

Business & Metropolitan

Indonesian minister cracks whip at delinquent bankers

JAKARTA, Nov 12: The government has given the former owners of ailing banks taken over by the Indonesian Bank Restructuring Agency (IBRA) until Wednesday to agree to surrender more assets to ensure they settle their debts or face legal sanctions, reports said, says AFP.

The deadline is until Wednesday at seven (1200 GMT) in the evening, the Jakarta Post quoted Coordinating Minister for the Economy Rizal Ramli as saying late Friday night.

"If this is not met, the attorney general has confirmed that he would take necessary action," Rizal told a press conference following a meeting of the Financial Sector Policy Committee (FSPC).

He also said they would be required to give personal guarantees of debt settlement.

The FSPC groups senior economics ministers, the attorney general and IBRA, and the committee approves major IBRA deals.

The former bank owners, who are also among the country's top business tycoons, owe hundreds of trillions of rupiah (billions of dollars) to the government in return for massive liquidity support.

Many have been found to have violated legal lending limits by channelling the liquidity credits designed to keep them afloat to affiliated businesses instead.

Under an agreement known as the Master of Settlement and Acquisition Agreement (MSAA) signed with IBRA in 1999, they pledged their assets to the IBRA to repay their debts.

"We have given them one month... We will not give them more time because it's useless. They only use it to lobby government officials or legislators to avoid (surrendering more assets)," Rizal said.

They think there are government officials who can be bought, but the current (economic) team won't accept bribes," he added.

The minister said the attorney general's office had conducted an investigation and found that the former bank owners still held assets here and overseas.

It turns out that they're not as poor as they had claimed," he said.

Swedish OM Group concedes defeat in bid for LSE

LONDON, Nov 12: Swedish technology company OM Group finally admitted defeat on Friday in its hostile bid for the London Stock Exchange, admitting that just 6.7 percent of LSE shareholders had accepted its offer, says AFP.

OM shook the City financial district of London in August when it launched its audacious offer for the 227-year-old London exchange, which repeatedly attacked the offer as "inadequate."

But despite increasing its bid for Europe's largest stock market to 1.06 billion pounds (1.80 billion euros, 1.50 billion dollars) in October, and extending its offer deadline until Friday, OM's offer attracted only a handful of LSE shareholders.

With the hostile offer out of the way, the London exchange is now free to reconsider its strategy -- including possible alliances with other exchanges.

Having been forced to abandon its controversial plans to merge with the Frankfurt Deutsche Boerse in September to defend the OM bid, the LSE is now thought to be considering a tie-up with the US tech-rich Nasdaq exchange.

The LSE may well build something with Nasdaq," LSE chairman Don Cruickshank told British business leaders at the annual conference of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI).

LSE chairman Don Cruickshank welcomed the OM news. He said: "I am pleased that the distraction of OM's offer is over."

"We are getting on with building the business from its strong foundations and implementing our strategy in full consultation with our shareholders and customers."

The LSE said it would announce in the next few weeks the formation of the Exchange Markets Group, its new formal consultation process.

WB brokers talks on Pak power tariff row

ISLAMABAD, Nov 12: The World Bank has arranged talks between Pakistan and the country's largest independent power producer Hubco to break a deadlock over their bitter tariff row, a newspaper said Saturday, reports AFP.

In a letter World Bank president James D Wolfenson has requested Pakistani Finance Minister Shaikat Aziz to meet with Hubco directors in the Gulf state of Dubai on November 15, Dawn said, quoting government sources.

An official of the bank will also participate in the talks, the sources told the paper.

The more than three-year old row centres on the demand that Hubco reduce the rate at which it sells electricity to state-run Water and Power Development Authority.

Hubco said last week it had made an offer in September to reduce the tariff from 6.7 cents

to 5.5 cents per kilowatt hour. But Wapda reportedly wants the company to lower the rate.

Saudi Arabia's Xenel Industries and Britain's National Power have major stakes in Hubco.

Pakistani military government, which emerged from a coup late last year, has vowed to seek an early solution to the dispute which is seen to be impeding the flow of foreign investment.

Thousands of angry South Korean workers battle riot police in Seoul yesterday in violent protests against the government-forced closure of debt-ridden firms. Union claimed about 200,000 people could be thrown out of work on top of 800,000 who had already been laid off since South Korea took a 8-billion-dollar bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in late 1997.



Thousands of angry South Korean workers battle riot police in Seoul yesterday in violent protests against the government-forced closure of debt-ridden firms. Union claimed about 200,000 people could be thrown out of work on top of 800,000 who had already been laid off since South Korea took a 8-billion-dollar bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in late 1997. - AFP photo

British Telecom may sell Rogers AT&T Wireless stake

TORONTO, Nov 12: British telecommunications giant BT may sell off its stake in Canada's Rogers AT and T Wireless, but it would not be the first non-core asset divested, the National Post reported Friday, says AFP.

On Thursday, British Telecom announced a radical shake-up in London, saying it would split its cellular operations, data business, network company and business directories division to help reshape the company into lean business units. An umbrella holding company would be set up to oversee their operations.

The British company said it intended to focus on Western Europe and Japan businesses, and in particular ways to "realise the value" of these assets.

"We want to concentrate on those areas and as far as I know, Canada is not in either," BT spokesman Andrea Paradine told the daily paper.

She added that the firm has other non-core assets to divest before it considers selling the Rogers stake, which was acquired more than a year ago. BT's stake in Rogers AT and T Wireless was worth approximately 1.2 billion dollars (775 million US) based on share

prices Thursday.

Paradine said any possible Rogers deal would be "very long term," adding that they were not presently in talks with potential bidders.

BT's alarming debt -- which is expected to top 30 billion pounds (50 billion euros, 42.6 billion dollars) early next year -- was at the root of the company's overhaul, which is expected to shed 10 billion pounds off the debt burden.

In August, another spokesman told the paper that the firm was considering selling the Rogers Wireless stake as an option to reduce debt.



A farmer from northern Italy poses for photographers with the cow Ercolina, who is the symbol of the protest against European Union milk quota fines, in St. Peter's Square during the celebration of the Catholic Church's Jubilee for Farmers in Vatican City yesterday. The Pope told tens of thousand of farmers present to "work in such a way as to resist the temptations of productivity and gains that detract from respect for Nature." - AFP photo

US urges Japan to bolster its financial system

WASHINGTON, Nov 12: The United States urged Japan yesterday to make a greater effort to bolster its banking system to speed up economic recovery, the Treasury Department said, reports Reuters.

Treasury issued a statement at the conclusion of talks in San Francisco between US and Japanese officials to discuss measures previously agreed in 1995 to ease entry into financial markets and to reduce regulation and red tape.

It said the US side pressed for greater openness and transparency by Japanese financial authorities and by its self-regulating organisations, and for more steps to stimulate economic growth.

"They emphasised the importance of follow on measures to move from stabilisation to full recovery such as early actions to amortise weak financial institutions, aggressive disposal of bad loans and the return of underlying assets to the market," the statement said.

It said Japanese officials urged US "vigilance regarding the soundness of US financial institutions" lending in the continued economic expansion in the United States.

The new committee was installed in the MECA-Get-Together-2000 held on Thursday at the auditorium of Engineers' Institution. Reception was accorded to the new members to the organisation.

Ex-cadets, their families, ex-teachers and officials of Mirzapur Cadet College and representatives from other ex-cadets organisations attended. The business session was followed by dinner.

3 killed in city

Three youths, one of them an alleged mugger, were killed by beating and shooting in the city on Saturday-Sunday, reports UNB.

Hospital sources said an unidentified young man, aged about 25, was shot dead by gunmen in broad daylight on a road at North Bhashantek near Combined Military Hospital (CMH) on Sunday.

Meanwhile, some miscreants beat another unidentified man, aged 30, to death at Diabari cross-dam in Mirpur on Saturday. Later police recovered the body from a ditch in the area.

Also in Mirpur area, Akash, 23, an alleged snatcher and a resident of Block B, Line 19 in Mirpur-10, was caught by local people from Senpara-Parbata area at noon on Saturday. They beat him mercilessly. He was rushed to DMCH where he succumbed to his injuries early Sunday.

"Causes of the killing of the two unidentified men were not known immediately," police said.



Ismail R Chowdhury, an official of Oman Airlines handing over a cheque for Taka 70,000 to Jarina at a simple ceremony at its Gulshan office on Saturday morning. - Star photo

What's on today....

DUJ EC meet: A meeting of the Executive Committee of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) will be held. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 11 am.

Rickshawpullers' rally: Dhaka city rickshawpullers' (van) Union will hold a rally and submit a memorandum to Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation. Venue: Mukhtangan. Time: 10 am.

Seminar: 'Health for All' will hold a seminar on National Drug Policy and Use of Drug. Keynote speaker: Dr Sayeedur Rahman (Khasru), Assistant Professor, Sir Salmullah Medical College. Venue: Ganoshasthya Nagar Hospital, House No 14/E, Road No 6, Dhanmondi. Time: 5:30 pm.

Discussion meet: 'Bangamata Parishad' has organised a discussion meeting to commemorate the Jail Killing Day. Chief guest: Home, Post and Telecommunication Minister Mohammad Nasim. Venue: Poet Sufia Kamal Auditorium of the National Museum. Time: 4 pm.

..... and tomorrow

Rickshawpullers' meet: A meeting of Dhaka Metropolitan Rickshawpuller Owner's Unity Council will be held to protest the eviction of rickshaws from some city roads. Venue: Mukhtangan. Time: 10 am.

Weather

Drizzle likely

Light drizzle is likely at one or two places over Rajshahi and Dhaka divisions and weather may remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country during the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Light to moderate fog is also expected over the northern to central part and river basins of the country after midnight, said the Met Office adding that night temperature may remain nearly unchanged across the country.

Yesterday's highest temperature of 33.0 degree Celsius was recorded at Sitakunda and the lowest 17.2 degree at Rajshahi. The sun sets in the capital today at 5:14 pm and rises tomorrow at 6:12 am.

Table with 4 columns: City/Town, Temperature in Celsius (Max, Min), Humidity in Percentage (Morning, Evening). Rows include Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet, Cox's Bazar.

HERE and THERE



Mirzapur Ex-cadets Assoc

A 19-member executive committee for the term 2000-2002 was formed in the last AGM of Mirzapur Ex-Cadets Association (MECA) held recently. Fahim Hussain and Qazi M Arif were elected the president and general secretary respectively, says a press release.

The new committee was installed in the MECA-Get-Together-2000 held on Thursday at the auditorium of Engineers' Institution. Reception was accorded to the new members to the organisation.

Ex-cadets, their families, ex-teachers and officials of Mirzapur Cadet College and representatives from other ex-cadets organisations attended. The business session was followed by dinner.

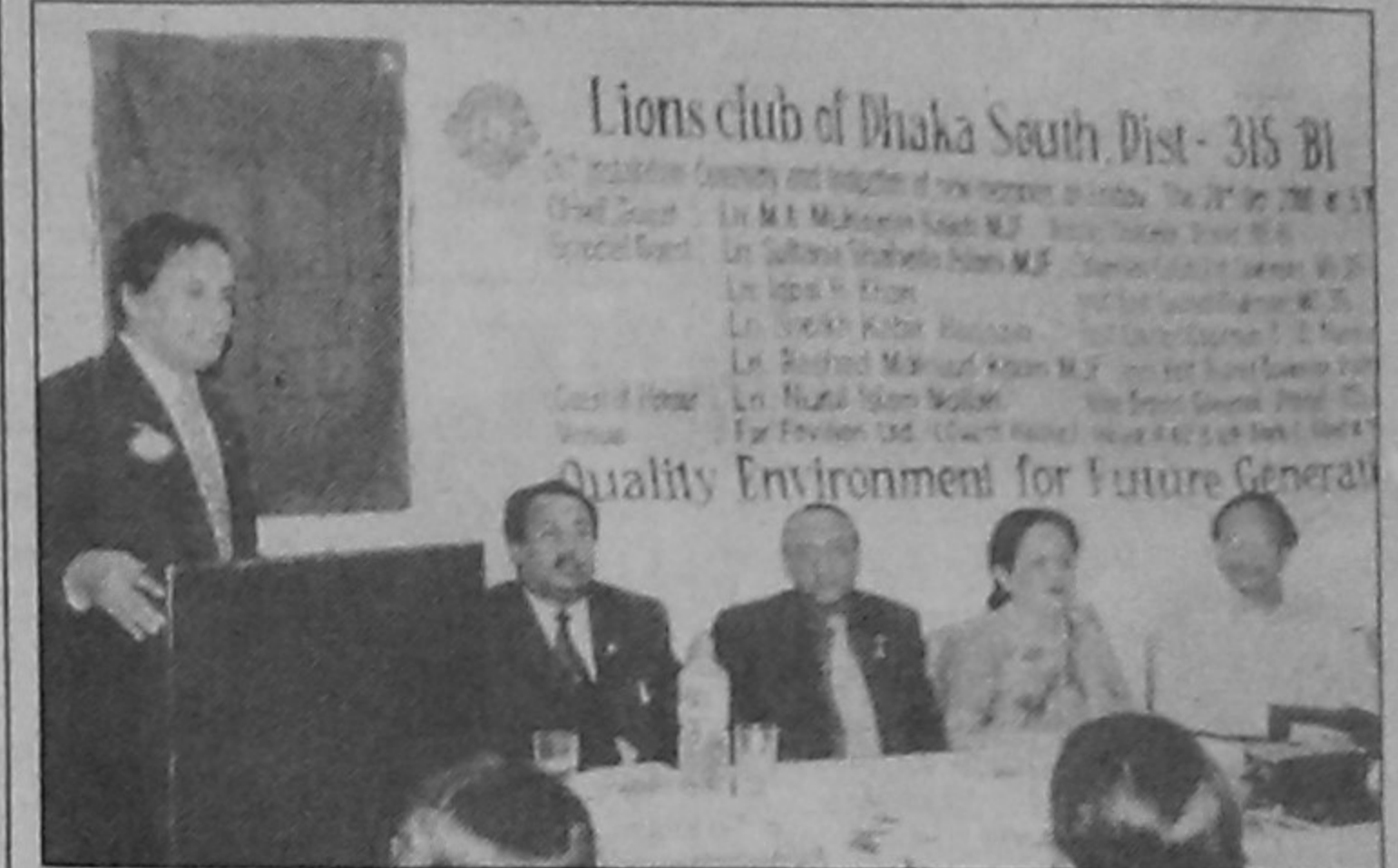
Bangladesh Student Fed

The 6th national council of Bangladesh Student Federation was held at Engineers' Institution seminar room on Friday, says a press release.

The councilors elected the following central committee of Bangladesh Student Federation for the next two years: President - Ameer Abbas, vice president - Yeasin Mukul, general secretary - Uzzal Balo, assistant general secretary - Abeda Gulrukh, organising secretary - Iftekhkar Ayub, finance secretary - Shamol Shil, secretary of publicity & publication - Niru Muhammed, secretary of political education affairs - Subarna Mozumder. Members: Maruf Hossain, Faruq Ahmed, Ahmed Babu, Asif Iqbal, Zia Shikder, Salahuddin Mukul, Miridul Das, Emdad Rana, Shanker Chandra Das.



The teachers and students of The Aga Khan School, Uttara donated relief goods worth Taka 50,000/= to the Chairman of Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, Ln Sheikh Kabir Hossain.



Ln MA Muhaimin Saleh, District Governor, District 315-B1, delivering a speech on the eve of 26th installation ceremony of Lions Club of Dhaka South, held recently at Far Pavilion Guest House, Banani in the city. From (L-R) Ln Nurul Islam Mollah, Vice District Governor, Ln Rashed Maksud Khan, Imm. Past District Governor, Ln Sultana Shaheda Islam, Council Chairman and Ln SI Nizami, President of the club.



littlebangla.com, an e-Commerce portal of RaCon International, an US-based IT company, was launched yesterday. Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria inaugurated the portal as chief guest at Dhaka Club in the city. Among others, DCCI Chairman Aftab Ul Islam, Aarong Director Tajul Islam, FedEx Deputy Managing Director Azad Khan, RaCon International CEO Rasul Chaudhury and littlebangla.com Country Representative Nazeem Choudhury was present on the occasion.

BCL accused of threatening JU student to quit SCF

By JU Correspondent

An uneasy calm is prevailing at the AFM Kamaluddin Hall of Jahangirnagar University (JU) as left-leaning Samajtantrik Chhatra Front (SCF) has accused the ruling party-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League of threatening a SCF activist to quit party.

SCF activist Julhasuddin Shajan (Chemistry-First Year), in an application to the AFM Kamaluddin Hall authorities on October 22, demanded security alleging that BCL leaders and activists had threatened to kill him if he continue politics.

SCF leaders submitted another application to the hall authorities on October 30 saying that Barin, Bullet, Nawshar, Milton and some other BCL activists allegedly beaten him up and tried to force him out from the hall on October 29 as he did not abide by their order.

The hall authorities formed a five-member probe body with Hall Warden Kawsar Hossain as its head to investigate the incident. The probe body served showcase notice on the four BCL activists on November 1.

SCF leaders, at a press conference on the campus on November 5, alleged that the BCL activists threatened Shajan several times after submitting the second application and tried to force him to withdraw the complaint saying that he would not be able to continue his study if he fails to abide by their order. Shajan, at the press conference, demanded security.

After the showcase notice was served, BCL activists submitted a memorandum to the Vice-Chancellor on November 6 demanding expulsion of the SCF activist Shajan saying that he had teased one female first year admission seekers on October 29.

SCF leaders also told journalists that BCL leaders forced Shajan at gun-point to issue a confessional statement seeking apology for his misdeed.

They (BCL) are thus trying to divert attention by lodging complaint against Shajan," SCF leaders alleged adding BCL activists were desperate to oust Shajan from the campus as he cannot prove BCL crime.

Killers of Akhi to be punished, says Nasim

Home Minister Mohammad Nasim yesterday said killers of Chhatra League leader Akkashur Rahman Akhi must be arrested and punished at any cost, reports BSS.

The minister was speaking as the chief guest at the memorial meeting of general secretary of Dhaka city Chhatra League (North) and VP of Titumir Government College Akkashur Rahman Akhi. A K M Rahmatullah MP, Chhatra League President Bahadur Bepary, Awami League leaders Tipu Munshi, Osman Gani and Omar Ali Member also addressed the meeting while President of Dhaka City Chhatra League (North) Saifulah Saiful was in the chair.

The minister said there will be no compromise with terrorism and terrorists. The law will take its own course. The killers of Akhi, even if they belong to Awami League, will not be spared, he warned.

Awami League came to power with the blessings of people, not by the terrorists, he said, adding that several killers had already been arrested in this connection and the rest would be detained.

Supporters of UP chairman attack protesters: 10 hurt

BAGERHAT, Nov 12: Ten people, including a Union Parishad member, were injured in an attack by supporters of the Chairman of Teligati UP in Morelganj upazila here today, reports UNB.

Of the injured, three persons were hit by bullets.

Local people said the attack followed protest against alleged irregularities by the UP Chairman in distribution of foodgrain against VGF cards.

They said accomplices of UP Chairman Sadekul Islam alias Sadhukha shot at UP member Alamgir Chowdhury and his supporters in front of his home at about 11 am after he had an altercation with Sadhukha for distributing less quantity of food to the VGF cardholders on Saturday.

Indian states battling for winning 'IT capital' status

BANGALORE, India, Nov 12: An intense battle has broken out to grab the mantle of IT capital of India from Bangalore, with massive technology parks and optical fibre networks popping up all over the country, says AFP.

The top contenders for the prestigious title are Hyderabad in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh state, Madras in Tamil Nadu and a trio of cities - Bhopal, Indore and Gwalior - in the central state of Madhya Pradesh.

"We have finished the first phase of our HiTech city in Hyderabad and will in another couple of years complete the second phase with a total investment of 375 million dollars and five million square feet of office space," said Suresh Chandra, chief of AP Technology

Services Ltd.

US President Bill Clinton's visit to Hyderabad in March and Microsoft's decision to set up its research and development centre there has helped put Andhra Pradesh on the global IT map.

"Twenty-seven per cent of the Indians in the Silicon Valley are from Andhra Pradesh. All the districts of the state are connected to the government's wide area network so easy decision-making is possible," Chandra told AFP.

One of India's largest private firms, the Reliance group, is presently laying a 12,500-kilometre (7,875-metre) optical network in Andhra Pradesh to connect all districts.

Though Karnataka, of which Bangalore is the state capital, leads the southern pack with

software exports of 1.2 billion dollars in the fiscal year ending March 31, others are snapping at its heels.

Tamil Nadu's software exports have almost trebled from 91 million dollars in the past three years and Andhra Pradesh's exports have shot up from three million dollars in fiscal year 1994-95 to 131 million dollars in 1998-99.

Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh has become the only Indian state to be completely wired up with a 23,000-kilometre (14,500-mile) optical fibre network.

"Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have taken a tremendous lead but we are catching up," said LK Joshi, principal secretary in the Madhya Pradesh government.

"In the last five years we

have increased the number of training institutions from just eight engineering colleges to the present 43, although Bangalore alone has more than 40 colleges," Joshi said.

He said the state was planning to set up software technology parks in Bhopal, Indore and Gwalior.

"We will be able to attract a lot of investment as e-governance will be on a par with other states. The next two to three years will be crucial. Our Achilles heel is the perception that north India does not produce software professionals," he said.

In the southern city of Madras, the Tamil Nadu state government is building a 1.28-million square foot (115,200-square meter) technology park.