

Saifur asks NCBs to tag lending with recovery



SHAHRIAR KARIM

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday asked the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) to tighten their leash on lending.

Saifur told the banks at a meeting on 'new lending policy' that lending should be proportionate to loan recovery, according to sources.

He also asked Bangladesh Bank (BB), the central bank, to frame a

new lending guideline in consultation with the NCBs which have more than 28 per cent non-performing loans.

The finance minister's instruction came after the International Monetary Fund (IMF) gave a condition that the NCBs should stop fresh lending if Bangladesh is to get US\$1.80 billion poverty reduction growth facility (PRGF) loan.

BB Governor Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, Finance Secretary Zakir

Ahmed Khan, deputy governors of the BB and managing directors of the four NCBs -- Sonali, Janata, Agrani and Rupali--attended the meeting.

Saifur also asked the NCBs to reduce their lending rate and make the management more dynamic and efficient.

"No business can be profitable if it has to pay 14 per cent interests on bank loans. The banks have to make a k e

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BB chaos 'No threat to reforms will be tolerated'

STAR REPORT

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday said the government would not bear with any threat to the central bank from any quarters and act tough against any such move.

"Any threat to the central bank would pose a threat to the economy. No threat to the banking sector will be tolerated so long as I remain the finance minister," he said, referring to the chaos created by BNP-backed officers' associations at the Bangladesh Bank (BB) Monday.

Saifur made the comments after newsmen drew his attention to the incident.

"No, they won't be able to pose a threat to the ongoing reforms. We'll take tough action if we find any such threat or inefficiency," the finance minister said when he was told that ruling BNP supporters were creating the chaos and that many of them were involved in financial irregularities.

Four pro-ruling BNP officers' associations under the banner of the Jatiyatabadi Forum created chaos at the bank on Monday to protest the ongoing reforms at the central bank, chanting slogans against the governor.

Some 50 officers of the four associations -- Bangladesh Bank Officers Welfare Council, Bangladesh Bank Officers Welfare Association, Bangladesh Bank Officers Association and Bangladesh Bank Officers Welfare Forum -- tried to meet Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed on Monday to place their five-point demand.

On Sunday, the association leaders went to the governor to seek an appointment to discuss their demands including their opposition

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5 'extremists' held with bombs, explosives

Suspected training camp unearthed in C'nawabganj

UNB, Dhaka

Police yesterday arrested five suspected cadres of an extremist group, Jama'atul Mujahedin Bangladesh, along with two time-bombs and explosives in a pre-dawn snoop on a house in the frontier district of Chapainawabganj.

The arrestees are Monirul Islam alias Abdul Khabir, 18, of Ranishankail in Thakurgaon district, Amir Hamja, 25, of Manda in Naogaon, Abdur Rahim, 20, of Hujrapur in Chapainawabganj municipal area, Ayub Ali, 30, of Debinagar of Chapainawabganj

Sadar upazila and Mariful Islam, 26, of Tarapur Thutapara in Shibganj upazila.

Police were questioning them.

Police recovered two 'powerful' time-bombs, two chocolate-bombs, one kilogram of explosives, splinters, a mobile phone, a passport, catalogue for making bomb, toll collection receipt of Jama'atul Mujahedin Bangladesh, audio cassette of the Taliban, a still camera, a two-in-one set, radio, various books and important documents of the organisation.

The arrestees told journalists that they felt proud of being members of the group.

Acting on a tip-off, three police squads led by Superintendent of Police (SP) M Nawsher Ali, Additional Police Super S M Rakanuddin, Assistant Police Super Hamidul Islam and Sadar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Ali Ahmed Hashmi raided the residence of Haji Noimuddin at Hujrapur in the town at about 5:00 am and arrested the five youngsters.

Police said the group had rented the residence six months back claiming themselves as madrassah students. They allegedly turned the

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PHOTO: STAR

An old woman wails on the roof of a goods train yesterday after the Bangladesh Railway knocked down an illegal slum on its land at Tejgaon in the city. It also forced the squatters to board the wagon with their belongings for an unknown destination.

Aussies survive Bond blows

AFP, Port Elizabeth

Australia recovered from a battering by New Zealand fast bowler Shane Bond to maintain their unbeaten run in the World Cup at St George's Park here on Tuesday.

Bond ripped through the Australian top order batting to take six for 23, the best figures in New Zealand one-day international history, as Australia crashed to 84 for seven in the Super Six clash.

But the reigning champions recovered to 208 for nine before their bowlers launched an assault of

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TODAY'S MATCH

Super Six
 Zimbabwe vs Kenya
 Venue: Port Bloemfontein

Fresh UN vote put off

Split to send Saddam wrong signal: Britain

REUTERS, London/Baghdad

Britain said yesterday splits that have delayed a fresh UN vote on Iraq were sending Saddam Hussein the wrong signal as opponents of a rush to war pressed for an extension of weapons inspections.

Efforts by Britain and the United States to give Iraq a March 17 ultimatum on scrapping weapons of mass destruction or face attack have failed to draw widespread backing, forcing them to put off a vote in the Security Council until later this week.

Both France and Russia say they will block such a deadline. Other members of the 15-nation Security

Council have suggested giving Iraq a further month or more to comply.

"My concern is if countries talk about using a veto in all sets of circumstances, the message that sends to Saddam is: you're off the hook," British Prime Minister Tony Blair told reporters in London.

A flurry of telephone diplomacy by President Bush pushing for the swift ultimatum have made little headway, but he has said he would attack Iraq even without UN support.

This would cause major problems for his number one ally, Blair, who faces open revolt within his Labour Party if British troops join in an attack without Security

Council approval.

In Iraq, workers began destroying more of the prohibited al-Samoud 2 missiles, a day after chief weapons inspector Hans Blix criticised Baghdad for not declaring a suspicious drone.

Iraq has denied accusations it is hiding weapons of mass destruction and says it is cooperating with UN inspectors.

The US military has built up massive forces around the Gulf and says it is ready for war, but some analysts say Washington might be willing to delay the widely expected attack by two or three weeks to give time to complete its preparations.

"It seems to me the Americans

are still very interested in operating from Turkish bases," said Gary Samore of the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London.

Samore said Washington might wait for Turkish ruling party leader Tayyip Erdogan to be installed as prime minister this week and resubmit to parliament a request to let US troops deploy in Turkey for a "northern front" against Iraq.

The Turkish parliament narrowly rejected the US request on March 11.

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Bomb attack kills 2 cops in Khulna

Two in critical condition: 30 held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Two police constables were killed and two others severely injured in a bomb attack by unidentified assailants at about 8.30pm yesterday near the Sheikhpara branch of the Janata Bank under Sonadanga thana.

The dead have been identified as Ramesh, 36, and Shariful, 32, while the injured are Moniruzzaman, 30, and Nizamuddin, 34. The injured, whose legs were blown away by bombs, have been admitted to the KMCH in a critical condition.

The bomb attack came when the four constables of Bania Khamar (west) police outpost were on patrol duty. At least six powerful bombs were hurled at them and Ramesh and Shariful died on the spot. The alleged attackers ran away through a by-lane, eye witnesses said.

Three loaded shot guns are reportedly missing, while a rifle was recovered from the place of occurrence. These arms were being carried by the dead and injured constables. Senior officers remained tight-

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Two arrested from Benapole quizzed, grenades defused

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A 15-member army team of explosives experts, headed by Major Amirul Islam, defused Monday seven grenades on a school ground at Jhikargacha upazilla.

The grenades had been recovered from two young men, Zahidul Islam Shumon and Shahidullah, while they were bound for Khulna from Benapole border along with four others by three motor cycles. The four accomplices managed to escape.

According to army experts, the grenades were very powerful. Each grenade had an electric circuit, four pencil batteries and an electric switch, explosives experts said.

Arrestees Shumon and Shahidullah were placed on five days' police remand yesterday.

Police and officials of intelligence agencies believe that the arrestees belong to a well organised gang of saboteurs having a countrywide network. They are being interrogated by the police and intelligence personnel. But till yesterday afternoon nothing significant came out of the intense interrogation, said the SP of Jessore, Shahidul Islam.

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