

LC margin on all imports goes

REJAUL KARIM BYRON
Bangladesh Bank (BB) yesterday withdrew letter of credit (LC) margin on all imports, a move expected to make imported goods 7 to 10 percent cheaper.
The goods to become cheaper include biscuit, chocolate, imitation jewellery, television, refrigerator, vehicle, electric fan, cassette player, plastic goods, gas and electric burner (cooking), air conditioner, washing machine, cement, footwear, newsprint, news magazine

and cosmetics.
Next come imported rice, wheat and sugar to be cheaper.
The decision was taken to fulfil a condition of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to get loans under the Poverty Reduction Growth Facilities (PRGF).
"Besides, we now have no reason to maintain LC margin that was introduced in the face of a declining foreign exchange reserves," a Bangladesh Bank top official said.
"We now have good reserves of

\$2.43 billion," he added.
The BB in a circular yesterday said from now on the margin will be fixed by the banks on the basis of their relations with customers.
The BB imposed a 100 percent LC margin on 56 import items in 2001 when the foreign exchange reserves slid to about \$1 billion.
A raft of other measures including channelling illegal remittance transfers to official system, cutting down on import-oriented annual development programme and increasing foreign assistance flow

improved the reserves. The IMF then dictated that the LC margin should go by November.
Consequently, the BB relaxed the margin by 50 percent on 56 categories of items on October 16.
The next day, the central bank withdrew LC margin on all food items including onion, lentil, spice and date to control their prices during Ramadan. However, a 25 percent margin on rice and wheat and 50 percent on sugar remained

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Law makes exceptions for BNP lawmaker

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The constitution says all citizens are equal before law and entitled to equal protection of law; but law ceases to be effective when it comes to a ruling BNP lawmaker, or so it seems.
Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, MP, accused in an extortion case, has not been present in the court on 23 consecutive dates and a metropolitan magistrate's court has not issued an arrest warrant against him.
The same court had cancelled the bail of one Farid Ahmed of 53 DIT Extension Road, Naya Paltan

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CHT at standstill as violence marks accord anniversary

1 dies, 2 others hurt in attack on UPDF office

STAR REPORT

An indigenous youth was shot dead and two others were wounded yesterday in Khagrachhari during a road barricade programme of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) in the three hill districts on the sixth anniversary of the signing of the peace accord there.
Gunmen, allegedly members of the pro-peace accord PCJSS, rained

bullets on Gyaneshwar Chakma, 36, the dead, and Dhrubajyoti Chakma, 32 and Antar Barua, 31, the injured, at 6:00pm in front of the UPDF office in the remote hilly area of Babuchhara of Khagrachhari under Dighinala upazila.
The victims were members of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), which opposes the peace accord signed in 1997 ending two decades of insurgency.

Gyaneshwar and Dhrubajyoti were rushed to a private clinic but Gyaneshwar died at 2:30pm. Dhrubajyoti was in critical condition, our Chittagong correspondent reported. Antar was undergoing treatment in a Khagrachhari hospital.
The gunmen also set the local UPDF office ablaze before fleeing our Khagrachhari Correspondent

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PM seeks World Bank help for city subway

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday sought assistance of the World Bank (WB) to introduce underground railway system in Dhaka city.
She sought assistance when the bank's Executive Director C M Vasudev called on her at the Prime Minister's Office at noon.
Appreciating Khaleda's plan for an underground railway system, Vasudev said the bank would come forward if it gets a proposal in this regard.
Responding to some other requests, he assured the prime minister that the WB would provide assistance in construction of Padma Bridge and give increased support in power sector and infrastructure building.
Vasudev highly appreciated various government steps, including reform measures in the financial sector.
He said the WB lauds Bangladesh's growth rate, macro-economic management, low inflation, good foreign exchange reserve and successful introduction of floating exchange rate of local currency.
The bank's executive director

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

A wall of the independence monument in the Suhrawardy Udyan, built to showcase pictures of war veterans, is unfinished although former prime minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated it years ago. The monument has apparently been left in neglect since the Awami League left office.

Dr Kamal for wider public role to save country

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday said no effort to free people from the unbearable situation would succeed without the participation of the masses.
"Nowadays we are hearing of different types of initiatives for unity from different quarters," he said adding that any such move without people's support would weaken the country's foundation.
He was addressing an opinion-sharing meeting on the role of the civil society members in the present situation of the country.
The Ain-o-Salish Kendra (ASK) and Sammilito Samajik Andolon co-organised the programme at the Liberation War Museum in the city. The discussants dwelt on law and order, political development and repression on the religious minority.
Kamal said people are looking for a way out of the misery they have been put in. On the recent recovery of huge arms, he said such illegal arms are making people feel insecure.
Other speakers at the programme

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Shantu asks govt to withdraw troops, cancel army drive

Threatens agitation from January

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shantu (Jyotindra Bodhipriyo) Larma, president of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), has demanded withdrawal of security forces camps from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and cancellation of the 'Operation Uttaran' by this month.
"Otherwise, we'll throw a series of agitation programmes from the first week of January. The government has put us in such a situation that we now have no options but to move for implementation of the (peace) accord," he said at a press conference at the National Press Club in Dhaka yesterday.
"We will continue with our move-

ment until Wadud Bhuiyan is removed from the CHT Development Board and a full minister is at the helm of the CHT affairs

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US embassy warns of possible attacks in KSA

REUTERS, Riyadh

The US embassy in Saudi Arabia warned its citizens yesterday of possible attacks on compounds housing Westerners, saying it had information that at least one residential complex was under surveillance by militants.
In response to the information, the embassy said it was restricting its American employees and their dependants from visiting housing compounds in the capital Riyadh at night.
"Recent confirmed information indicates that the Seder Village housing compound in Riyadh has been under active surveillance by terrorist elements," the embassy

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HIV victims bare their souls to lawmakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Afsana Rahman (not her real name), an HIV carrier of 13 years, lost her husband and only six-year-old son.
Her health is now deteriorating sharp and she cannot pay Tk 8,700 every month to get her status checked. And unless she gets immediate medicare, she would die soon.
Rajia Begum (not real name), mother of an eight-month old child, cannot even think of her son's future. Rajia tested HIV positive when she was carrying for eight months soon after her husband

died of Aids.
She still does not know whether her son is also an HIV positive, as doctors cannot confirm his status until he is 18-month-old.
Thirteen HIV carriers like Rajia and Afsana yesterday frankly narrated the sufferings and social stigma they undergo at a meeting with the lawmakers at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday.
Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui, also chairman of Bangladesh Parliament Members Group (BPMG) on prevention of HIV/Aids and human trafficking, chaired the meeting.

While narrating their woes, some of the HIV carriers found their voices choked with emotion.
They said most parents turn their face away from their sons and daughters once they are detected with HIV/Aids. In some cases in Sylhet, schools did not allow children with HIV to attend class.
A fourth class employee of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) said he was terminated because of carrying HIV. He and his seven family members have been in misery since then.
The HIV positives appealed to both government and parliamentarians to provide them medical support, which they are being denied in hospitals.
The BPMG assured them of all-out assistance including medicines, treatment and moral support.
"We, the lawmakers, have been mandated by the people to direct any organisation to take welfare measures for the HIV victims," Hamid told the meeting. He expressed dissatisfaction at the misuse of funds for the HIV/Aids programme.
The BPMG also resolved that a massive HIV/Aids awareness cam

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Arms case filed against Shamim Osman

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

An arms case was filed against former Awami League (AL) lawmaker Shamim Osman on Monday, as he did not surrender his licensed arms to police.
In the first information report (FIR), Sub-inspector Jamal Uddin of Fatullah Police Station said the government issued an order for surrender of all licensed and unlicensed arms between November 5 and November 22 last year.
"Shamim has been keeping a licensed double barrel gun with him, defying the government's decision," the plaintiff added in the FIR.
Shamim, also general secretary of Narayanganj district AL, left the country after October 1, 2001 general election.

Curfew in Mohammadpur 56 arrested during hunt for Kuril gunrunners

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested 54 persons during a five-hour curfew it imposed on Mohammadpur at midnight Monday to conduct a joint raid with Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in the wake of the big arms haul from a sign-board shop at Kuril Badda Sunday.
The joint team, however, failed to recover any firearms during the raid spanning Sher Shah Suri Road, Tajmahal Road, Nurjahan Road,

Banshbari, Geneva Camp, Bijli Mahalla, Jahuri Mahalla and Adabar under ward Nos. 42, 43, 44 and parts of 45.
Earlier, none of the 38 people arrested Monday during block raids in Kuril Badda was found to have links to the gunrunners who left behind four AK-47 assault rifles, two revolvers, 20 hand grenades, four time bombs, a large number of AK-47 ammunition and

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Youth kidnapped, cousin's payphone shop looted, house bombed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Local extortionists abducted a man after they bombed, vandalised and looted his cousin's residence that also houses a payphone shop at Azimpur last night on refusal to pay them tolls.
Four of Anwar Hossain Mahubb's family -- his wife Reena, son Antu, younger brothers Maksud and Bahadur -- were injured in the bomb attack and admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).
A gang of about 12 including Miston, Titu and Apu swooped on the shop, Bappi Enterprise, with hockey sticks and firearms and set off a string of homemade bombs at around 8:00pm. Mahubb was away during the attack. They took the cousin, Mintu, with them.

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No shift in Japan stance to send troops to Iraq

Koizumi tells The Daily Star, other ANN members

ANN, Tokyo

Japan will live up to its commitment to send troops and civilians to stabilise the situation in Iraq despite the killing of the two Japanese diplomats, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said yesterday.
A decision on when to send the troops will depend on Tokyo's assessment of the situation but Japan is committed to preventing Iraq from becoming a "hotbed of terrorism", Koizumi told representatives of the Asia News Network (ANN).
"There is no change whatsoever in Japan's position," he said.
Conceding that there were dan-

gers ahead and that he was "utterly infuriated" by the killing of the two diplomats, he said it would be in Japan's interest to "discharge its responsibility and cooperate with the United States in restoring stability in Iraq".
Koizumi was talking at length on the issue that is causing widespread concern in his country during a hour-long interview with representatives from 12 Asian newspapers which are ANN members.
The Daily Star is one of the ANN members and its Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam was among the representatives.
Koizumi also shared his concerns about the growing threat of

terrorism, the emergence of China and the North Korean threat and other issues.
Tokyo's post-war foreign policy attaches much importance to the Japan-US alliance and its own role in international cooperation, Koizumi said and added it was his intention to ensure that his government is effective in ensuring both.
Japan will send self-defence forces, civilians or government officials to stabilise Iraq and help Iraqis form their government, he said.
The fatal ambush on Saturday of two Japanese diplomats in Iraq has sparked off widespread concern

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Secondary students to get books late over print job row

STAR REPORT

Thousands of secondary students may not get textbooks by January next year, as a dispute between publishers and textbook authorities seems certain to slow print and distribution.
Leaders of Bangladesh Book Publishers and Sellers Association (BBPSA) blamed the crisis on what they said was an unrealistic decision by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) that granted 92 percent of the print job to only 43 of the 370 publishing houses.
Although the NCTB claims the job will be finished before the next academic year starts, publishers feel

able to print a small number of books by that time, sources close to the industry said.
"It is not possible for 43 publishers to print 1.6 crore secondary textbooks before the next academic year starts," one of the sources said, asking not to be named.
The bickering surfaced when the NCTB offered the work involving Tk 47.27 crore, but a section of printers submitted letters of intent ranging between Tk 50 crore and Tk 500 crore, which BBPSA President Abu Taher pegged as violation of the NCTB rules.
Taher at a recent press conference accused the NCTB of awarding the job to a favoured group.

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Mrs. Yasmin Rahman
Wife of M. Faizur Rahman

"Death is the starlit strip between companionship of yesterday and reunion of tomorrow"

We request all relatives and friends to pray for Mrs. Yasmin Rahman, the dearest member of our family who passed on to eternity four years ago.