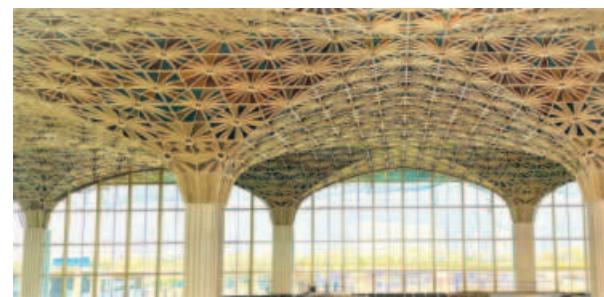


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## ROOPPUR PLANT

### NPCBL to finalise power purchase deal

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, *Pubna*

The Nuclear Power Plant Company of Bangladesh Limited (NPCBL) has been given the responsibility for finalising the power purchase agreement with the Power Development Board (PDB) for selling electricity from the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant.

The Ministry of Science and Technology on March 25 informed the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) about the government's decision on the PPA, sources at Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant and NPCBL told The Daily Star after a meeting yesterday.

The NPCBL organised the meeting at the Rooppur site office to discuss the PPA after getting the government's approval, the sources said.

"We have submitted the draft proposal and design of agreement to the Ministry of Science and Technology recently, but we did not finalise the price of electricity from the Rooppur project as the production cost has not been

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Hefazat vows tougher action if its demands not met

### To hold rally today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh yesterday said they would go for a tougher programme if its key demands, including the dissolution of the Women's Affairs Reform Commission, the withdrawal of cases against its leaders, and a ban on the Awami League, are not met.

Junayed Al Habib, the organisation's central senior vice-president and president of its Dhaka city unit, issued the warning while addressing a rally in front of the capital's Baitul Mukarram National Mosque after Jumia prayers.

"If our demands are not fulfilled, Dhaka will come to a standstill tomorrow [today]," he said. "Hasina had to step down in the face of protests; you too will be forced out with just a gust of resistance... You have time until tomorrow [today]."

The rally was organised by Hefazat's Paltan zone to press forward their various demands.

Their other demands included ensuring justice for the killings at Shapla Chattar and other alleged crackdowns, and stopping "the genocide and persecution of Muslims in Palestine and India".

Hefazat will today hold a grand rally at Suhrawardy Udyana.

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## Australia launches 'world's largest' battery-powered ship

AFP, *Sydney*

An Australian boatbuilder launched what it described as the world's largest electric-powered ship yesterday, a 130-metre (426-feet) behemoth capable of carrying 2,100 passengers.

Identified by boatbuilder Incat as Hull 096, the aluminium catamaran is powered by more than 250 tonnes of batteries and was built for South American ferry operator Buquebus.

It was designed to carry passengers and up to 225 vehicles across the River Plate between Buenos Aires and Uruguay.

"Hull 096 proves that large-scale, low-emission transport solutions are not only possible, they are ready now," Incat CEO Stephen Casey said in a statement after the launch on Hobart's Derwent River in the island state of Tasmania.



Rain and a moderate nor'wester swept through various parts of Rajshahi district on Thursday, causing hundreds of maunds of mangoes to fall from the trees across several upazilas. Growers from the affected areas brought the fallen fruit to wholesale markets in Puthia upazila, and sold them to traders at a low price of Tk 5 per kg. Traders at the markets are now packing these mangoes in sacks to send to Dhaka, Chattogram, Sylhet, and other districts. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

## Govt plans to hire foreign firms to operate Ctg Port

Says CA's press secretary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

The government is considering appointing some of the world's most experienced port operators to manage Chattogram Port and other sea and land ports in the region, said Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam yesterday.

He expressed hope that the recruitment process would be completed by September this year.

Speaking at a press conference at the Chattogram Circuit House in the afternoon, Shafiqul addressed concerns regarding the rationale behind bringing in foreign operators instead of employing domestic ones.

"Chattogram Port is currently unable to handle cargo in line with the demands of today's global investors. Local operators, including Saif Powertec, are facing capacity limitations, which is a key reason behind the persistent container congestion at the port."

Shafiqul emphasised that the future trajectory of Bangladesh's economy hinges on the efficiency and capacity of Chattogram Port. "We have no alternative but to expand the capacity of the port, along with Patenga Terminal, Bay Terminal, and Matarbari Port."

"Chattogram and its surrounding areas are ideal for port-based development. We are in discussions with companies that have experience managing 50 to 100 ports globally."

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## Drones hit aid boat heading for Gaza

Say activists, blame Israel; rescuers say 20 Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes

AFP, *Gaza*

A group of activists organising an aid boat for Gaza said yesterday it was attacked by drones in international waters off Malta as they headed towards the Palestinian territory, accusing Israel of attacking the vessel.

The Maltese government said it responded to a distress call from the vessel and offered immediate support. It said all crew members were safe, while making no mention of an alleged attack.

"At 00:23 Maltese time (2223 GMT on Thursday), the Conscience, a Freedom Flotilla Coalition ship came under direct attack in international waters," the activist group said in a statement.

"Armed drones attacked the front of an unarmed civilian vessel twice, causing a fire and a substantial breach in the hull," it added, blaming Israel.

"Israeli ambassadors must be summoned and answer to violations of international law, including the ongoing blockade and the bombing of our civilian vessel in international waters."

The Israeli military did not provide an immediate response when contacted by AFP.

Meanwhile, Gaza's civil defence agency said yesterday Israeli strikes killed at least 20 people in the Palestinian territory.

Civil defence official Mohammed al-Mughayir told AFP 20 people had been

killed since dawn, including nine following the Israeli bombardment of a home in Bureij camp in central Gaza.

The health ministry in Hamas run Gaza said that at least 2,326 people have been killed since Israel resumed strikes, bringing the overall death toll since the war broke out to 52,418.

➤ Gaza humanitarian work on 'verge of total collapse': Red Cross

➤ WFP sends out its "last remaining food stocks" to kitchens

➤ 2,326 Palestinians killed since Israel resumed strikes

The Red Cross warned yesterday that the humanitarian response in Gaza was on the "verge of total collapse" after two months of Israel blocking aid to the war-torn Palestinian territory.

"Without an immediate resumption of aid deliveries, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will not have access to the food, medicines, and life-saving supplies needed to sustain many of its programmes in Gaza," it said

in a statement.

The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) said a week ago that it had sent out its "last remaining food stocks" to kitchens.

Israel strictly controls all inflows of international aid vital for the 2.4 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

It halted aid deliveries to Gaza on March 2, days before the collapse of a ceasefire that had significantly reduced hostilities after 15 months of war.

Since the start of the blockade, the United Nations has repeatedly warned of the humanitarian catastrophe on the ground, with famine again looming.

"Civilians in Gaza are facing an overwhelming daily struggle to survive the dangers of hostilities, cope with relentless displacement, and endure the consequences of being deprived of urgent humanitarian assistance," Pascal Hundt, ICRC Deputy Director of Operations said in yesterday's statement.

"This situation must not -- and cannot -- be allowed to escalate further."

ICRC stressed that under international humanitarian law, "Israel has an obligation to use all means available to ensure that the basic needs of the civilian population under its control are met".

"If the blockade continues, programmes such as the ICRC common kitchens -- which often provide the only meal people receive each day -- will only be able to operate for a few more weeks," it warned.

China 'evaluating' US offer to hold talks over tariffs

Says Beijing, warns against 'extortion'

REUTERS, *Beijing*

Beijing is "evaluating" an offer from Washington to hold talks over US President Donald Trump's 145 percent tariffs, China's Commerce Ministry said yesterday, although it warned the United States not to engage in "extortion and coercion."

Washington and Beijing have been locked in a cat-and-mouse game over tariffs, with both sides unwilling to be seen to back down in a trade war that has roiled global markets and upended supply chains.

The Commerce Ministry said the United States has approached China to seek talks over Trump's tariffs and Beijing's door was open for discussions, signalling a potential de-escalation in the trade war.

The statement comes a day after a social media account linked to Chinese state media said Washington had been seeking to start talks, and a week after Trump claimed discussions were already underway, which Beijing denied.

"The US has recently taken the initiative on many occasions to convey information to China through relevant parties, saying it hopes to talk with China," the statement said, adding that Beijing was "evaluating this".

"Attempting to use talks as a pretext to engage in coercion and extortion would not work," it said.

The US should be prepared to take action in "correcting erroneous practices" and cancel unilateral tariffs, the Commerce Ministry said, adding that Washington needed to show "sincerity" in negotiations.

The punishing US tariffs on many Chinese products saw Beijing respond in April with levies on imports of US goods of 125 percent, as Beijing labelled Trump's tariff strategy a "joke."

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## Minerals deal with US 'truly equal'

Says Zelensky; Russian strikes on Ukraine wound 31

AFP, *Kyiv*

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Thursday a landmark minerals deal with the United States offered "equal" benefits for both sides even though the accord offered no concrete security guarantees for Kyiv.

Russia later launched a large-scale drone attack on the central industrial city of Zaporizhzhia, ripping open a Soviet-era residential building and wounding 31 people after Zelensky urged allies to step up pressure on Moscow to end its invasion.

The agreement, which has taken months to negotiate, would see Washington and Kyiv jointly develop

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