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ADB forecasts 5.4pc growth rate in '97

Bangladesh is set to register real GDP growth of 5.4 per cent in 1997 and six in 1998 as against 4.4 and 4.7 per cent achieved in 1995 and 1996 respectively, a country projection report of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) made available in Dhaka yesterday said, reports BSS.

The report, Asian Development Outlook 1997 and 1998, said if the steps, taken up under the reform programmes of the present government after its assumption of office in June 1996, are carried out properly the

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Shantibahinimen kidnap eight, demand ransom

BANDARBAN, Apr 23: Eight tribal farmers were kidnapped late Monday night reportedly by tribal insurgents from two villages in Roachchhari thana under the Bandarban district, reports BSS.

According to police and security force sources, a number of Shantibahini gunmen raided Longlaipara and Bumpara villages at mid-night and took six Khlang tribal farmers from Longlaipara and two from Bumpara to an unknown place.

The kidnappers demanded ransom for the release of the hostages, the sources said.

Four of the hostages were freed today by the kidnappers to convey their demand for ransom, the sources added.

PM goes to Tungipara today

From Our Correspondent
 GOPALGANJ, Apr 23: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will arrive here tomorrow.

She will address a meeting of officials and the local elite at the circuit house on law and order in the district.

Later the Prime Minister will visit the Dogdoo Memorial School Centre to see the progress of a literacy programme which was inaugurated by her on March 16.

The Prime Minister will have an overnight stay at her ancestral home at Tungipara and offer Fataha at the Mazar of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman next morning. She will also inaugurate a loan distribution programme at Tungipara and leave for Dhaka the same day.

Khaleda to address public meet at Gafargaon Apr 29

By Staff Correspondent
 BNP chief and Leader of the Opposition in Jatiya Sangsad Begum Khaleda Zia will address a public meeting at Gafargaon in Mymensingh on April 29 at 3 pm, said a press release.

Central leaders of the party will also address the meeting.

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Ganges Barrage feasibility study project ready for cabinet approval

By Mizan Ali

A Tk 60-crore project proposal for conducting feasibility study and preparing design of the proposed Ganges Barrage will be placed before the cabinet soon, according to highly placed official sources.

The feasibility study and design of the barrage is likely to take two and a half years. The project proposal was prepared by the Water Development Board (WDB), the sources said.

The project will be designed in such a way so that the government can initiate the project with its own resources. However, option for seeking foreign assistance will remain open, the sources said.

About the ability of Bangladesh engineers and experts to take up such a big project, the officials said that the 615 meter Teesta Barrage was designed and constructed by the Bangladesh engineers.

Talking to The Daily Star, M H Siddiky, Director General of the Water Resources Planning Organisation (WARPO) said that the Ganges Barrage was a top priority project of the government.

"The barrage has been planned with the aim of checking environmental and ecological destruction and restoring the conditions for growth of normal habitat in the southern region of the country," Siddiky said.

The objective now is different from what it was in the 60s, Siddiky added.

In the 60s, construction of the Ganges Barrage was proposed with an emphasis on irrigation and agricultural development, but the situation has changed now. The river Goral, which is the only fresh water carrying artery in the region has now died down and the southern belt is worst hit by salinity. Priority now is to resuscitate Goral and save the southern belt from salinity specially during the dry period," he said.

The WARPO DG said that the possible site of the barrage is likely to be at Pangsha, 60 km downstream of Hardinge Bridge. This has been based on an earlier study on the possible site of the barrage, conducted by an expert study group in 1984.

Prior to this study, two other studies conducted earlier had proposed the site for the barrage within 15 km downstream of the Hardinge Bridge, sources in the WDB said.

The first study conducted in 1962 by M/s TAMS, an American Consulting Firm had proposed the site at Talbaria, 15 km downstream of the Hardinge Bridge.

The other study carried out by the Associated Consulting Engineers (ACE) in 1969 had proposed the site at a place four km downstream of Hardinge Bridge.

Mentionably, the agreed minutes of the fifth meeting of the India-Bangladesh Joint Economic Commission held in New Delhi from March 10 to 12, 1997 and signed between the foreign ministers of the two countries says, "The Bangladesh side stated that with the signing of the Ganga water sharing treaty, they

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Bank reforms body suggests Loan defaulters, their family members can't be directors

By Inam Ahmed

The Bank Reforms Committee has recommended that no loan defaulter or his family members should be allowed to become directors of any private bank.

The Committee, formed soon after the new government took charge last year with the task of outlining far-reaching reforms to make the banking sector transparent and competitive and to serving customers more efficiently, has submitted its report to the Finance Ministry last week.

Headed by Kazi Fazlur Rahman, an advisor to the caretaker government of Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, the committee has drawn up a guideline, for the first time, to accord licences to new banks.

The proposed guidelines would eliminate the practice of controlling the banks by families of sponsors, bankers say.

The committee has also proposed that the paid-up capital of new banks should be Tk 40 crore instead of the current provision of Tk 20 crore. Of this Tk 40 crore, at least half the amount will have to be paid by the sponsors. They should not be allowed to borrow money from another bank and invest in new banks.

The sponsors must have cleared their income tax and corporate taxes of their firms to be eligible for directorship.

To stop the current trend of controlling the board of banks through placing family members in it, it has recommended that the board should not consist of more than one member from the same family.

Further, members of the same family should not hold

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The electric pole and tree uprooted by a storm Tuesday night near the Dhaka Medical College Hospital were yet to be removed yesterday. — Star photo

Draft Housing Rights Bill discussed Percentage of landless people doubles to 60pc in 22 yrs

By Staff Correspondent

The percentage of landless people in the country has increased from 30 to 60 per cent in the last 22 years, said Law Minister Abdul Matin Khasru yesterday.

"No state policy can be taken up without considering the 60 per cent landless people of the country," he said.

The minister was addressing different NGO representatives, lawyers, journalists and relevant experts at a consultation meeting on a proposed Housing Rights (Urban and Slum Area) Bill whose draft was prepared by two members of the Ain-O-Salish Kendra. The draft Bill suggested that urban slum dwellers be given various protections.

Commenting on the proposal, he said that it was the beginning of a big task. The slum dwellers must have some protection. "But can you stop tens of thousands of people from coming to the city by giving the city slum dwellers rights?" the minister asked.

He said that Dhaka was becoming too polluted and so, further growth of slums should be discouraged. "A planned economic growth is required throughout the country," the minister said.

The contrast between Baridhara and Bhashantek is a slap to the civilisation. Since independence we received 15 billion US dollars in foreign aid, where is that money? Why are people increasingly becoming landless?" he asked.

The minister assured that the draft Bill would be sent to the Law Commission and the government would consider it with due importance.

Presenting the draft Bill, Zaved Hasan Mahmood, a member and co-author of the draft bill, said while preparing the draft a wide range of national and international laws and acts were consulted.

"Unofficially 40 per cent of the city's population live in the slums. The city cannot run if these people stop work for a day. They need to be protected," Mahmood said.

Chairing the meeting, Justice KM Subhan pointed out that this should be a law as simple as any others of the land. "From our experience we know that provision for unions could create a dangerous situation. There should be a difference between slum dwellers and squatters. Only housing could

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18-week Peruvian hostage drama ends All captives freed, all guerillas killed



Smoke billows from the residence of the Japanese ambassador in Lima Tuesday as Peruvian special forces storm the residence to rescue 72 hostages held by Amaru rebels for 18 weeks. — AFP/UNB photo

LIMA, Apr 23: Peruvian troops stormed the Japanese ambassador's residence here yesterday in a surprise operation that freed 71 of the captives held by Marxist rebels since December, but left 17 dead including all the hostage-takers, reports AFP.

The risky raid was launched without warning and came amid negotiations to end the 18-week crisis peacefully.

Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto stressed in a hastily-arranged press conference in Tokyo that the Japanese government had not been informed of the move. He, however, thanked the Peruvian President.

From the start, Tokyo had insisted force should not be used to end the crisis, launched when the rebels stormed the ambassador's residence on December 17.

One of the freed hostages Bolivian ambassador Jorge Gumucio, said the captors were playing a football match in the reception hall of the residence when the troops launched the assault.

Officials said 140 crack troops entered the residence compound through an underground tunnel, first highlighted when rebels cited its construction as the reason for an abrupt

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Tangail BCL leader shot dead in city

By Staff Correspondent

A Chhatra League (BCL) leader of Tangail was gunned down at Rajabazar in the city late Tuesday night.

Police said that Shamim Talukder, 27, suffered at least 10 bullet wounds in his body when an unidentified gang fired on him in a lane at East Rajabazar at about 11:45 pm. He died on the spot.

Shamim hailed from Akur Takur Para in Tangail. He was joint secretary of pro-Awami League BCL, Tangail district unit. He came to Dhaka a few days back and was residing at his uncle's house at Khilgaon in the city, police said.

The motive behind the killing could not be known immediately. Police, however, suspected that the incident might be linked with conflict between two MPs from Tangail.

Shamim went out of his uncle's Khilgaon residence when a young man called him at about 5 pm. Later, Tejgaon police recovered his blood stained body from an East Rajabazar lane and sent it to the Dhaka Medical College.

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BNP yet to finalise its agitation programme

By Nazmul Ashraf

BNP's planned countrywide agitation is unlikely to be launched prior to its scheduled programmes in the Chittagong Division, peasants' grand rally at Narsingdi and a reception to the ICC Trophy winning Bangladesh cricket team in the city, competent sources said.

However, the major opposition party is now in the grip of conflicting views of its top leaders on the nature of the much-publicised post-Eid 'tougher' movement against the government.

According to insiders, a section of the party leadership is preferring the launching of an all-out agitation to keep the government under constant pressure and consolidate party unity across the country. But the other section is favouring a go-slow policy in view of a liberal attitude of the government and taking into consideration the mood of the masses.

Against this background, the planned agitation is yet to take definite shape and it is also uncertain whether the next meeting of the BNP standing committee, the highest decision-making body of the party, would adopt any such programme.

Asked about this, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan

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Hide traders' claim refuted Banks provided Tk 219 cr despite overdue loans

Four nationalised commercial banks and a private one gave Tk 219 crore to hide traders as fresh loan for procuring hides during this Eid-ul-Azha, the peak season for hide collection, reports UNB.

Of this, Tk 27.75 crore was disbursed by the Sonali Bank, Tk 99 crore by Janata Bank, Tk 38.30 crore by Agrani Bank and Tk 48 crore by Rupali Bank while Tk 7 crore by National Bank Limited, a private bank.

"The press reports saying that banks did not provide money for procuring hides this year is not factual," Banking Division Secretary Amir-ul-Mulk told newsmen yesterday at his office.

He said the banks provided the fresh amount in spite of the fact that Tk 1,200 crore lying outstanding with the hide traders. "Of this, Tk 553 crore has already become overdue," he added.

Breakup of the earlier-provided loans is: Tk 147 crore from the Sonali Bank, Tk 331 crore Janata Bank, Tk 371 crore Agrani Bank, Tk 198 crore Rupali Bank and Tk 153 crore from National Bank.

The secretary said the banks disbursed Tk 279 crore last year (1996) among the hide traders, of which Tk 162 crore was reallocated. "The excuses shown by the defaulters in this regard are not acceptable," he said.

In 1995, the amount of disbursed loan was Tk 283 crore, according to Bangladesh Bank sources.

Usually, the banks should not provide loan to those who do not repay outstanding loans, but, Amir-ul-Mulk said, loan was provided this year for the sake to leather industry which collects its 40 per cent hides during Eid-ul-Azha.

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Nor'wester lashes 2 dists: 2 killed

Nor'wester accompanied by hailstorm lashed different parts of Dhaka and Manikganj districts yesterday killing two people and injuring nearly 50, reports UNB.

Witnesses said the hailstorm that began at about 12:30 pm damaged IRRI crops and cutcha houses in many areas.

Mohammad Ali, 25, of Awkpara and Joydhar, 26, of Ganokbari villages in Savar thana died as a live electric wire snapped during storm fell on them.

Nearly 50 people were also wounded being hit by flying tin roofs and broken tree branches as the storm packing a wind speed of upto 80 kilometres swept seven thanas of Manikganj district and Savar and Dhamrai thanas of Dhaka.

Probe report on killing of Taj submitted to DU VC

By DU Correspondent

The probe committee formed to investigate into the killing of Arif Hossain Taj, a student of the Dhaka University, submitted its report to Vice Chancellor of the University Prof AK Azad Chowdhury yesterday.

Arif Hossain Taj who was also a leader of the BNP-backed Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) was killed on March 13 at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall of the university.

The committee also investigated the incident of firing on a procession from the Surja Sen

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Sec 144 on Tripura border with Bangladesh

AGARTALA, Apr 23: Prohibitory orders under Section 144 were promulgated today within a three kilometre radius of the Indo-Bangla border in the Gandacherra subdivision of Dhala district in Tripura, reports PTI.

An official notification said the order, which will remain in force till May 22, had been imposed to check smuggling and other cross border crimes.

Law & order reviewed Rape, abduction mark sharp rise in March

By Staff Correspondent

The number of rape, abduction and criminal cases recorded with police in the country marked an increase last month over that of February, according to reports presented at the regular monthly meeting of senior police officials at the police headquarters here yesterday.

The meeting, presided over by Inspector General of Police (IGP) M Azizul Haq reviewed the overall law and order in the country. The IGP gave some "important instructions" for curbing criminal activities, said a police press release.

Criminal cases of dacoity, robbery, murder and riot, in March was 907, 12 more than that of February. Of those, cases of dacoity were 80, robbery-140, murder-279 and riot-408. However, the number of riot cases dropped by 35, the press release

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Shilu Abed passes away

By Staff Correspondent

Shilu Abed, Director of Aarong, passed away at a city clinic yesterday afternoon. She was 55.

Wife of Fazle Hasan Abed, Executive Director of BRAC, Shilu Abed suffered a severe heart attack a few months back and recovered fully.

She then went to her office yesterday for the first time. On return, she complained of breathing problem. She was rushed to a city clinic where doctors pronounced her dead, family sources said.

Aarong was Shilu Abed's major achievement. She successfully expanded Aarong network both at home and abroad.

Her namaj-e-janaza will be held today (Thursday) at the Gulshan Mosque after Jhor prayers and she will be buried at the Banani graveyard.

Reshma murder Personal officer to finance secy arrested

By Staff Correspondent

The personal officer to the Secretary, Ministry of Finance, was arrested yesterday in connection with the killing of Reshma, whose body was found hanging in the staircase of a building at Azampur Staff Colony Tuesday, police said.

Habibur Rahman made a confessional statement when produced before the court of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate. Quoting his confessional statement, police said that Habibur Rahman confessed that he "raped Reshma for the whole night, strangled her to death and then hung her body with the clothes she was wearing."

Reshma, 25, wife of Masud Rana, a rickshaw mechanic, reportedly went to buy medicine for her child on Monday night, but did not return to their shanty near the Road No 3, Dhanmondi. Her body was later recovered hanging at the staircase of Azampur Staff Colony on Tuesday morning.

Correction

Zainul Hoque Sikder, Director of National Bank Limited (NBL) in a statement yesterday said he had adjusted his loan amount before getting the notice of the Bangladesh Bank by depositing ten per cent of the outstanding loan on March 25 and April 1. Accordingly, a rescheduled proposal for gradual adjustment of the loan was sent to the Bangladesh Bank and it was approved by the BB on April 9 and 15.

The Bangladesh Bank statement upon which The Daily Star report was based did not show his payment of ten per cent loan amount, the statement said.