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IMF for reforms before any bailout package

INAM AHMED

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has clearly indicated that Bangladesh will need to carry out a number of reforms in critical areas if it were to seek any bailout package.

The team also held discussions with the Bangladesh Bank to have an idea about the economy. It felt that following the September 11 attacks in the US and the subsequent developments, Bangladesh should have a clear concept about the extent of impact the global depression would leave on it.

The team also was of the view that the country should assess the impact on the banking sector as well as the external and internal balances because of the global cool-down.

On the fourth day of the IMF Article IV team's visit, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman had a lengthy meeting with the team head Luis Valdivieso. Following the meeting, Saifur expressed the hope that because of the new government's prompt actions in a number of areas, Bangladesh would get IMF fund to support its

fragile balance of payment situation.

"We are committed to reforms," Saifur told newsmen at his office following the talks. "We have already taken some steps and will do more for our own sake."

But the IMF wants more measures to be taken up by the government such as drastic steps against the state-owned enterprises and hiking of administered prices of fuel, gas and electricity. Reforms in banking and public administration are also high on its agenda.

Getting IMF standby facility or Poverty Reduction Growth Facility has become ever more important for Bangladesh as it needs to pay around US\$400 million to the Asia Clearing Union in January. It has already deferred payment of one instalment due in November, making it obligatory to pay two tranches at a time.

Bangladesh can get up to 533.33 million SDR from IMF as its quota.

"So, we need the IMF facility by December," said a finance ministry source. "The external picture is already

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Transfers in top posts of NCBs, specialised banks finalised

STAR REPORT

The government yesterday finalised a series of transfers in top posts of nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) and specialised banks.

At the same time, boards of NCBs are expected to be thoroughly reorganised today. The prime minister is expected to officiate the changes.

As per the changes, Rabiul Hossain of Rupali Bank has been made managing director of Sonali Bank. SA Chowdhury of Sonali Bank has been made managing director of Bangladesh Shipa Bank (BSB). Yasin Ali who was in BSB have been posted at Rupali Bank.

Murshid Kuli Khan, Managing Director of Bangladesh Krishi Bank

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Northern Alliance at Kabul's gates, Taliban retreat

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghanistan's opposition captured a town commanding the main road to Kabul yesterday and said it could launch an attack on the capital anytime, while the ruling Taliban said it had made a strategic retreat in the north.

Following up their battlefield victories against the Taliban this weekend in northern Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance said it captured the town of Pul-i-Khumri, just northwest of Kabul.

They said they also captured the strategic town of Qala-i-Nau in western Afghanistan yesterday after an intense four-hour battle and was now heading toward the city of Herat.

Northern Alliance said they took control of the northern province of Takhar, including the capital Taloan, which they lost a year ago, in fighting yesterday.

"We have just received information from the front that Takhar has fallen," alliance spokesman Ashraf Nadeem said.

The fall of Takhar will help the Northern Alliance to bring down Russian arms supplies now stockpiled in the former Soviet republic of Tajikistan.

"We have now reached the gates of Kabul from the north and our troops can launch an attack for Kabul any time," said Ashraf Nadeem by satellite telephone.

Herat is on the main road to

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Al Qaida attacked WTC, admits Laden

XINHUA, London

Osama Bin Laden has for the first time admitted that his al-Qaida group launched the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon, the Sunday Telegraph reported yesterday.

In a previously undisclosed video which has been circulated for 14 days among his supporters, the paper said, Osama bin Laden confessed that "history should be a witness that we are terrorists. Yes, we kill their innocents."

In the footage, shot in the Afghan mountains at the end of October, a smiling bin Laden says that the World Trade Center's twin towers were a "legitimate target".

The paper said that the footage, to which it obtained access in the

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

November Rain..... With the rain-gods showing little passion for cricket, it proved a futile effort on the part of groundstaff at Bangabandhu National Stadium to soak up the water. (Right) As the Guns N' Roses were not available to liven up the gloomy day, Zimbabwe's Heath Streak (R) opted for a relaxed chat with Bangladesh skipper Naimur Rahman (L). Henry Olonga (C) also joined in.

Gloomy weather out to save hosts' face

AL-AMIN

The gloomy sky over the Bangabandhu National Stadium has probably ended the prospect of any further cricket in the first Test between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe.

Play on the fourth day yesterday was washed out without a ball being bowled due to rain. The met office forecasts no sunshine on Monday either.

Weather-permitting the match will resume at 9.30am today. On the other hand, if the inclement weather persists then Bangladesh will register their first draw after five consecutive Test defeats.

"If there is no overnight rain then we can expect play to resume after two hours. In that case, there must be sufficient sun throughout the morning," said BCB Grounds Committee secretary Alam Chowdhury.

The ground staff frantically tried to remove water from the pitch covers, but eventually gave up after yet more rain in the afternoon.

Finally, after another inspection match referee Hanumant Singh called off the day's proceedings five minutes before the scheduled tea break.

Nobody was more disappointed at the abandonment than debutant captain of Zimbabwe Brian Murphy.

"It is really unfortunate that the rain came down today since we were in the driving seat. Tomorrow we are confident of finishing off the match. Even if we get one more session that is enough," said Murphy.

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Armed attack on AL press confce at Bagerhat: 12 hurt

12 Jubo Dal activists expelled

UNB, Khulna

More than a dozen people were injured when armed terrorists attacked a press conference called by Bagerhat district Awami League at Amtala in the district town yesterday.

Awami League was holding the press conference at the residence of district unit secretary Fakir Mansur Ali protesting the attack on Awami League activists who were announcing the programme of a public meeting in the town through loud speakers on Saturday.

The meeting, scheduled for yesterday, was postponed in view of the situation.

Witnesses said about 50 terrorists equipped with firearms and lethal weapons swooped on all present at the press conference at about 4:20 pm. They beat them all and stabbed some others.

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Nominations of B Chy, Rowshan Ali declared valid

UNB, Dhaka

Nominations of BNP leader Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and Barrister Rowshan Ali for Presidential elections were declared valid by the Election Commission yesterday.

Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed declared both the nominations valid after scrutiny, an EC release said.

The deadline for withdrawal of candidature is 5pm today.

The presidential election will be held in the Jatiya Sangsad from 2 pm to 5 pm on November 14.

Another reshuffle in admin

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday made another reshuffle in the administration involving 36 officials at joint-secretary and deputy-secretary level.

Of them, 23 are joint secretaries while the rest 13 deputy secretaries, establishment division sources said.

Three joint secretaries have been made officer-in-charge (OSD).

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Quayum made Commissioner of DMP, 4 rtd

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More senior police officials were transferred and four others sent on forced retirement yesterday.

Mohammad Abdul Quayum, DIG at police headquarter, took over as Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP). He replaced Mohammad Anwarul Iqbal who has been made DIG of CID.

Additional IGP of CID AT Ahmedul Haque Chowdhury has been transferred to the Ministry of Establishment.

The officials sent on forced retirement are Additional IGP Fazlul Haque, DG of Department of Narcotics Control (DNC), Motiur Rahman, DIG at Police Training Academy, Habibur Rahman, DMP Deputy Commissioner and SP Mostafa Jamal Uddin Azad.

With yesterday's changes, about 500 police personnel have been transferred or sent on forced retirement.

Hazaribagh tanneries will be relocated immediately: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has said the tanneries in the city's Hazaribagh area will be relocated immediately as they pose health hazards.

She said this when a delegation led by Mohammad Harun Chowdhury, Chairman of Bangladesh Tanners Association, and MA Sattar Bhuiyan, Chairman of Bangladesh Finished Goods and Footwear Association, called on her at the PM's office yesterday.

The delegation apprised the prime minister of their demands targeting growth of the export industry.

The prime minister assured the team of all-out measures from the

government to increase production of leather goods and their export through further development of the sector.

Referring to initiatives taken by her government in 1991-96 to relocate the tanneries to Savar, the delegation suggested that the factories are shifted to Shafipur in Gazipur district or across Katchpur bridge.

The Prime Minister also said an inter-ministerial meeting would be arranged to resolve the existing problems of the leather sector. She again attached importance to increasing production of finished goods.

The leaders urged the Prime Minister to formulate a policy

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