

SNC-Lavalin accused of offering bribes to six Bangladeshi officials: report

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MONTREAL - Embattled engineering giant SNC-Lavalin allegedly offered large bribes to at least six influential Bangladeshi officials, including two former government ministers, to obtain a lucrative bridge contract, the Dhaka Daily Star reported Thursday.

The newspaper said it obtained the information from unnamed sources within the anti-corruption commission who allegedly had access to evidence gathered by the RCMP during an investigation launched at the request of the World Bank.

According to the Daily Star, SNC-Lavalin (TSX:SNC) allegedly offered "huge bribes" to obtain a consultants contract overseeing the construction of a 6.5-kilometre bridge over the Padma river (called Ganges River in India) in the country in the sub-Indian continent.

The paper — billed as the largest English daily by circulation in Bangladesh — reported it did not obtain the size of the bribes allegedly offered.

Among the officials allegedly bribed by the Montreal-based company was then communications minister Syed Abul Hossain, who now heads the department of Information and Communications Technology.

The others are former state minister for foreign affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury; former secretary of the bridges division of the communications ministry Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan; Rafiqul Islam, ex-director of Padma Multipurpose Bridge project, along with three businessmen working on the project.

The Daily Star said RCMP investigators could arrive in Bangladesh in the coming days to share details and collect more information from the commission. Police officials did not comment Thursday.

Bhuiyan and Hossain denied any wrongdoing.

SNC-Lavalin declined to comment Thursday, noting that investigations are continuing.

In statement released in April, SNC said it "intends to provide a comprehensive response to the allegations," adding it "remains committed to maintaining ethical standards of business conduct."

The accusations of bribery prompted the World Bank to suspend a US\$1.2 billion loan and temporarily barred the SNC-Lavalin subsidiary from bidding on other contracts in the country.

SNC-Lavalin is also under investigation over \$56 million of payments to unidentified foreign agents.