Haque, ACC deputy director in Pabna, said they would investigate the case as per the rule.

Shadhon Chandra Sutrodhar, assistant ACC director, has been tasked with investigating the case, he added.

A hostel of nightmares

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from home to survive the past seven months.

Petrazehra Berhad, a Johor Baru-based Malaysian company, hired the Bangladeshi workers. As per the job contract, they were supposed to get RM 1,500 (Tk 37,500) as basic salary. The brokers who mediated even promised the workers they would earn Tk 60-70 thousand a month.

The Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia wrote a letter to the expatriates' welfare ministry in February saying that 14 recruiting agencies got approvals for sending 1,500 workers for Petrazehra Berhad, and 725 of them travelled to Malaysia.

It requested the agencies not to send the remaining 775 workers to Malaysia until the 725 got jobs, implying they were yet to be employed.

According to the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training, over four lakh Bangladeshis have gone to Malaysia since late 2022, when the Southeast Asian country reopened the labour market for Bangladesh after four years.

The Malaysian labour market was earlier restricted for Bangladeshis following allegations of corruption and irregularities against a syndicate of 10 recruiting agents.

In 2022, initially 25 Bangladeshi agencies were allowed to recruit workers. The number was later extended to 100.

Activists and researchers estimate that out of approximately 800,000 Bangladeshis in Malaysia, 100,000 to 200,000 workers remain jobless, unpaid and in debt.

Billal Khan (pseudonym), another migrant in the group, said, "Petrazehra agents warned us not to complain to authorities. They kept promising us work permits and jobs, but nothing has materialised yet."

He too had to manage Tk 5 lakh through loans and selling off his cattle and also borrow an additional Tk 70,000 from relatives back home. "Now, my family can't pay back the loans nor take new ones to help me survive."

Billal even secretly visited a friend half an hour away from the Sepang hostel in an attempt to gather some money. "I left the hostel despite the fear of being caught by the police, but I'm left with no other option."

Those who managed to flee the hostel remain undocumented.

Even if they find jobs somewhere else, they will be under constant fear of being arrested as foreign workers can only work in the companies that hire them.

"We had come here for a better life, but are now crying for help. None but Allah would understand what we are going through," said Billal.

About the Bangladeshi workers suffering in Malaysia, Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud on Thursday said his ministry has already asked the Bangladesh High Commission there to discuss the issues with the Malaysian authorities.

"We've discussed the labour issues with the Malaysian High Commission [in Dhaka] as well. I have a plan to hold discussions in this regard at the foreign and labour ministry levels," he told The Daily Star during a briefing at the foreign ministry.

He, however, claimed the situation for the workers there right now is much better than what it was a year ago.

NRBC bank's rejoinder, our reply

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and NRBC Branch covered Capital Flight. These allegations, suggesting that I have engaged in illegal and immoral activities, are baseless and without merit.

First and foremost, I categorically deny each and every claim made against me in this context. Not only are these accusations false, but they are also deliberately designed to tarnish my reputation and undermine my integrity both professionally and personally.

It is deeply disappointing and concerning that such slanderous statements have been made public without any regard for the truth and how my statement has been presented. These allegations have caused me significant distress and have potential implications for my professional standing and relationships.

Current chairman Mr. Tamal Pervaz was accompanied by his body guard, as he was under threat (I refer to Mr. Tamal's own statement). We arrived in separate cars and I was coincidentally in the same lift. (There is video proof to this) I can confirm that no gunman entered the board room and the minutes, along with probe report has been fabricated using photoshopped photos. Thus I strongly deny and condemn the writing that myself and Mr. Tamal entered the board room with a Gun man. There are police report confirming the same. The contents in the 48th Board minutes were simply fabricated which was later reversed in the Board minutes of the 56th meeting.

I strongly deny that I took 28 Cr of "disguised loans" under the name of NES, Pubali and Ornita. There is no evidence and I strongly protest the wrong statement that I owned any of these companies. I request The Daily Star to present such evidence. Bangladesh Bank investigated the allegations and found the allegations were false. It is astonishing that a newspaper like Daily Star presented the facts in such a way to implicate me into a crime, where I have no part. NES, Pubali and Ornita were normal customers of the bank got facilities based on their credentials and more importantly these loans have been paid by these customers in full. There are no loans that exist anymore. The Daily Star implicated me on a matter after 8 years where I have no involvement.

I strongly deny allegation that I forged/submitted bill for a branch through my company Adrita trading. I have no connection or link with this company and again I am requesting Daily Star to provide me evidence that I have connections with the company called Adrita. Again, the 48th minutes which seems to be the focus of this report is simply false. Daily Star brought the issues simply to defame me.

The report says we were removed from the board. I can confirm we were NEVER been removed from the board. I can confirm that Farasath Ali and his associates illegally tried to remove me from the Board and illegally froze our shares. Bangladesh Bank investigated the matter and unearth the wrongdoing against me and other directors and in July 21, 2016 ordered the bank to include 3 of us Mr. Tamal, Mr. Rafiqul and myself in the normal board activities.

The so called "Nexus" of my interest with Pubali and NES are simply fabricated, made up and customised to frame me to which

the court used as a reference only. I assume that The Daily Star was simply played in the hands of Farasath Ali and his companions in their cravings to derail the bank. The Daily Star misplayed Court's deliberation without verifying independently the authenticity of such document. Again, there is no such loan. I strongly stand by my statement that HC in its judgement, which was subsequently superseded by Appellate Division judgement, referred to the report prepared by the then Chairman and his associates to frame and defame me. I again protest Daily Star stating that the HC found no patent or latent irregularity in the enquiry report. To confirm that enquiry report was done by the committee which Bangladesh Bank removed for gross proven irregularities after the judgment date (which was then superseded with another judgement) and these probe committee report was cancelled in the 56th meeting, thus how can we after 8 years rely on such report to make such statement when is totally false, proven and action taken. This is simply reflection of wrongfully defaming me.

As a Director and EC chairman, it's my duty to protect bank depositors. This branch had many NPL thus risking the depositors money. Ixora was a sick client of the bank. I strongly deny that I was a shareholder or I have any link with Ixora. I strongly protest the statement by the Daily Star that Ixora is my company. There is no logic or reason why I will be part of a sick company. Bank management works with non willful default customers to see how a solution can be obtained to turn around such companies. [Z14] Since the new management took over, we were making all effort to recover the loans and regularise the banks position resulting in reducing NPL for the bank and most importantly protecting depositors interest. The Bank Board always supported such initiatives. Hence, wrongly implicating me as part of Ixora was a serious breach of editorial integrity and we never expect such reporting from The Daily Star.

Whilst these reports were disturbing and distressing, it does seriously demotivate Non-resident Bangladeshis like us who have worked hard abroad from a young age to carve out success in foreign lands, and carrying out investment activities in Bangladesh to create employment opportunities and bringing in FDI.

I have always conducted myself in accordance with the highest ethical standards, and I take my professional and personal reputation very seriously. The dissemination of these false claims not only affects me but also has wider implications for my family, colleagues, and those I work with.

I urge the Daily Star to retract these unfounded allegations immediately and remove such reports from its online forthwith. Failure to do so will leave me with no option but to consider all available legal remedies to protect my reputation and seek redress for the harm caused by these malicious falsehoods.

I am prepared to take the necessary steps to defend my reputation and ensure that the truth prevails. I remain open to resolving this matter amicably, should there be a willingness to retract the defamatory content and correct the public record.

OUR RESPONSE

The Daily Star did not use any photoshopped photos of the entry of the gunman as its news source,

as claimed in the rejoinder. In addition to multiple documents in its possession, The Daily Star has verified the gunman's entry using a video from the close-circuit camera which this newspaper has published on its YouTube channel. The police report mentioned in the rejoinder categorically states that Tamal Parvez's gunman was armed, adding that Tamal himself was not carrying the gun and did not threaten the board by being armed.

Nowhere in our report did we mention that Tamal carried the gun and that he threatened anyone with the firearm.

The Daily Star has received a copy of the minutes of the 48th board meeting from the bank's legal team post-publication. The minutes are identical to the ones we already had in our possession which we used as one of the many sources for our reporting. Both copies of the minutes - the one provided by the bank's legal team and the one already in our possession - state the above, i.e., the presence of a gunman in board office on the day of the 40th board meeting of the bank.

Although the rejoinder alleges that the said meeting minutes were fabricated, it does not provide any proof of that.

The Daily Star has not been in touch with former bank chairman Farasath Ali or "his companions" except to give them the right to response before publication. Therefore, the assumption in the rejoinder that this newspaper "was played" is the bank's own opinion.

The Daily Star has also received a copy of the High Court order from the bank's legal team post-publication, and again, it is identical to the one already in our possession. Since the content of both copies are the same, the copy provided by the bank's legal team after publication does not reveal any new information. The key focus of the HC petition was the unauthorised removal of three directors, including Adnan, from the board by the then management.

This newspaper has established Adnan Imam's links, not ownership, with Pubali Construction and NES Trading in the story with documentary evidence, and yet re-verified it using the 44th meeting minutes provided to The Daily Star post-publication by the bank. The minutes are the same as the ones in possession of this newspaper, and contains Imam's interview with the board. The minutes cited him as saying that the owner of NES Trading Shyan Zubair is Adnan Imam's brother-in-law and business partner and the owner of Pubali Construction is his employee "who respects Imam's father-in-law like his own".

Furthermore, the High Court Division's 41-page verdict was not "superseded" in its entirety by the Appellate Division, as the rejoinder claims. The Appellate Division only overturned a certain section of the judgement pertaining to the attachment of the shares of three directors, including Adnan, with the bank. This newspaper is aware that the Appellate Division gave this verdict after the board agreed to mutually resolve their differences, for "the betterment of the bank" as mentioned in the 56th meeting.

Our report details the paper trail showing Adnan Imam's link with Ixora and does not claim that he owns apparel company.

We stand by our report.

Bank heists rock hills

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and Tk 2 lakh from Krishi Bank," said Thanchi Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mohammad Mamun.

The robbers could not break open the vaults, he added.

He said they apprehend that yesterday's robbery was committed by the same group that attacked the Sonali Bank branch in Ruma the previous day.

Bandarban Deputy Commissioner Shah Mujahid Uddin said they are working to rescue the abducted Sonali Bank manager alive and maintain law and order in the area.

"The operation against the group is ongoing, and BGB and police are working there," he added.

Inspector General of Police Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun said tough actions will be taken against those involved in the robberies.

ROBBERY ATTEMPT IN RUMA

Earlier around 8:30pm on Tuesday, armed men stormed the Ruma Upazila Parishad complex and took 14 weapons, including two light machine guns, of security personnel but failed to take any money from the Sonali Bank branch there, investigators said.

Two teams of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Chattogram and Cox's Bazar went to Ruma yesterday and collected evidence.

They opened the bank vault and found Tk 1.59 crore in it.

Chattoogram Zone Special Superintendent of Police Shahnewaz Khaled said no money was looted.

Sources in law enforcement agencies said the gunmen took two

light machine guns with 60 bullets, eight rifles with 320 bullets, and four shotguns with 35 cartridges.

Assistant Sub-Inspector Mamunur Rahman and Constable Touhidul Islam were injured when the armed men attacked them to get the machine guns.

Narayan Das, a senior officer at the bank, told The Daily Star that over 100 armed criminals, who were in uniforms and had camouflage face paint, took part in that operation.

"When they entered the area there was a power cut. We could not properly see their faces in the dark," he explained.

Narayan said the attackers went to the mosque and started looking for Nezam Uddin, the branch manager. Under threats at gunpoint, locals identified Nezam.

"As soon as I reached there, the gunmen apprehended me along with a few locals," he said.

Eventually, the gunmen entered the bank with Nezam but failed to get the vault opened, Narayan said, adding that the attackers then vandalised the computers of the bank.

Soon after they left with Nezam, power was restored in the area, he said.

The home minister said the group had snapped the power line before entering the upazila complex.

He added that KNF colluded with militants and arranged the training for the armed groups.

"They had been neutralised through army and Rab operations, but they have been reasserting their strength in different ways recently," he said.

PM may visit India in June

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India's parliamentary polls are scheduled to be completed on June 1.

Yesterday, Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen met the PM at the Gono Bhaban and extended an invitation to visit China in July. The PM accepted the invitation, reports BSS.

Foreign ministry sources confirmed that Hasina's visit to China was delayed because of the national polls. With the election now over, the premier is planning the visit. However, she will tour India before travelling to China.

Hasina's visit to Germany in mid-February to attend the Munich Security Dialogue was her first foreign tour after the polls.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud yesterday said he requested the envoys of Bahrain, Portugal and New Zealand to invest in Bangladesh's IT sector and economic zones.

He made the request during separate meetings with Bahrain Ambassador to Bangladesh Abdulrahman Mohamed Ahmed Al-Qaoud, Portuguese Ambassador Joao Manuel Mendes Ribeiro de Almeida and New Zealand High Commissioner David Pine.

Taiwan's strongest earthquake

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system to close briefly, although most lines resumed service.

Fire authorities said they had already evacuated some 70 people trapped in tunnels near Hualien city, including two Germans.

But they had lost contact with 50 workers aboard four minibuses heading to a hotel in a national park, Taroko Gorge, they said, and rescuers were looking for them. Another 80 people are trapped in a mining area, though it was not immediately clear if they were inside a mine.

A woman who runs bed-and-breakfast accommodation in

Hualien city said she scrambled to calm her guests who were scared by the quake.

The government put the number of injured at 946. "At present the most important thing, the top priority, is to rescue people," said President-elect Lai Ching-te, speaking outside one of the collapsed buildings in Hualien.

The rail link to the area was expected to re-open today, Lai, who is set to take office next month, told reporters.

The White House said the US stood ready to provide any assistance necessary.