

Revenue earnings

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Of the earning till April, Tk 3965.69 crore was from import duty, Tk 4971.50 crore from VAT, Tk 2708.87 crore from supplementary duties, TK 222.05 crore from excise duty and Tk 2295.51 crore from income tax.

During the corresponding of last fiscal year, the earning was Tk 11674.76 crore . The revised target for the year was Tk 16000 crore.

Describing the governments initiatives to increase revenue earning, a senior official told this correspondent that the tax officials recently conducted a number of raids on big business houses and imposed financial penalty on them for evasion of Value Added Tax (VAT) and supplementary duties.

They found that many big companies did not maintain proper records regarding payment of VAT and other duties. They often resorted to fraudulence to evade payment of duties.

According to sources, Tk 1600 crore duty and taxes remained unrealised because of cases pending with the High Court for several years. The importers appealed to the High Court following dispute with the customs officials over assessment of duties.

On the other hand, many importers evade import duties by 'under invoicing.' They mention lower prices of the goods in collaboration with a section of officials of pre-shipment inspection companies.

According to an investigation by (NBR), only six big companies evaded around Tk 148 crore (VAT). Cases concerning these also remained pending for years together as the companies appealed to the High Court.

The NBR also detected that many doctors, lawyers and other professionals earning huge amounts evaded payment of pay income tax.

NBR officials said it not unusual that businessmen and wealthy people would try to evade payment of duties and taxes. The trend exists more or less in other countries also but the governments of those countries go for special extra drives to stop the loopholes and realise the taxes, they noted.

However, they admitted that the level of tax evasion in our country is much higher and attributed this to weak tax collection mechanism, shortage of manpower and limited tax network.

JS body critical

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The committee asked officials concerned to speed up their activities to implement those within their stipulated time as the government has only two more months of its tenure left.

"We would like to see the pledges fulfilled within the timeframe for national interest," a ruling party lawmaker who attended yesterday's meeting told The Daily Star.

The meeting emphasised maintaining ecological balance and suggested the authorities concerned to implement the projects undertaken to protect the country from global warming. It also suggested decreasing the use of commodities that damages the Ozone layer.

Regarding development of the country's communications, the meeting recommended proper issuance of driving licences and introduction of health check up of professional drivers to curb road accident. It also directed the communications ministry officials to take steps to recover the lands and property illegally occupied by certain quarters of the railway division and the roads and highways division.

Held at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, the meeting was chaired by committee chairman Rezaul Karim Hira and attended by Tazul Islam Chowdhury and Mosharraf Hossain Mangu. Secretaries of the two ministries were present.

7 murders in 32 hrs

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death by a gang of youths in front of Pubali bank in Panir Pump area of Tejgaon on Wednesday night at about 11:pm.

Doctors at DMCH declared him dead when he was taken there. Police said he might have been killed by some local miscreants following rivalry with him.

Iqbal's brother filed a case with Tejgaon police station accusing three persons -- Tofazzal, Abdul Kuddus and Mohammad Hossain--of involvement in the killing. Tofazzal was arrested.

In another incident, Ekramul Hasan was shot dead by an armed gang on Nawabpur Road at around 8 pm but his body was recovered from Goalnagar Lane in Kotwali thana.

The victim's wife Rina Akther filed a case with Kotwali police without naming any accused. An unidentified person informed her over telephone that her husband was killed, she said.

A mother and her daughter were strangled at their third floor flat at the DCC Staff quarters at Maniknagar at about noon on Wednesday.

They were identified as Shamsun Nahar, 40 and her mother Noor Jahan Begum, 62. Nahar was wife of Aftab Hossain, a supervisor at DCC market.

Police said the killers tied their hands and legs and strangled them there. There also marks of injury in Nahar's abdomen.

A couple-- Helal and his wife--

rented a room at Aftab's flat and moved there in February.

A gang of about 10 took away Tk 20,000, a refrigerator and 10 tolas of gold ornaments from the flat. Asked by neighbours, they replied that these belonged to Helal and they were taking these to a new house rented by him.

Aftab, who was at his office when the incident took place, returned in the evening and found the door locked. He then went to his relatives who also could not give him any information about his family members.

On return, he entered his flat by breaking the lock at about 9 pm and found his wife and mother-in-law dead.

As he raised an alarm, neighbours rushed there and informed Demra police about the incident.

Aftab filed a case in this regard and Helal was arrested later.

A new-born baby was killed by unidentified elements. A woman was trying to dump the body, wrapped in a polythene bag, in a bush near Mirpur Zoo. She was caught by security guards of the Zoo and was handed over to Mirpur police. A case was filed in the regard.

Demra police recovered the body of a young man from a house at Mizan Lane at Maniknagar.

He might have been killed at least five days back and his wife was absconding. The couple came to the house on May 1, police said but they could not give details.

A case was filed in this regard.

Access denied

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BTTB recently floated an international tender for installation and maintenance of its two lakh nationwide mobile telephones.

MOPT last year signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with WorldTel for installation of three lakh fixed telephones in the capital, which will also be deprived of interconnection with mobile telephones if BTTB's project is not implemented, the sources said.

MOPT officials said the offer of the private sector operators is too meagre an amount and their other conditions are also not acceptable.

When contacted an official of a private mobile telephone operator said, "Private operators proposed interconnection of only their mobile telephones with BTTB's fixed telephones."

There are about 3.20 lakh mobile telephones in the country of which about 70,000 have access to the BTTB's network.

MCCI

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Sayed Anwar Hossain, Trustee Dr Sarwar Ali, architect Rabiul Hussain, Ali Zaker, Mafidul Haq and Sarazaker.

The museum authorities urged the government to grant remission of income tax on the money given as membership fee or donated to the museum. This would help preserve and uphold the nation's history, tradition and culture as the museum is a public service and educational institution, it was noted.

3 readymade garments shops looted in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dacoits looted three readymade garments shops at Sobhanbagh on Mirpur Road in the city on Wednesday night.

A gang of about six dacoits entered Crafts, OG and Chandans at about 8:45 pm and looted money and valuables worth over Tk one lakh. The gang also snatched several mobile sets from the shops at gunpoint.

Sources said the same gang earlier looted cash and valuables from Apex Tannery and snatched gold chains from the customers.

A case was filed with Dhanmondi police. None was arrested till filing of this report last night.

Uzbek woman

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Ramna police station along with a counselor from the embassy. A case was filed with Ramna police.

Suraiya came to Dhaka on Tuesday as a tourist and was staying at Sundarban Hotel in the city.

Sources said patrol and traffic police are always stationed near the spot where Suraiya was stabbed.

They said muggers from Siddheshwari's Masum group might be responsible for the attack on the tourist.

Ramna police said it could not arrest anyone in this connection or recover the lady's passport till last night.

Earlier on May 4, a Bangladesh-born US citizen M Rashid Khan was kidnapped from Tejgaon's Sat Rasta and stabbed by muggers who took away 600 US dollars and other valuables from him.

The muggers took him to the Dhanmondi area in an auto-rickshaw and pushed him out before fleeing. In a critical condition, he was rushed to a clinic by local people.

A case was filed with Tejgaon police station following the incident but none was arrested.

Gulshan Lake

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allocation' as well.

Rajuk sources said the former chairman went on to allocate some plots on the same walkway. And later, one after another plot was 'somehow' awarded to influential people. In many cases, the related files of such dubious allocations have disappeared from Rajuk.

Residents of the nearby area quoted the new owners of the plots as saying that they obtained the allocation 'several years ago'.

"Every week someone turns up to claim his plot along the lake. If you ask how he obtained it, he would simply say he got it long ago," said a resident of Gulshan, also an owner of a plot at Road-104 since the 1950s.

When contacted, a Rajuk official told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity that some officials are bargaining with the authorities to 'leave alone some plots' from the projected development work of the lake.

The Rajuk chairman could not be contacted for comments, however.

Diseases of poverty

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year. Over 70,000 people die from TB every year.

About 450 people died from malaria last year. Incidence of malaria is increasing every year and is now a major threat to public health, it said.

All deaths from malaria are not recorded. About 88 per cent of the population are now at risk of malaria and about one crore people are at "high risk" in 13 malaria-prone districts.

Measles infects about ten lakh children a year, with two per cent deaths. The EPI (extended programme of immunisation) should aim at eliminating measles, not its control, the paper said.

Acute respiratory infection (ARI) is the number one killer disease in Bangladesh, taking a toll of about 172,000 children a year. It accounts for 18-25 per cent of child deaths.

Poverty and low birth weight is the main cause of ARI. Quoting a survey, it said 80 per cent mothers do not have any information about diseases caused by ARI.

About 100,000 infants and children die from diarrhoeal diseases every year. The disease is no longer a major threat as its incidence is declining.

The rate of death from maternal and pre-natal complications is three in 100,000, one of the highest in the world. This can be easily avoided if facilities and skilled manpower are provided.

The rate of transmission of HIV virus is still low in Bangladesh. But

the country is surrounded by India and Myanmar where it is endemic. If measures are not taken right now, it will soon flare up into and epidemic, the paper said.

Nazrul's birthday

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poet also earned him the wrath of the British rulers who jailed him several times for igniting people's passion for independence through his poems.

Nazrul's songs and poems were also a great source of inspiration for freedom fighters during liberation war in 1971.

Meanwhile, President Shahabuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave separate messages on the occasion.

The government and different socio-cultural and political organisations have chalked out elaborate programmes in observance of the national poet's birth anniversary.

The government programmes include placing of wreaths at the poet's mazar, Nazrul festival, discussions, marches, rallies and cultural functions.

A weeklong Nazrul Festival organised by the Nazrul Institute, Shilpakala Academy, Shishu Academy and National Museum will be held from 3pm to 7pm every day from May 25 through May 31 at the National Museum exhibition hall.

A major shift for major gain

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ground realities there.

The Indian government has now come round to the view that the cease-fire proved to be of no consequence as militants were having a free run for the last six months putting great stress on security forces as well as civilians. Another contributory factor was the lack of response from Kashmiri militant as well as major separatist groups to enter into talks with the government's interlocutor on Kashmir KC Pant, highly-placed sources here say.

Farooq Abdullah is understood to have consistently disfavoured cease-fire, and welcomed the decision to call off the truce and welcomed the invitation to Musharraf for talks.

The Hurriyat Conference was cautious in reacting to invitation to

Musharraf for talks. "Let us wait and watch," said Hurriyat chief Abdul Gani Bhat who has repeatedly asked Indian government to allow Hurriyat delegation to travel to Pakistan before initiating talks on Kashmir.

Aware of the possible fall-outs in making a major change in stand in inviting Musharraf for talks, the Vajpayee government has taken into confidence Leader of the Opposition and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi and major allies of the BJP, including Shiv Sena.

Senior Congress leader K Natwar Singh, who is heading the party's foreign affairs cell, said his party has been for long favouring Indo-Pak dialogue at the highest level and it was of no use waiting for Pakistan to end terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir unless it wants to end it.

India invites Musharraf

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Indian leadership anywhere, anytime," Pakistani Foreign Secretary Inamul Haq said in Islamabad.

"We will respond positively when we receive the invitation officially," he added.

Experts saw in Vajpayee's invitation a shift in Delhi's approach to rival Pakistan.

India had earlier insisted it would talk to Pakistan only after Islamabad ended its support to cross-border terrorism in Kashmir.

Over the past few weeks, Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist-led coalition government has been striving to open talks with Kashmir's political and separatist groups in a bid to restore normality in the region.

Kashmir's umbrella forum of separatist parties reacted warily to the move.

"Let us wait and watch. However, we still believe that tripartite talks could produce better results by including the principal party which is Kashmir," said Abdul Gani Bhat, chief of the All-Party Freedom Conference.

He, however, said the scrapping of India's truce would leave ground conditions unchanged.

"Cease-fire or no cease-fire, the situation will never change and as a matter of fact cease-fire never existed,"

Singh said the cease-fire had helped to cool regional military tensions and added the Indian government would continue to exercise restraint on the borders.

Meanwhile, India's press yesterday described New Delhi's cancellation of its cease-fire in Kashmir and its invitation to Pakistani leader General Pervez Musharraf for peace talks as a "major shift" in policy.

The Hindu newspaper said the moves were "a major shift of strategic gears."

Taka devalued by 5.5pc

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year."

Without devaluation, in the present situation, direct import restraints would have been required which would be a reversal of external liberalisation policy, he pointed out.

"The level of remittances from abroad has become virtually stagnant after having grown rapidly in the previous years. An alternative to devaluation for maintaining the external balance could be to restrict domestic credit expansion, thereby repressing aggregate domestic demand. But the prevailing low inflation does not warrant such a contractionary policy stance. However, to the extent that the government's domestic borrowing is an element in determining the economy's aggregate and external balances there is a need for caution in this regard," he said.

If the government's development spending is speeded up toward the end of this fiscal year, government borrowing may sharply rise, thereby posing further risk to external balances, Dr Mahmood warned. This would be more so because of the large shortfall in foreign aid in the current fiscal. So, caution is needed even after this devaluation, he observed.

Dr Farashuddin, meanwhile, said the devaluation is premised on strong theoretical justification.

"The most impressive GDP growth of over six per cent and bumper food production and also the other positive indices in the internal management suggest that we have internal balance meaning that the demand and supply are matching each other. This is why there has been almost negligible inflation in the economy," he told The Daily Star last night.

"The question of external balance is however different. Because of rapid GDP growth, imports have surged. In fact, compared to one year ago, the monthly import bill has increased by US\$200 and capital goods and raw materials are being imported heavily. But at the same time, some unnecessary luxury

goods are also coming. As a result, the import bill has surged. But export earnings, after impressive growth in first and second quarters, has slowed down and remittances are also recording negative growth."

As a result, the imbalance has increased disturbing the balance between demand and supply of forex. This has made this adjustment inevitable, Dr Farashuddin said.

There have been competitive devaluation in the region, he pointed out. In India, price of one dollar is 47 rupees and in Pakistan, it is 62 rupees. Moreover, since 1990, India has devalued its currency by 62 per cent, Pakistan by 68 per cent, while Bangladesh by 50 per cent.

"We have been losing some readymade garments orders because of higher costing of local exporters. This devaluation will give them some relief. At the same time, it will also give support to import substitute industries," he observed.

Jt statement

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politico-economic situation in their respective countries, as well as their future plans for economic development.

Both sides stressed the need for deepening the ties of friendship through economic, social, commercial and technical cooperation and cultural exchanges between the two friendly countries.

The President of Venezuela extended an invitation to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh to pay a return visit to Venezuela, which the latter gladly accepted.

Meanwhile, Venezuelan President Hugo Rafael Chavez Friar left Dhaka yesterday morning for Beijing, ending his 22-hour trip to Bangladesh.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave the distinguished visitor a hearty send-off at the Zia International Airport.

Earlier, the visiting President made a courtesy call on President Shahabuddin Ahmed and joined a state banquet at Bangabhaban on Wednesday night.

Before his departure at 10 am yesterday, the Venezuelan President was given a guard of honour by a contingent drawn from the three services.