

'Credit delivery agents' in rural areas under study

The government is considering fielding 'credit delivery agents' in rural areas to ensure easy and timely access of farmers to farm credits, said Finance Minister Saifur Rahman here yesterday, reports UNB.

Such agents will be responsible for both disbursement and recovery of loans under the proposed alternative credit system, envisaged in view of lapses of the concerned banks. They will work on the basis of commission, Rahman told a press briefing.

The briefing followed a review session on the performance of two agricultural banks — Bangladesh Krishi Bank (BKB) and Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (RAKUB) — in the last fiscal year (1992-93).

Saifur Rahman said the alternative mechanism of credit delivery was being planned against the backdrop of staggering procedural tangles and corrupt practices in the traditional banking operations in rural areas.

The Finance Minister expressed dissatisfaction at the thin volume of lending by the two agricultural banks in 1992-93 that totalled Tk 563 crore.

The amount is meagre when the agriculture contributes 40 per cent to the country's GDP... we need to ensure much more supply of credit to the farm sector," he said.

BKB disbursed Tk 463 crore in the last fiscal against its target of Tk 601 crore while RAKUB lent out Tk 100 crore against its disbursement target of Tk 130 crore.

BKB Managing Director Dr A T M Shamsul Huda and RAKUB Managing Director Jalilur Rahman apprised the meeting of the last year's performance of their respective institutions.

The meeting was addressed by BKB Chairman Abdul Baten, RAKUB Chairman Emran Ali Sarker, Bangladesh Bank Governor Khorsheed Alam and Finance Secretary Nasimuddin Ahmed.

Disclosing other plans of the government for ensuring increased and easy credit flow into the agricultural sector, the Finance Minister said a proposal for simple interest rate on farm loans was also under active consideration.

He, however, ruled out any immediate step for lowering the interest rate on agri-credit.

When the issue of slump in the price of rice came up, Saifur Rahman stressed improving efficiency in the agricultural sector through farming diversification. "We claim to be self-sufficient in food only by achieving autarky in cereal production, but it is not self-sufficiency in true sense of the term," he said.

"We must go for value-added farming instead of traditional agriculture... ginger, onion, pulses and fish farming are much more profitable than paddy," he directed BKB and RAKUB to help diversification of agriculture.

To a question on government decision on writing off cooperative loans up to Tk 5,000, the Finance Minister said there would be no write off in future.

"Loan write off has created a lot of problems in the banking sector," From now on, he asserted, the government itself will have to compensate the banks from its budget for any such exemption.

The Finance Minister said the government is further expanding the ambit of BKB and RAKUB in rural areas, restricting their operations only within farm sector.

To improve the efficiency in those two specialised banks, he said, people from agriculture extension field and Agricultural University would only be recruited in future.

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650 illegal Chinese in limbo off US-Mexican coast

SAN DIEGO (California), July 11: More than 650 undocumented Chinese immigrants remained in political and diplomatic limbo off the US-Mexican coast on Saturday as the US administration confronted a major test of the vow to crack down on illegal immigration, reports Reuters.

Officials in Washington were trying to determine what to do with three immigrant-smuggling ships detained by the US coast guard in the Pacific Ocean after Mexico on Friday night turned down a US request to accept the passengers.

State Department spokeswoman, Phyllis Young said officials from the US Embassy in Mexico City were holding discussions with Mexican authorities in an effort to resolve the situation.

The discussions were aimed at finding a US proposal that Mexico would accept, she said, adding that an administration interagency committee was meeting on Saturday on what steps to take.

Mexico's Interior Ministry said four more ships carrying an estimated 750 Chinese immigrants were being tracked by navy vessels in international waters in the same general area off Baja California.

The three ships were being held by the coast guards 60 miles (96 km) west off Ensenada, Mexico, near the US-Mexican border, awaiting instructions from Washington.

"We're just waiting for the next step," said petty officer Gary Openshaw, a coast guard spokesman in Long Beach, California.

He described conditions aboard the vessels as "obscene" but said the passengers, 50 of them women, were in fairly good health and were being resupplied with food and other essentials.

"No one's sick, and no one is in need of medical attention, but they are cramped in there," he said.

British expert on VAT

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a training manual and also conducted a series of training courses for tax officials.

He identified the difficulty faced by tax officials in adjusting from the excise to the VAT system as one of the main problems currently being encountered.

It is essential to ensure that tax officials at all levels understand the system, he said, because only in that way they can administer the tax effectively and explain it to the business people.

"In this connection, there is a misunderstanding by businessmen about their entitlement to tax credits and a distrust by officials of the amounts and categories of input tax claimed," he added.

Noting that very little funds are allocated for training purposes, Moutat said the National Board of Revenue (NBR) must arrange for more organised, effective training for the taxmen.

"In my country, we literally spend a whole year on training, he said.

VAT was introduced in the United Kingdom in 1973.

The lack of public information or understanding about VAT also poses problems, he said, and suggested a publicity drive.

He termed the resistance of local businesses, in general, to paying taxes as the most common problem being faced currently.

"One of the major problems is that businessmen do not feel that they need to pay taxes. There is an absence of a good tax culture in the country," he said.

Since VAT on transactions would reveal information about income tax, many businessmen are reluctant to do so, he pointed out.

"Because businessmen here are less inclined to pay taxes than in my country, (VAT) has to be tailored to local needs," Moutat said.

Replying to a question, he said he found that most moder-



Edward RC Moutat

Patharghata Pura Chairman, 7 commissioners join BNP

Patharghata Pura Chairman and seven commissioners yesterday formally joined Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), reports BSS.

Patharghata Pura Chairman Anwar Hossain Akand and commissioners Alhaj Saifur Rahman, Shahabuddin Ahmed, Abdul Latif Sikdar, Shahabuddin Saku, Babu Paritosh Chandra Roy, Mosharrif Hossain Shorab and Golam Kabir came to the Prime Minister's Secretariat in Dhaka Sunday afternoon and expressed their eagerness to join BNP. Works Minister and BNP Joint Secretary General Barrister Rafiqul Islam Mia and local MP Nurul Islam Mont were present.

The Prime Minister welcoming the newcomers in the party asked them to work for strengthening Patharghata unit of BNP, help spread party ideals and programmes in the local area, help implement development programmes initiated by the BNP government and improve law and order in the Patharghata.

They assured the Prime Minister that they would work for the best interests of the people.

ate-sized local businesses do maintain accounting records, even if it is in the form of keeping a simple cash book. "But generally, they strongly resist tax officials from seeing it," he added.

Tree plantation

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premises of its offices across the country of which 1,04,716 survived.

Tree plantation has been included in the syllabus of all police training institutes to motivate the members of the police forces to actively participate in the national tree plantation programme.

The Prime Minister also inaugurated the tree plantation campaign of Bangladesh Navy by planting an Arocharia sapling at the Naval Headquarters at Banani.

Naval Chief Rear Admiral Mohamminul Islam briefed Begum Zia on the Navy's ongoing tree plantation campaign.

The Navy has launched a massive tree plantation campaign at all its bases and establishments in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Mongla and Kaptai where more than one lakh saplings will be planted.

On arrival at the Naval Headquarters, the Prime Minister was received by the Naval Chief and introduced to the senior officers of the Bangladesh Navy.

State Minister for Environment and Forest Goyeswar Chandra Roy and senior military officials were present on the occasion.

The Navy planted 37,536 saplings last year of which some 20,869 grew up properly.

Later, Begum Zia launched the tree plantation programme of Bangladesh Ansars and the Village Defence Party (VDP) at its Headquarters at Khilgaon by planting a coconut tree.

Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury received the Prime Minister on her arrival at the Headquarters premises.

Director General of Ansars and VDP Maj Gen Syed Badruzzaman briefed Begum Zia on the organisation's campaign in which the Ansars and VDP members planned to plant about one crore saplings this year. They planted about 18,70,581 saplings last fiscal.

Earlier on July 3, the Prime Minister formally launched the national tree plantation programme near the Mirpur Botanical Garden.



Employees and workers of BRTC who went on voluntary retirement brought out a procession in the city demanding payment of arrears. — Star photo

JS probe body

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Earlier, reopening the debate, acting Leader of the Opposition Abdus Samad Azad demanded revival of the parliamentary probe and requested the Speaker to take necessary measures to that end.

"We want to tell the nation that we accepted the proposal of a special parliamentary committee," he said. "We are ready to face challenge from any minister."

Azad said the committee is still alive. There was disagreement on its terms of reference, which should be reviewed and finalised on the basis of the statements of the minister and Tofael Ahmed, he added.

Taking part in the debate, acting Chairman of the Jatiya Party Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury called on the government to prove its claim of transparency by forming the committee to investigate into charges against the Irrigation and Flood Control Minister.

Referring to the resignation of a Japanese Prime Minister on a charge of reported corruption, Chowdhury said, "Let the Irrigation Minister prove that he is free from any corruption."

There should not be any dispute on the terms of reference when the government and the concerned minister had been claiming their honesty, transparency and innocence, the JP leader said.

Responding to the Prime Minister's counter-charge of corruption against the Opposition parties while in power, Chowdhury said, "If you are not corrupt, sit with an open mind and prove it."

Another JP leader, Barrister Maudud Ahmed, suggested that the terms of reference should be reviewed and modified through discussion for the committee to function effectively.

He said there is no difference on the question of representation on the committee and its chairmanship.

"The government sincerely wants the committee to function, where is the bar to sit together and finalise the terms of reference through discussion between the government and the Opposition?" he asked.

Information Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda said the Opposition must withdraw their statements questioning the integrity of the Speaker.

If the Opposition's remarks about the Speaker are not withdrawn "unconditionally", Barrister Huda felt it would be difficult for the Treasury Bench to work in the committee headed by the Speaker.

Jamaat leader Matlur Rahman Nizami observed that the house cannot retreat from the issue even if the challenges retreated.

The terms of reference should be based on the statements of Majid-Ul-Huq and Tofael Ahmed, he said, and suggested the government and the Opposition sit across the table and finalise the terms of reference.

Nizami thought that the Minister, who denied the allegations against his Ministry, should himself come forward to remove whatever doubts that may have been created in the minds of the people.

He also called on the government and the Opposition to refrain from mudslinging.

Ganatantri Party leader Suranjit Sengupta called for framing the terms of reference on the basis of the Speaker's ruling on June 27 and the statements made by both Tofael Ahmed and Majid-ul-Haq in the House.

Science museums to be set up in divisional towns

The government has a plan to set up science museums in the divisional towns in phases, Education Minister Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar informed the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday, reports BSS.

Replying to question by Rahmat Ali (AL), he said that the process of setting up such museums could begin in the 1993-94 financial year.

The minister said that the government attached considerable importance to the benefits of the science museums and told the questioner that some provisions had been made in the current budget in this regard.

He informed the member that Taka five lakh was spent for the maintenance of the science museums at the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in 1992-93.

Answering supplementaries, Sircar said that setting up of the science museums in the district towns could be taken up after covering the divisional towns.

Pubali Bank employees' memo to Speaker

A delegation on behalf of Pubali Bank Employees Union jointly led by Kamaluddin Ahmed and Abul Kashem, chairman and secretary general of the organization respectively, met the Deputy Speaker Humayun Khan Panni at his chamber at Sangsad Bhaban here yesterday.

They handed over a memorandum to the Deputy Speaker, which is addressed to the Speaker Shaikh Razaque Ali. The memorandum contained various demands of the employees of Pubali Bank.

Iraq

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at which Iraq had refused to allow UN inspectors to install monitoring cameras.

Silver, an American veteran of past UN inspections, flew in from Bahrain on Saturday and left suddenly the next day after the Iraqis refused to allow him to carry out his mission.

He did not describe the next move by the United Nations, but US Secretary of State Warren Christopher had said on Friday that he thought the UN Security Council would recommend that Iraq destroy the facility.

If the Iraqis refused, Christopher said, the United Nations would have to react.

The chairman of the UN special commission in charge of destroying Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, Rolf Ekeus, also said in New York on Friday that if his team was not allowed to seal the sites, he would seek to destroy the facilities.

He did not specify the method.

Iraq, locked in a standoff with the UN Security Council over missile testing, has put forward new proposals to defuse the dispute.

But a newspaper published by President Saddam Hussein's eldest son Uday accused the United States of using the dispute as a pretext for a fresh military strike against Iraq.

"We gave them good suggestions. They promised to study these suggestions," senior Iraqi weapons official Husam Mohammed Ameen told reporters today.

Mohammed Ameen was commenting on talks late on Saturday with UN weapons inspectors charged with sealing equipment at two missile test sites, but he gave no details of the proposals.

UN reaction to Iraq's proposals was not immediately known.

Iraq has been using the sites 65 km to the south and south west of the capital to test missiles with ranges below the 150 km permitted by the ceasefire which halted the 1991 Gulf war after a US-led multinational force ended Iraq's seven-month occupation of Kuwait.

But UN experts, who have been scrapping Iraq's weapons of mass destruction under the terms of the ceasefire, fear that the Iraqis could try to test longer-range missiles there.



Banners welcoming the Bosnians at the ABIM Centre in Kajang, where they have taken shelter. — Star photo

Bosnians find new home

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other establishments while efforts are being made to provide jobs to others, he said.

ABIM, in collaboration with the Zagreb-based relief organisation Merhamet, arranged transportation of the war-affected Muslims from Bosnia-Herzegovina. They were taken to Frankfurt and from there flown directly to Kuala Lumpur.

The first group of such Bosnians arrived in Malaysia late last year. Other groups reached here by February.

ABIM has brought 163 Bosnian Muslims into Malaysia. Forty-five of them, mostly women and children, were sent to Sarawak where Peryatim, a welfare organisation, looks after them.

ABIM, which was once headed by the Finance Minister Anwar Ibrahim, also arranged admission of 30 Bosnian students at the International Islamic University located near the capital. The students were accommodated at the varsity dormitories.

The rest of the 163, all women and children, were given shelter at the ABIM centre in Kajang.

PERKIM, another welfare concern, brought 40 Bosnian Muslim families comprising over 100 members in February this year. Most of these Bosnians, who are staying at PERKIM's centre near Kajang, were detained in Serbian concentration camps and later released.

Three other Bosnian families comprising more than ten people came to Malaysia at their own initiative and are being looked after by a voluntary organisation RISEAP.

Earlier, a group of 20 Bosnian students were given shelter and opportunity to continue higher studies in Malaysia.

According to authorities, over 300 Bosnians are now staying in the country.

Malaysian Ministry of Welfare has been coordinating the relief measures for the Bosnians while the government officials are holding regular meetings with the charitable organisations to review the situation.

This is the first time we are handling such a situation — our Bosnian friends are here for a temporary asylum — they are our guests," said Ms Amrah, a veteran welfare worker of the ABIM.

Amrah informed this correspondent that the voluntary organisations are bearing the expenditures for the Bosnians mostly from funds donated by the Malaysian people.

The Midnight File

Presidential polls in Togo Aug 25

OUAGADOUGOU, July 11: The government of Togo and its opponents signed an agreement here today laying down August 25 as the date for a presidential election. The accord, the first step toward normalisation of the political situation in Togo after a two-year-long crisis, also laid down conditions for organising the election and security measures to be taken during the electoral process. The signing ceremony took place in public, reports AFP.

Pakistan welcomes US for extending ban on N-testing

ISLAMABAD, July 11: Pakistan today welcomed Washington's recent decision to extend its moratorium on nuclear testing until September 1994. An official statement here said a permanent ban on nuclear testing by all states was an "essential element in a programme for complete nuclear disarmament," and would strengthen the goal of nuclear Non-Proliferation, reports AFP.

Bosnian presidency agrees to federal state plan

ZAGREB, July 11: Eight of the 10 members of the Bosnian Presidency appeared to have overcome their differences today in agreeing on a plan to transform Bosnia-Herzegovina into a federal state, Croatian radio reported here, says AFP.

The project was first revealed by Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic on Friday following a presidency meeting.

And even though international peace mediators seemed to sweep aside the proposals Saturday when they were outlined here, the Bosnian Presidency said Sunday that it wanted to continue the negotiations.

The EC's Lord Owen and UN mediator Thorvald Stoltenberg appeared to favour an earlier joint Serbian and Croatian plan to divide the republic into a confederation of three mini-states along ethnic lines.

Bosnian Serb and Croat leaders have presented the plan virtually in the form of surrender terms, threatening continued war with further government losses unless the plan is accepted.

But the Bosnian mixed presidency pushed ahead with their own proposals during five hours of talks Sunday, signalling the end of earlier discord which emerged Saturday.

According to Croatian Radio, the three Croat members of the presidency have agreed to the Bosnian plan, using the term "federal state."

The number of units, or provinces, for proposed federal state has not yet been decided, but suggestions have ranged from "three to 18", Croatian radio reported.

A majority of the presidency was said to be in favour of attending peace talks in Geneva.

Bosnian Prime Minister Mile Akmadzic said before the meeting that eight members had agreed to meet again at the end of the week in Geneva. Within the presidency we realise that we need to negotiate.

The members also discussed how the future Bosnian government and parliament would be organised.

Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic has remained in Sarajevo with the head of the Bosnian armed forces Rasim Delic.

Owen, who on Saturday denied that the mediators were attempting to pressure the presidency into accepting the Serbian-Croatian plan, said it's up to President Izetbegovic as well as the other members of the presidency to decide whether they want to continue to negotiate. If they are, we are ready to organise a meeting in Geneva from Monday.

Rickshaw-puller beaten to death in Barisal

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, July 11: Police, acting on secret information, recovered the body of a rickshaw-puller from a rickshaw garage at the town's Hospital Road midnight last night.

Police said the rickshaw-puller, Babul, was reportedly beaten to death by one Mosharrif Hossain, proprietor of the garage, on charge of stealing an audio cassette and some other things.

Police arrested Mosharrif Hossain and the garage was shut down.

Babul's body was sent to his home at Palashpur after autopsy at the Barisal Medical College Hospital morgue today.

Hartal call

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chief Abdus Samad Azad, the meeting was participated by Abdul Mannan, Abdur Razzak, MP, Tofael Ahmed, MP, Opposition Chief Whip Mohammad Nasim, and Amir Hossain Amu of the AL, Rashed Khan Menon, MP, Hasanul Haq Inu, Abdullah Sarkar and Moineuddin Khan Badal of the Five-Party Alliance and Nurul Islam 'Nahid', Pankaj Bhattacharya and Mujahidul Islam Selim of the four-party Patriotic Democratic Front (PDF).

The nearly two-hour meeting, held at the AL's central office, discussed the proposed labour shutdown, the Government-SKOP agreement, labour bodies' demands, allegations of corruption by different ministries and widespread violence.

Private airlines

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like to restrict competition in this sector.

In January last, a local travel agency — Vantage Tours and Travels — applied for a private airlines styled "Dhaka Airlines."

Another agency, Borak Travels, operated 88 flights between Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur in May and June under a charter agreement with Biman.

The national carrier entered into the agreement with Borak Travels, the general sales agent of Aeroflot, after one of its four DC-10-30 aircraft met with an accident on May 18 last.

The agency paid Biman a royalty of 658,900 US dollar on the Dhaka-Kuala Lumpur route and another 82,500 dollar on the return flights.

That successful charter operation helped intensify demands for a private airlines.

The aviation systems and airlines services in the neighbouring countries are also being studied by the government. A number of private airlines now operate in India and Pakistan, the source added.

A response from Japan, containing a draft of the scope of the feasibility study, along with cost estimates, is expected later this month.

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