

Default loans drop on NCB result

3.5 percentage point improvement in a year

SHAHRIAR KARIM

The share of default loans has dropped by three and a half percentage points in a year till December 2002 because of intensified supervision by the central bank.

Twenty-eight per cent of the loan portfolio was classified in December 2002 against 31.47 per cent a year back.

The total classified amount however rose by Tk 463 crore over the period to Tk 23,962.22 crore as the loan portfolio increased.

The nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) performed well during the period and their default loans came down to 34 per cent from 37 per cent a year back, a straight 3 per cent improvement.

On December 2002, their default loans stood at Tk 12,179.82 crore, which was Tk 12,227 crore a year back.

The private commercial banks (PCBs) showed little improvement. Their classified loans fell slightly to 16.65 per cent in December 2002 from 16.98 per cent in December 2001.

The amount of their classified loans went up to Tk 5,483.95 crore from Tk 4,566 crore during the period.

The classified loans of the foreign commercial banks (FCBs) declined to Tk 137.12 crore or 2.61 per cent of their total portfolio from Tk 140 crore or 3.33 per cent in December 2001.

The ailing development financial institutions (DFIs) also marked

some improvements in their share of classified loans, which fell to 25.19 per cent from 61.80 per cent during the period.

Among the NCBs, Sonali has Tk 5,217.38 crore or 35.51 per cent in classified loans, Agrani's classified loans stand at Tk 3,143.76 crore or 37.46 per cent, Janata's at Tk 2,548.07 crore or 28.21 per cent and Rupali's at Tk 1,270.61 crore or 31.81 per cent.

The Bangladesh Shilpo Rin Sangstha - a DFI has 82.80 per cent of its Tk 1,637.05 crore loans marked as default. The Bangladesh Shilpo Bank (BSB) is now strapped with 67.54 per cent default loans, Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank with 54.30 per cent and Bangladesh Krishi Bank with 51.86 per cent default loans.

CNG auto ban spins new trouble

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

A ban since Tuesday on three-wheelers on the stretch between the Bijoy Sarani and the Sheraton Crossing has left commuters in trouble.

The passengers who started travelling by CNG auto-rickshaws after the ban on rickshaws have been affected most.

The road was made off-limits to rickshaws long ago and travelling by bus is all the more difficult for office-goers during morning rush hours.

"I felt helpless when an auto-rickshaw driver didn't want to go," said Tania Sharmin who was heading for college.

She needs to reach the Holy Cross College in Tejgaon from Mirpur every day in time. She has to find a way out.

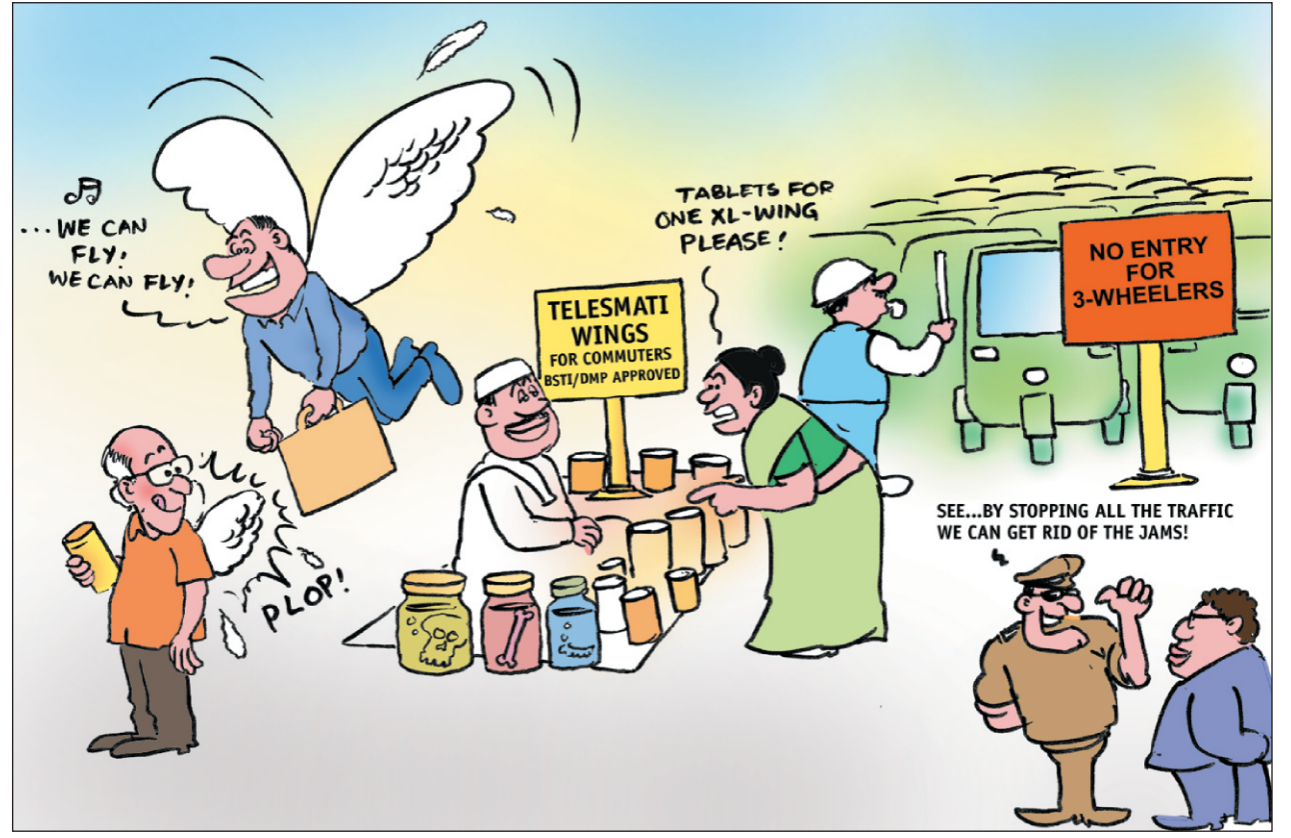
"I always went to school and then to college by auto-rickshaw. Look, the road is also off-limits to rickshaws," she said.

Tania is not alone. Many others expressed the same plight yesterday. "This is a serious problem for me since I go to office in Motijheel that way," said Ashraf Hossain who lives in Kachukhet.

"I always travel by three-wheeler since it is hard to get a bus in the morning," he said.

"I find it difficult to travel by bus," said Golam Faruk

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Massive arrest follows cop murders

211 picked up, house-to-house search for killers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Two hundred and eleven persons have been arrested for questioning during a massive hunt for the killers of two constables who died in a bomb attack Tuesday.

At least 14 persons were injured when riot police clubbed pedestrians and shop owners at Sheikpara bazar Tuesday night, after constables Ramesh and Shariful Islam died in the bomb attack.

The injured include Sheikh Nazrul Islam, a press photographer of a local daily, Dainik Anirvan. He was admitted to a clinic with multiple injuries at 9:30pm on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, all residents of Sheikpara were asked to remain indoors as police conducted a

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Serbian prime minister assassinated



Zoran Djindjic

AP, *Belgrade*

Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic -- a key leader of the revolt that toppled former President Slobodan Milosevic in October 2000 -- was assassinated yesterday by gunmen who ambushed him outside the government complex, police sources said.

Djindjic, 50, died in a Belgrade hospital after having been shot in the abdomen and back, the sources told The Associated Press.

Two people were arrested and one was injured in the shooting, witnesses said.

The government building where Djindjic was ambushed was sealed off by heavy state security,

and three ambulances were parked in front. Police stopped traffic in downtown Belgrade, searching through cars and checking passengers.

Djindjic appeared to have been targeted last month, when a truck suddenly cut into the lane in which his motorcade was travelling to Belgrade's airport. The motorcade narrowly avoided a collision, and Djindjic later dismissed the Feb. 21 alleged assassination attempt as a "futile effort" that could not stop democratic reforms.

"If someone thinks the law and the reforms can be stopped by eliminating me, then that is a huge

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Alliance plans joint assault on AL propaganda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The four parties in the alliance government will launch a joint campaign against the opposition's anti-government 'propaganda' soon.

The parties the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Oikya Jote and the Bangladesh Jatiya Party will also reorganise themselves as they feel a serious gap has been created between the government and the party leaders.

The decision was taken at a two-hour long meeting of top leaders of

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Militant arrest spills beans on training camp

Link to Indian, Pak Islamists suspected

ANWAR ALI, *Chapainawabganj*

The arrested five militants of the Jama'atul Mujaheddin Bangladesh have been placed on a ten-day remand and will be taken to Dhaka for interrogation today.

Police arrested the five of the Islamic militant outfit in a pre-dawn raid on a training camp in

Chapainawabganj Tuesday.

The arrestees are Ayub Ali, 30, a teacher of the Jamia Islamia Madrassah, Mareful Islam, 26, an instructor, Abdur Rahim, 20, son of a Jamaat-e-Islami supporter Nurul Huda, Amir Hamza, 25, of Naogaon and Momirul Islam, 25, of Thakurgaon.

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PHOTO: AFP

Arab volunteers at a training camp near Baghdad yesterday. Hundreds of them are offering to become "human bombs" in defence of Iraq.

Unilateral Iraq action to be questionable: Annan

REUTERS, *Paris*

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on yesterday repeated his warning that any war against Iraq without United Nations backing would have its legitimacy questioned.

Writing in Le Monde, Annan said that taking action against Iraq without the backing of other Security Council member states would mean a lack of political support that would doom a post-military phase to failure.

Annan penned the opinion piece for the influential French daily newspaper just days before a crucial vote at the 15-member Security Council on a US-British-Spanish proposal authorizing war if Iraq does not disarm.

"If they cannot agree on a common position and if some of them launch action without the support of the Council, the legitimacy of

this action will be widely questioned and it will not obtain the political support required to ensure its success in the long term, once the military phase is over," Annan said.

Seeking crucial votes on a divided UN Security Council, Britain and the United States suggested Iraq could be given a few more days to prove it had disarmed -- slightly delaying the deadline for war.

But there were signs of strain between the two allies yesterday after Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld suggested Washington was ready to go it alone with or without British support.

Both countries said Iraq could, at best, expect only the narrowest reprieve as diplomatic maneuvering at the United Nations entered its final phase.

"I am pretty sure we are talking

about action in March," Britain's UN ambassador, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, said.

With more than 250,000 US and British troops ready for war, US officials said Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had "days, not weeks" to prove he had complied with U.N. orders and had given up all weapons of mass destruction.

Demonstrating the military power backing up the ultimatum, the US Air Force tested the most powerful conventional bomb in its arsenal, a 21,000-pound killer which sent a huge mushroom cloud into the sky over a Florida weapons range.

The White House wants a US-British-Spanish proposal authorizing war if Iraq does not disarm to go to a vote in the 15-member Security Council on Thursday or Friday.

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7th PW gives deposition

SHAZNEEN CASE

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Atiqur Rahman alias Masum, the seventh prosecution witness in the Shazneen rape case and paternal uncle of the victim, gave his deposition before the court yesterday.

Kazi Rahamat Ullah, Judge of the Second Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka recorded the deposition for about an hour.

He was then cross-examined by the lawyer of Shahidul Islam alias Shahid, the principal accused in the case.

Masum identified all the six accused--Shahid, Hasan, Badal, Shaniram, Minu and Parvin-- in the dock.

The court then adjourned the hearing till March 17.

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Kenya history-makers

AFP, *Bloemfontein*

Kenya's first ever one-day win against Zimbabwe took Steve Tikolo's unfancied side into the semifinals of the World Cup after they triumphed by seven wickets in their Super Six clash at Goodyear Park on Wednesday.

An unbroken fourth-wicket stand of 73 off 56 balls between two of Kenya's stalwarts, Thomas Odoyo (43 not out off 40 balls) and Maurice Odumbe (38 not out off 20 balls) saw the non-Test nation achieve a crushing victory with 24 overs to spare.

Kenya, who take on reigning champions Australia in their last Super Sixes match on Saturday, will play India in the day-night semifinal at Durban on March 20.

For their African opponents defeat meant their slim hopes of reaching the last four had been extinguished. It was a remarkable result given that Zimbabwe, a Test side, had won 12 of the teams' 14 previous one-day internationals with the other two no-results.

Kenya's victory, which took them into the last four of the World Cup for the first time in their history was all but assured, barring a huge attack of nerves, after they skittled out Zimbabwe for just 133.

Only star batsman Andy Flower, with a battling 63, Douglas Marillier and Dion Ebrahim managed double figures after Zimbabwe skipper

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