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NAM flats for Mps, bureaucrats

Technical, essential hands to go from development to revenue budget

SHAHRIAR KARIM

Going against its very own policy and defying donors' suggestion, the government yesterday agreed in principle to transfer the technical and essential manpower from the development budget to the revenue budget.

According to meeting sources, it also decided to sell off apartments built for Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit to the MPs and high government officials. It further decided to lease out the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

The cabinet committee on economic affairs yesterday made the decisions and also resolved to form a committee headed by Cabinet

Secretary Dr Saadat Husain to examine and scrutinise essential manpower in the ADP projects for absorbing them into the revenue budget.

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman chaired the meeting held in the cabinet conference room. Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, Agriculture Minister Matir Rahman Nizami, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin and the officials concerned attended the meeting.

"We discussed the possibility of leasing out the centre and running it commercially by professional hotel managers like in the case of Sonargaon and Sheraton hotels,"

Saifur told newsmen after the meeting.

The NAM apartment project and the friendship conference centre were financed with Chinese credits in preparation for holding the NAM summit, which was later postponed. Yesterday's decision came several days after China transformed the over 3 million-dollar loan into grants during Prime Minister Zia's visit to Beijing.

About the NAM apartments, Saifur said the Ministry of Public Works would complete the apartments at the earliest. Later, it would be decided how the apartments would be allotted to MPs and high government officials.

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City wears a new look

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With rickshaws off some major roads and 6,575 two-stroke three-wheelers banned, the city wore a fresh look yesterday.

On the first day of the ban, traffic department officials said police apprehended 11 'defiant' two-stroke three-wheelers. Three were later released as they pleaded they were leaving the city with their vehicles.

Yesterday 66 mobile and stationary police teams were deployed to enforce the ban on two-stroke three-wheelers.

"These teams will remain on duty for one month," said Deputy Commissioner (South) Abu Musa Md. Fakhru Islam Khan.

The ban on two-stroke vehicles and the segregation of rickshaws have, meanwhile, created a vacuum in the way of transportation for the city dwellers. Shortage of public transport resulted in acute sufferings of commuters.

The CNG-run three-wheeler drivers took the full opportunity of this crunch by increasing the fare.

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PHOTO: STAR

City thoroughfares like the one between Farmgate and Shahbagh were comparatively free from traffic jam yesterday as hundreds of two-stroke auto-rickshaws stayed off roads due to a ban.

Over 2 lakh file for UP polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than two lakh aspirants filed nomination papers to vie for 55,042 posts of chairman, member and women member in 4,234 Union Parishad elections across the country yesterday, the last day for filing nomination papers.

The polls for the Union Parishad, the lowest tier of the local government, begin on January 25 and will be staggering until March 16.

Election Commission (EC) sources said no untoward incident was reported. The EC today would scrutinise nomination papers.

Officials at the EC Secretariat in the capital were busy receiving the lists of candidates from across the country till late last night.

Meanwhile, the tussle between the government and the EC over deployment of troops during the polls is still to be over with both sides showing no signs budging from the respective positions.

The dispute followed an EC decision to deploy troops to maintain law and order during the election. The government questioned the EC's jurisdiction as far as the deployment of army is concerned.

Some 25 non-government

organisations sought accreditation from the EC to monitor the polls, according to the EC sources.

This time the number of election observers is likely to soar to 100,000 from 30,000 in the 1997 election.

Meantime, the commission has started exchanging views with the NGOs. Apart from other preparations, the commission is busy preparing the "observers' accreditation" cards. The observers are to follow the code of conduct the EC

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Clinic staff beat pregnant woman to death in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A private clinic staff yesterday beat a pregnant woman to death by for non-payment of fees.

The victim is Amirun Begum, 30, wife of Harun Miah, a rickshaw-puller and a resident of a shanty near Malibagh Chowdhurypara Matir Mosque.

Amirun's younger sister Lipi said on December 29 a special attendant at the gynaecology department of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) had promised Amirun better treatment at the Dhaka Maternity Clinic at Chankharpool, Nawabktra in the city's Kotwali area when she was admitted at the public hospital. Amirun agreed and she was shifted to the private clinic the same day.

There, one Dipali, who claimed herself as a doctor of the clinic, charged Tk 4,000 for delivery. But

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Poor aman signals cruel time ahead

INAM AHMED and ANWAR ALI

January and February could prove the cruellest months for the urban and rural poor because of the evolving food scenario.

Indications are there that aman is headed for a bad harvest, prompting high prices in the short term and foodgrain imports to well overshoot the target. As a result, growth will be curtailed. A bad wheat season and high international prices will only compound the woes.

The picture will be clearer in a week when harvest result becomes available.

Across the north and in some areas in the south, farmers have already reported poor harvest. Their spirit nonetheless remains high, with prices keeping buoyant belying a normal trend of lowest prices between end-December and end-January. Overall, the market has shown an abnormal upswing on the

back of the aman dip this year.

Rice prices kept creeping up from mid-December and increased marginally even in end-December.

The foodgrain production target this year was set at 28 million tonnes, six per cent up from last year's 25.9 million tonnes. Aman target was set at 11.46 million tonnes as against last year's 10.73 million tonnes of the year before. And experts feel both targets were a bit ambitious as is now being proven.

Wholesalers and millers in the north are reporting a slow supply of paddy and rice, resulting in the price increase.

"It is possible that supply has slowed down due to various reasons including late harvesting because of Ramadan," said Dr Sajjad Zohir, a senior research fellow at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS). "But there are several reasons to argue

otherwise."

Between November and mid-December, the government went for open market sales (OMS) of rice at Tk 11, a rate substantially lower than the purchase price.

"This had a crowding-in effect resulting in slow off-take from the private stock. And as a result, rice price should have dropped even more, which did not happen. This is an indication that aman production has been low this year," said Dr Sajjad.

The aman shortfall would also mean a dent in the growth.

The OMS over, prices increased more rapidly and, during December 29 to December 31, the national average was Tk 12.63 per kilogram.

On the other hand, over 80 per cent of the projected private import has been realised within the first five and a half months, once again confirming the production shortfall.

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Bid to remove First Securities Bank directors on hundi charge

INAM AHMED and SHAHRIAR KARIM

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) is to serve notices today upon the chairman and five directors of the First Securities Bank to explain why they would not be removed from the bank board for their alleged involvement in hundi transactions.

Going through records, a BB inspection team has found abnormal transactions in foreign exchange remittance at the Dilkusha branch of the private commercial bank and also found clues to involvement of the bank

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New BDR chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Major General Jahangir Alam Chowdhury has been made the director general of the Bangladesh Rifles, according to army sources.

Jahangir replaces Major Rezakul Haider, who will take over as the

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