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IMF insists on power, gas, oil price hike

Saifur agrees, will try to convince colleagues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The IMF yesterday once again insisted, but more incisively than ever, on raising the prices of all fuels including petroleum products and gas as well as power. "Bangladesh cannot afford the financial losses and economic costs stemming from the underpricing of energy products," a visiting team of the International Monetary Fund told a press conference at IMF Dhaka office yesterday morning. Because, the team argued, "the implicit subsidies arising from the

underpricing of diesel, kerosene, electricity and natural gas benefit the wealthiest households much more than the low-income households." About the IMF stance, Finance Minister Saifur Rahman told the press, "They are 100 per cent right. I am fully agreed with them. Because, if the prices are not adjusted [with the global market prices], it's impossible to face the challenge of achieving the targeted 7 per cent GDP growth." The 5-member team headed by IMF Adviser Thomas Rumbaugh arrived here on April 30 to review

the economic developments and implementation status of policies supported by the IMF's Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) before approving the sixth PRGF loan tranche to the tune of \$80 million. The mission held its wrap-up meeting with Saifur Rahman at his planning ministry office yesterday afternoon. After the meeting, Saifur told the press, "I am convinced. I am also persuaded to convince [my colleagues in the government]." He claimed the country has achieved macroeconomic stability -- the export-import is rising fast,

besides the socio-economic programmes and economic development programmes are also showing a healthy growth. In this context, Saifur argued, if the government does not go for the price adjustment, it will destabilise the macro-economy and hamper the growth. The IMF press statement also said, "A number of challenges continue to pose risks to the macroeconomic outlook." The main risk, it said, comes from the government's failure to address the worsening power crisis. SEE PAGE 15 COL 7



Another case filed against Kushtia journo

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Following ruling BNP lawmaker Prof Shahidul Islam's extortion case against three journalists on Tuesday, a local leader of the same party filed another case against them with Kushtia Sadar Police Station yesterday. The journalists are Hasan Jahid, staff correspondent of the daily Manavjamin and Kushtia correspondent of RTV, Al-Mamun Sagar, staff correspondent of ATN Bangla. SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Tension runs high at Shanir Akhra

Salahuddin's men hold rally today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tension continues to run high at Shanir Akhra as supporters of local BNP lawmaker Salahuddin Ahmed yesterday declared counter programmes against people agitating for supply of water, power in Demara areas. The water is still dear at Shanir Akhra and dearer in its adjacent areas as the army men have been

providing water mostly to the people at places where demonstrations took place on May 5. Under the banner of Sangram Parishad, the agitators blocked the Dhaka-Chittagong highway for 13 hours and locked in clashes with the police. The Sangram Parishad yesterday held a rally at the Goalbari crossing and marched through the

Nasreen was killed, alleges BSEHR probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nasreen Parveen Huq, the late ActionAid Bangladesh country director, was deliberately killed, investigators of a rights watchdog alleged yesterday. "Analysis of witness accounts and circumstantial evidence proves that the killing of Nasreen was well planned," Advocate Alena Khan, executive director of the Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights

Terrorism, trafficking bracketed for talks

Saarc home ministers sit today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home secretaries of Saarc countries yesterday underscored the need to strengthen cooperation and make effective the regional mechanism to fight cross-border terrorism and drug trafficking. The home secretaries of the seven-country forum, who met in

Dhaka in the first conference of this kind, proposed working in collaboration with other international bodies like Asean and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in fighting terrorism and the drug menace that topped the list of regional problems. "We've made specific recommendations regarding terrorism

and the narcotics problem, which will be tabled at the home ministers' meeting tomorrow," Bangladesh Home Secretary Safar Raj Hossain told reporters after yesterday's meeting, declining to disclose the recommendations. The home secretary level meeting set the stage for a meeting of SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

JMB's former Shura man now a cop in Dhaka

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, Bogra

Police Sub-Inspector (SI) Alamgir Jahan Rana was one of the Shura members of the first JMB working committee that was formed in Dhaka in December 1998. JMB Bogra Zonal Commander Adnan Samy recently made a confessional statement to Criminal Investigation Department (CID) officials to this effect during the

Dhaka elected member of UN Human Rights Council

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh was elected one of the 47 members of the newly formed Human Rights Council of the United Nations by a large margin of votes in the council's first election held at the UN General Assembly in New York on Tuesday. A total of 63 countries were nominated for 47 seats in the newly established council, whose resolution had been passed by the general assembly on March 15. President of the UN General Assembly Jan Eliasson coordinated the election. This was one of the most hotly contested elections in the world body in recent times. Among the 13 elected Asian countries, Bangladesh bagged 160

IFIC shares go to Jubok, Mosaddek

Representatives attend board meeting

SARWAR A CHOWDHURY

Two representatives from Jubok Karmasangsthan Society (Jubok) and Mosaddek Ali purchased a significant chunk of shares of the IFIC Bank. Sources said Jubok Ceramic and Jubok Housing have purchased around seven per cent share of the bank on the stock market as some of the bank's sponsor directors offered to sell their holding shares. Another concern of Jubok -- Jubok Hatchery & Nursery -- is also all set to purchase another big chunk shares of the bank. Sources said Mosaddek Ali's wife Mahbuba Sultana and Mohammedan Sporting Club

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5 sentenced to death for rape, murder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

A court in Bogra yesterday sentenced five people to death in the sensational Shumi rape and murder case. Special Tribunal Judge KM Zulfikar Ali handed down the punishment in presence of the convicts in a packed courtroom. The convicts are Saidul Islam, 30, of Malotinagar village, Sujon Malgram village, Montazur alias Monta, 28, of Naruli village, Haider, 27, of Sujabad village and Swapan, 30, of Sakepala village of Bogra Sadar upazila. Among them, Sujon was tried in absentia. Suraiya Akhter Shumi was gang raped and strangled to death on the night of December 22, 2003 when the convicts went to the house of SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Run-down rails offer rocky to fatal rides

PINAKI ROY

More than half of the country's 2,792-km railway network has become run-down, causing over 700 accidents a year that makes travelling by train a high-risk venture indeed. At least 1,500-km train track is rickety and unsafe, as the signalling system in use dates back to the colonial era. "Excepting some important sections, most of the tracks are in really bad condition," admits a Bangladesh Railway (BR) high official, adding, "We need to rehabilitate almost the entire railway network."

Echoing him, an official of BR engineering department says, "Our main lines are in good condition, but the branch lines are in pretty bad shape. The only good tracks are in the Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Sylhet routes, and in Parbatipur area. The rest are quite unsafe." The BR operates 57 freight and 245 passenger trains a day and about four crore people travel by its trains a year. The decade between fiscal year (FY) 1995-96 and FY2004-05 saw a total of 4,968 train accidents, killing 354 people and injuring 2,485 others, show the BR data. Of the mishaps, 239 took place

in FY96, 552 in FY01, 708 in FY02, 524 in FY03, 754 in FY04, and 707 in FY05, marking an upward frequency curve, which continues. BR Additional Director General (Infrastructure) Abdul Khaleq claims, "As some of our lines are in a bad shape, we do compromise the speed but not the safety of trains." He blames "hundreds of unauthorised railroad crossings and other structures along the rail lines built on grabbed railway land" for most of the accidents. But, according to BR sources, despite the alarming rise in frequency of accidents, the top brass SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

POWER PROJECTS Another legal notice served on govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has received yet another legal notice demanding cancellation of the decision to rent power from skid mount plants and an end to 'illegal' activities of the committee headed by the principal secretary to the prime minister in respect of private power projects. The notice said illegal power purchase from rental power plants at high rates, hidden advantages and excessive privileges have violated the private power policy, policy for captive power plants and public procurement regulations, 2003. According to the power sector master plan of 1995, it's essential to generate 4,600 MW. To meet the demand in 2005, to achieve this target, 'government



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