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Political will can bail out banking system

Committee says vested groups bank on banking rot

Star Report

The Bank Reforms Committee (BRC) in its final report has said that tooth and nail opposition by powerful, vested interest-groups are the main obstacles to banking sector reforms.

"This is why strong political commitment is the key to making the reform programme successful," it observed in its report submitted to Finance Minister SAMS Kibria yesterday.

"A mass public awareness about the problems of the banking sector has already been created and steps to solve these

problems would undoubtedly receive mass support from all except a handful of opportunists," it pointed out.

However, BRC cautioned that the stability of the banking sector might be jeopardised if all the legal measures are taken at a go. "On the other hand, the reform programme will lose its credibility, making establishment of the rule of law difficult, unless some exemplary measures are taken."

The BRC was formed in late 1996 with Kazi Fazlur Rahman

as its chairman. The committee was restructured in 1997, making Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud, former advisor of the caretaker government, its chairman. The committee submitted 11 interim reports and some of its recommendations have already been implemented by the government.

"Taking steps regarding the ailing banks is a complicated process involving a lot of considerations. It is a time-consuming exercise to take steps against the banking sector

which have cumulated over the years due to the absence of a regulatory framework," the BRC observed.

The BRC report said that the steps taken so far are not adequate to solve the existing problems of the banking sector. "The legal framework relating to the banking sector is still weak and contain many discrepancies despite a number of amendments made so far," it said, adding that the procedural and institutional drawbacks

See Page 12 Col 5

BNP views Hasina's phone calls as political stunt

By Staff Correspondent

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday said his party always wants to resolve all problems and crises through discussion, but a conducive atmosphere has to be created for that.

"We are ready to sit for dialogue with the government party to resolve the political stalemate. There should be formal proposal and favourable atmosphere for that," he said.

"It is the duty of the government to create an atmosphere for holding a meaningful discussion," he told a press briefing at the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament yesterday.

The press briefing was organised to explain BNP's position.

See Page 12 Col 3

Talks begin towards ending hijack

KANDAHAR, Dec 27: Indian negotiators today began talks with the hijackers holding 160 people hostage on an Indian Airlines plane at Kandahar airport in Afghanistan in a desperate bid to end the four-day crisis, reports AFP.

The seven-member Indian delegation entered the airport's control tower along with Afghan Taliban authorities, about two hours after arriving from India on an Airbus A300.

Earlier the Indian officials held a brief meeting in the airport lounge with Taliban foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel and United Nations officials.

In New Delhi, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan said after a cabinet meeting there was no time frame to end the hijacking.

"Let them talk," he said. "Then they will come back. Then the government can respond. No mandate has been given to them."

"I am very optimistic we will get them (the hostages) back," Mahajan said. "But there is no timetable."

The flight from New Delhi also brought medical supplies and aircraft spare parts, and even a relief cockpit and cabin crew.

Minutes before it landed the Taliban foreign minister warned time was running out for India to end the hijacking.

"India should not delay negotiations to resolve the crisis. It could cause damage and loss of life," he said at Kandahar airport.

"Any delay in this emergency is not advisable."

The five Muslim militant hijackers earlier warned they would start killing the 160 passengers and crew on board the Airbus A300 if India did not begin negotiations.

One passenger has already died. He was stabbed to death on Friday.

The hijackers set a deadline for the executions to begin Monday, but backed down after India said it would send negotiators and the Taliban threatened to storm the plane.

"This warning was given to the hijackers after they told the control tower they had tied the hands and feet of two hostages and that they would kill them and throw their bodies out of the plane," said Mutawakel.

Anger from anxious relatives finally pushed New Delhi

See Page 12 Col 6



Residents have been impressed with shiny new taxi-cabs. However, the latest automobile seems like a pointless endeavour considering the sheer number of illegal rickshaws and smoke-emitting autorickshaws strangling the flow of traffic on the city's narrow, tangled streets.

— Star photo

Police-picket pitch battles leave 50 hurt at Ctg

Hartal again tomorrow

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Dec 27: At least 50 people including two policemen were injured in sporadic clashes between police and pickets during the dawn-to-dusk hartal here today, police and witnesses said.

The injured were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital and private clinics.

Police arrested 60 people during the hartal hours in the city today. The opposition alliance enforced the daylong hartal protesting the arrest of city unit Jamaat-e-Islami general secretary Shamsul Islam.

Shamsul Islam was arrested yesterday evening and sent to custody.

The opposition alliance has called another dawn-to-dusk hartal in the city tomorrow, also protesting the arrest.

Police fired and lobbed tear-gas canisters at Sirajuddaulah road at 10 am today during a clash with pickets mostly drawn from Jamaat and its student wing Chhatra Shibir. The pickets pelted brickbats and hurled cocktails at police who at one stage chased them away.

Cabinet okays land port law, changes to insurance act

The Council of Ministers yesterday approved the drafts of Bangladesh Land Port Authority Act 1999 and Ortha Rin Adalat Act 1999, and amendments to the Insurance Law 1938, reports UNB.

The cabinet approved it in principle at its regular weekly meeting at the PM's Office with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

20th BCS Test results on pages 11, 2

Dhaka considers Beijing offer for fighter jets

By M Anwarul Haq

Bangladesh is considering procurement of eight Chinese sophisticated fighter aircraft on "very easy financial terms", highly placed sources said.

China has offered to supply supersonic F-7 MB planes which are 'all purpose' fighters, suitable for both attack and defence.

The Bangladesh Air Force already has some F-7 MBs in its fleet. The F-7 MBs are specially designed for the country, the word B in the specification standing for Bangladesh.

The government gave a policy approval in October 1997 for

purchase of more multi-role fighters. The highest authorities at that time gave go ahead to a plan for procurement of eight Russian Mig-29s and eight Chinese F-7 MBs to add one squadron to the Air Force's existing fleet of five squadrons.

See Page 12 Col 1

Cheating patients to death

By Naimul Haq

It's a government hospital in the city where nurses, brokers and even doctors can make money by luring patients away to clinics.

Most of the cancer patients coming to the National Institute of Cancer Research and

Hospital (NICRH) are lured to private clinics as treatment there has virtually stopped. A section of nurses, employees and doctors are engaged in this 'booming business'.

The patients are lured in the name of 'package deals', doctors

reference and admission to 'ideal clinics'.

But the sad thing is that most of the clinics lack facilities for cancer treatment.

Some of the clinics even deceive cancer patients in the

See Page 12 Col 6



Latifur Rahman
new Chief Justice

Justice Latifur Rahman has been appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, an official announcement said in the city yesterday, reports BSS.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed made the appointment under Article 95(1) of the Constitution to Justice Rahman of the Appellate Division, to be effective from today.

See Page 12 Col 8

Speaker briefs President about his initiative

Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury yesterday apprised President Shahabuddin Ahmed of his initiative to bring back the opposition to Parliament in its upcoming session, reports UNB.

The Speaker said with a view to making the first session of Parliament in the next millennium memorable and fruitful, he wrote a letter to Leader of the Opposition requesting her to attend the session, beginning January 1.

"But in reply," he told the President, "the Leader of the Opposition has set a number of preconditions for attending the session."

An official release said the Speaker called on President at

See Page 12 Col 1

Inside Today

Article

Bangladesh in the 21st Century: Challenges in Shaping the Future

Column: Lest We Forget...
by Qazi Khaliquzzaman
Ahmad
Page 4

Supplements

Special supplements on National Day of Nepal on Page 8 and 50 Years of Saving Sight on Page 9

Sehri, Iftar timings

Ramadan	Dec	Sehri	Iftar
19	28	-	5-24
20	29	5-15	5-24
21	30	5-15	5-25

Prayer Timings

December 28		
Fajr	Azan	Jamaat
5-15	5-15	5-25
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-42	4-00
Maghrib	5-23	5-29
Tarabi	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

DCC trashes garbage policy

Concrete bins to replace the portable

By Staff Correspondent

Dhaka City Corporation will junk its pricey portable garbage containers in favour of concrete bins under a new plan to clean up the city's streets and neighbourhoods.

The portable containers are causing a nuisance and the system is too expensive," said Rafique Ali Bhuiyan Bachchu, a ward commissioner and one of the Mayor's two co-ordinators in the DCC's Conservancy Department.

Bachchu said the mayor is convinced the idea of using portable containers for garbage management "was wrong."

"Nobody in the city wants these containers in front of their homes or on the streets," said Bachchu. The containers are also obstructing traffic, he added.

The DCC admitted the mistake after spending crores of public money to import nearly 152 trucks and 410 containers. The corporation imported 24 trucks from Belgium recently.

Another DCC official said it's simply too expensive to fuel the trucks. The DCC spent about Tk 40 lakh on fuel this year.

The official said the trucks

See Page 12 Col 5

Intra-BCL bickering over spoiling Siddique's party

By Nazmul Ashraf and Abul Kalam Azad

The ruling party-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) is facing criticism from within, apart from widespread condemnation from different quarters, for its alleged involvement in vandalising the venue for launching of Kader Siddique's new political party in the city.

Besides a particular group of BCL activists, known as the armed cadres, most leaders and workers of the organisation are unhappy about what their fellow workers did. They think that the act of vandalism had badly damaged the 'image' of

the country's leading student body.

Most BCL central leaders were in the dark as the attack was planned on the Dhaka University campus. And now, they were learnt to have been highly critical of the incident, which they termed "very unfortunate".

"It was not necessary at all," said a secretariat member of the BCL's central committee.

"Such an attack was needless to harm a betrayer like Kader Siddique, who was on his way to be banished from politics," another central leader said, adding he had been facing

criticism from his followers.

The BCL cadres, who claimed credit for their 'heroic' role and expected to be rewarded, were 'happy' at their 'performance'. But some other cadres, frustrated by their non-involvement in the operation, continued to look askance at the matter.

Yet, some leaders felt that foiling Siddique's programme was all right.

"It was not enough to teach Kader Siddique who had joined hands with the anti-liberation forces," said one of them.

See Page 12 Col 2

Courting cyber-crime

Lawless Bangladesh a hacker haven

Local hackers may soon start invading Bangladesh's computer systems because there are no laws against the cyber crimes, which can be more dangerous than robberies, reports UNB.

Cyber-pirates could even break into state defence secrets and banking transactions in developed countries, making off with millions of dollars.

Experts believe the new mil-

lennium will be heralded by such sophisticated crimes since there have already been a number of instances of hacking e-mail, Internet and mobile telephones in Bangladesh.

Although they officially refuse to comment on it, insiders in the Internet Service Providers (ISP) such as Grameen Cybernet, Proshikanet and ISN, acknowledged they've been hacked.

"Such interventions are frequent here but for a lack of knowledge of general users, complaints are not so much," said an Internet expert of the Grameen Cybernet.

Unauthorised use of mobiles through breaking security systems or using logic is also on the rise in Bangladesh.

In daring raids, hackers have used mobile-to-mobile

See Page 12 Col 5

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