

## IMF okays \$490m anti-poverty loan

UNB, Dhaka

International Monetary Fund (IMF) has approved a \$490 million concessional loan for Bangladesh to be disbursed under its three-year Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF).

The approval was given at the IMF Executive Board meeting held in Washington on Friday to support Bangladesh's economic reform programme for 2003-06.

The first disbursement of about \$70 million will be made immediately, said an IMF release here yesterday.

The PRGF loans, meant for low-

income countries implementing their own poverty reduction strategies, carry an annual interest of 0.5 per cent and are repayable over 10 years with a five-and-a-half years grace on the principal amount.

Earlier on June 19, the World Bank (WB) approved "interest-free" loan of \$536 million to support Bangladesh's efforts to reduce poverty and facilitate three reform programmes.

Of the total loan, \$300 million has been approved for implementing the first phase of poverty reduction strategy and \$236 million for improving rural roads, telecommunications and for strengthening the

central bank.

Both approvals came after the WB-IMF board meetings formally endorsed Bangladesh's National Strategy for Economic Growth, Poverty Reduction and Social Development.

The strategy, commonly known as Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP) was acclaimed in the Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) in Dhaka on May 17-18.

Sources said the WB and IMF approvals are the outcome of Bangladesh's recent macroeconomic successes and policy statements for poverty reduction.

Bangladesh's economic performance strengthened over the last year due to prudent macroeconomic management and renewal of structural reforms, IMF deputy managing Shigemitsu Sugisaki said after the Board's decision.

"The challenges facing Bangladesh now are to build on this record of policy implementation and to put the economy on a path of higher growth with faster poverty reduction," he said.

The IMF top executive appreciated the I-PRSP as, he pointed out, the document has been prepared through a broad consultative process.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## Rain rules country

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Driving rain influenced by a depression lashed Bangladesh yesterday and swamped large part of Dhaka and southeastern regions causing sufferings to people, forecasters said.

The low that crept in from the Bay of Bengal will further fan out and continue to pelt much of the country with downpour today, they added.

Teknaf was drenched with 118 millimetres of rain, Chittagong with 109 millimetres, Rangamati with 98, Sitakunda with 79, Cox's Bazar with 59, Patuakhali with 51 and Kutubdia with 57 millimetres.

In Dhaka, Shantinagar, Mirpur, Rampura, Hazaribagh, Mughdapara, Malibagh and Mouchak areas went under knee-deep water.

The digging of roads in about 100 points by utility service providers made life miserable.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

## Justice Hasan likely to become next CJ

YAYADUL AHSAN

Chief Justice Mainur Reza Chowdhury is retiring today, whipping a wave of questions about the selection of his successor.

The new chief justice who will take oath on June 23 was still an unsolved riddle yesterday. The invitation cards sent out for the occasion did not even name the incoming judicial chief.

Speculations are rife that the senior most justice of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court may not be made the chief justice this time and they are fast gaining ground in the judiciary, Supreme Court Bar and of course, in the political arena.

It will be unprecedented if the government puts a judge ahead of two of his superiors in the chair of the chief justice. The constitution

stipulates the president to appoint the chief justice without even consulting the prime minister. This time he might well have to go the government's way.

Justice KM Hasan is being tipped to take over from Mainur who retires today, although Justice M Ruhul Amin is next in line in terms of seniority. The government argues that Justice Hasan was the senior most judge in the High Court when M Ruhul Amin and Justice Fazlul Karim superseded him to be appointed to the Appellate Division during the Awami League (AL) government.

There is a notion in the government circle that if the AL government could appoint justices Amin and Karim ahead of Justice Hasan, then it is the coalition's turn to do justice to Hasan.

But constitutional experts say both Justice Amin and Justice Karim were appointed to the Appellate Division, not elevated from the High Court Division. So, Justice Hasan is not senior to both of them in the Appellate Division. Besides, Justice Ruhul Amin stands in for the incumbent chief justice when he is unavailable.

One may ask why the government wants to appoint Justice Hasan as the chief justice and throw the appointment into controversy.

The Awami League (AL) took account of the fact that Justice Hasan served General Ziaur Rahman's government as an ambassador and played his part in floating the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). It also took stock that he

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

## Gang holds guests hostage to rob hosts' house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Holding guests hostage at gunpoint, robbers forced their way into their hosts' apartment and looted about Tk 28 lakh in cash and goods in the city's Tejgaon area yesterday, police and the victims said.

They said when the couple Shah Rajiul Hannan and Sharmeen, son and daughter-in-law of former jute minister ASM Hannan Shah, came down from the fourth floor of her father's Indra Road residence at 12:30pm, five young men approached them at the main gate.

As Rajiul inquired about their identity, they said they were there in the act of evading arrest by police.

Before the couple could move away, one of the gangsters whipped out a pistol, took them hostage and forced them back to the apartment of Ali Azam Khan, father of Sharmeen.

As the couple pressed the calling bell, Azam's wife opened the door and the gangsters barged in.

The robbers broke the almirahs and looted about 200 tola of gold, a diamond set, a camera, a mobile phone, cash and other valuables worth about Tk 27,54,500.

Rajiul filed a case with Tejgaon police, but none was arrested till last night.

## JCD leader gunned down in Mirpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified assailants gunned down a Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader and injured a rickshawpuller at Paikpara of Mirpur yesterday noon.

Imam Hossain Sohel, 32, assistant organising secretary of the JCD, Dhaka City North, and president of Mirpur thana committee, was shot in the head and chest at about 12:15pm.

He was going by a rickshaw when the gunmen stopped him and sprayed bullets on him.

The rickshawpuller, Siraj Biswas, also received a bullet in the face and was critically injured.

They were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the on-duty doctors declared Sohel dead.

"Hearing two gunshots, I turned around and saw three youths firing at a man on a rickshaw," a vendor who witnessed the killing said. "The man fell on the road and the killers continued firing."

After firing eight to 10 shots, the youths left the spot.



Imam Hossain Sohel

The victim's friends said Sohel was made assistant organising secretary of the JCD central committee in May. He was also made president of Mirpur thana unit only 10 days ago. But some central committee leaders asked him to resign, which he did.

Sohel was a contractor at the Bangladesh Sarak Gobesonagar staff quarters at Paikpara. A serious conflict developed between Sohel and an influential person of the area over getting the job. Later, the con

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

## One gets life term for killing 6-yr-old boy in Gulshan

BSS, Dhaka

The Speedy Trial Tribunal-3 Dhaka, yesterday sentenced a person to life imprisonment for killing a minor boy in Gulshan last year.

The court also fined convict Mohammed Khokon Tk 5000, in default, he will have to suffer one more year.

Five others accused in the case were acquitted of charges. They are Mohammad Abul Kalam, Mohammad Jasim Uddin, Jarna Begum, Rashida and Khuki.

According to the prosecution, Khokon strangled six-year-old Omar Sani at about 9pm on September 5, 2002 in front of their Sarkar Bari residence at Narda under Gulshan Police Station.

Family members alleged that Khokon killed Omar Sani as the victim's mother Saleha Begum refused a marriage proposal from the convict for her 13-year-old daughter Shahinur Akhter Shahin.

Saleha Begum filed a case with Gulshan Police Station and the police submitted charge sheet of the case on November 16 last year.

The charge was framed against the convict on March 17 this year.

Judge Mohammad Abu Hanif handed down the verdict after examining 14 witnesses and evidences.

## AL to stay in Sangsad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) has decided to continue its participation in the current session of the Jatiya Sangsad and raise its voice against the proposed budget.

The decision was taken yesterday at an emergency meeting of the AL Parliamentary Party (ALPP). AL President Sheikh Hasina presided over the meeting of about 30 lawmakers.

"The ruling party lawmakers and the chair interrupted us repeatedly so that we could not speak in favour of people. But we would continue to join the current budget session and prove that they did not allow us to speak in parliament," said Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid after the meeting.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



PHOTO: STAR

Slashing rain till Friday night submerges Sulkabaha area in Chittagong. The rain, influenced by a depression, pelted much of Bangladesh with heavy downpour yesterday.

## Troops request sends Dhaka walking diplomatic tightrope

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The government is walking a diplomatic tightrope as it mulls the US proposition to dispatch troops to Iraq.

The request, in all probability, has the smell of a 'combat mission', not a peacekeeping operation of the sort that Bangladesh has had performed in the past under explicit UN mandates.

Sources told The Daily Star that the foreign and defence ministries are working arduously to prepare a suitable reply to meet the US expectations.

A highly placed source in the

foreign office insisted that no commitment has been made as yet either to US Secretary of State Colin Powell during his stay in Dhaka, or to the US embassy after his departure. "All the relevant organs of the government are studying the issue," the official maintained.

Although the joint press conference during the US Secretary of State's visit had insisted that the US leaves the decision of sending troops solely to the government, the Americans made the request for troops weeks before his visit, according to diplomatic sources.

"The situation is indeed embarrassing," said a foreign ministry

official. "It is hard for Bangladesh to comply with such a request, and even harder to say no to it."

The alacrity of the American diplomatic thrust has further been manifested by the arrival in Dhaka of the Commanding General of the US army's Pacific Command, Lieutenant General James Campbell, on Friday, only a day after Powell's departure.

General Campbell is expected to pick the cue of his bilateral talks from where Vice Admiral James

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

## BNP's date with a dilemma

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling BNP is in a dilemma over sending forces to Iraq, as its allies do not want to see Bangladesh troops being placed under American command.

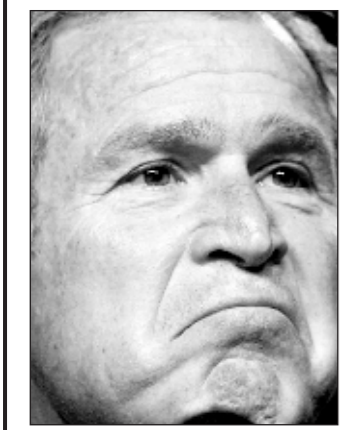
Highly placed sources said the government is planning to send troops to Iraq following discussions between US Secretary of State Colin Powell and government leaders during his June 19 visit.

They said Bangladesh could send troops to Iraq under the Security Council resolution 1483, passed unanimously on May 22, which called on all member states to extend assistance to Iraq. It also discussed about Bangladesh's participation in the process of rebuilding the country.

Many senior BNP leaders think that it would be wise for the government to respond positively to the US

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

## Bush says Iraqi WMD sites were looted



REUTERS, Washington

President George W. Bush, trying again to explain the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, said yesterday that suspected arms sites had been looted in the waning days of Saddam Hussein's rule.

"For more than a decade, Saddam Hussein went to great lengths to hide his weapons from the world. And in the regime's final days, documents and suspected weapons sites were looted and burned," Bush said in his weekly radio address.

It is believed to be the first time Bush has cited looting to explain the inability of US forces to uncover chemical or biological weapons in Iraq, a US official said.

Bush had previously said weapons may have been destroyed before the war. The US military has been criticized for failing to prevent looting at an Iraqi nuclear facility.

Bush has been widely criticized for misleading the public by asserting that Saddam had stockpiles of unconventional weapons that menaced the world. The allegations were Bush's main justification for

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

## Saddam's sons 'fled to Syria'

BBC ONLINE

A former top Iraqi official says he and Saddam Hussein's sons escaped to Syria after the US-led invasion. US defence officials have told American newspapers. Abid Hamid Mahmud al-Tikriti told interrogators that he, Uday and Qusay Hussein had been with Saddam Hussein after the war started but the group split up, reports say.

The three men later returned to Iraq after being expelled by the authorities in Damascus, according to reports in the Washington Post and New York Times.

Officials caution that the accuracy of the information has yet to be assessed.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

## Quorum crisis cripples JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday witnessed an unprecedented quorum crisis that delayed by about two hours the start of the day's sitting.

The number of lawmakers present was less than the required 60 when the session began 5:45pm.

Parliament officials said this was a 'record delay'.

Again, quorum crisis arose after the break for Maghreb prayers. Some legislators who went out of the House did not return in time, causing a 20-minute delay in resumption of the sitting.

Although the session was scheduled to begin at 4:00pm, only 37 MPs were present at 4:45pm. Then they began to go out during the break for Asr prayers and at 5:00pm, their number fell to a record low of 10.

The session began at 5:45 pm with 67 MPs present. A few minutes

later, Awami League legislators joined in.

There was no question-answer session yesterday. Disposal of three notices was suspended on request from the ministers concerned.

Prior to the budget discussion, the treasury bench and the opposition had a brief debate over making statements on point of order. Other than this, the sitting was somewhat dull.

Leader of the House and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina did not join the session till the evening. Most of the cabinet members were also absent.

The ruling four-party alliance has more than two-thirds majority in the House. Besides, it has six technocrat ministers who are also counted in forming quorum. But the treasury bench whip often finds it quite difficult to ensure presence of the required 60

MPs.

As the session was being delayed, Local Government and Rural Development Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and some other ministers repeatedly asked the whips to do something about quorum crisis.

Awami League's parliamentary party was meeting elsewhere at the time. Some MPs of Jatiya Party (Ershad) were however present in the House.

Taking the floor on a point of order, opposition leaders Suranjit Sen Gupta, Abdur Razzak and Shajahan Khan spoke on the murder of former lawmaker Montaz Uddin Ahmed and Chhatra League leader Saiful Rasul Palash. They criticised the home minister's statement in this regard. But Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui, who was in the chair, stopped them.

## Attack on AL MP Peaceful hartal in Jhenidah

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khuina

A half-day hartal passed off peacefully in Jhenidah yesterday.

The district unit of Awami League enforced the hartal to protest the attack on party MP Abdul Hye and three other leaders of its front organisations by a group of armed men reportedly belonging to the ruling party during hartal hours on Thursday.

No untoward incident took place anywhere in the district.

Educational institutions and business establishments in the district remained closed and vehicles were off the roads during the hartal.

Meanwhile, two separate cases have been filed with sadar police

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7