

Taka gains against dollar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Taka gained against the greenback in interbank trading yesterday following a central bank order for commercial banks to maintain mandatory cash reserve ratio (CRR) in local currency instead of dollar, dealers said.

They said taka closed at 57.90/58.40 per dollar yesterday against 58.48/58.50 on Monday.

"Taka was up against the greenback as dealers were busy to cover local currency shortage to maintain the CRR with the central bank," a senior private banker said.

It edged up against dollar for the first time since its devaluation last month. The forex market was calm yesterday with less demand for dollar.

Meanwhile, call money rate continued to shoot up following the central bank directive and hovered between 20 per cent to 35 per cent. However, some deals were reportedly done at as high as 40 per cent interest rate.

The Bangladesh Bank in a directive on Monday said commercial banks would no longer be allowed to show their foreign currency as the CRR.

It was a far-reaching measure to balance the budget following suggestions by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the wake of huge government borrowing from the country's banking system.

Meantime, the local call money market continued to experience pressure as the BB borrowed Tk 727 core through treasury bills Sunday.

According to the BB circular, the banks have to deposit 20 per cent of their local deposit with the central bank as statutory liquidity ratio

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Chambers of CPA chairman, chief engineer ransacked

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Unidentified miscreants ransacked at least ten chambers, including those of chairman and chief engineer of the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) 'for some important documents' on Monday midnight.

In the first-ever incident of ransacking in the well-guarded area of Bandar Bhaban, safes and cupboards in the rooms, many of them belonging to high officials, were found open and files and documents in a mess, sources said.

However, missing or theft of any documents is yet to be detected.

It is suspected that the rooms were ransacked in a bid to take away one or two confidential documents of different investigations or projects.

Following the incident, the CPA suspended three on-duty night-guards -- Md. Nurul Haq, Taher Ahmed and Ahsan Ullah. Another three Ansars -- Syed Ali, Azad Ali and Quamruzzaman -- were closed for their suspected involvement in the incident. The night-guards were handed over to police for interrogation.

The CPA also formed a two-member committee headed by its Deputy Director (security) Khaleduzzaman to investigate the matter. The committee has been directed to submit its report in ten days.

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First hundred days of third BNP government

Column: Currents and Crosscurrents
MM Rezaul Karim

Announcement

Today's edition of *The Daily Star* comes out in 44-page including a 28-page special supplement on its 11th anniversary. Therefore, the issue is priced at Tk 10 only.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Feb 13		5-52 pm
Feb 14	6-32 am	

Prayer Timings

Feb 13		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-40	6-10
Zohr	12-45	1-20
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-56	6-00
Esha	7-30	8-00
Source: Islamic Foundation		

Admin blotched with political colour

ZAYADUL AHSAN

Transfer of more than 2000 government officials and disciplinary actions against a few hundred more over the last four months have given the government services an unprecedented and distinct political tinge.

Politisisation of the administration is nothing new. But what has taken everybody by surprise is the scale and speed with which the steps are being taken.

This ongoing process has spread a sense of insecurity in every sphere of administration-- starting from bureaucrats down to police and ansar officials. Again, an unprecedented on-contract appointments of 13 secretaries through modification of the law concerned testify to the government's notion that the new generation leadership in civil service cannot be fully depended upon.

The government looks at these actions as part of a move to 'depoliticise' the administration, which, according to it, the past Awami League (AL) government had massively politicised. However, such mass-scale administrative actions have never been seen before, sources said.

Large numbers of officials have been given 'punishment' postings because of their perceived political tilt.

Since October 10, 2001 when the BNP-led four-party coalition government took office, over 2000 officials from civil, defence, police, Ansar and other institutions have been transferred. Many of them have been made Officer on Special Duty (OSD) or sent into forced retirement as part of the punishment.

Moreover, about 300 more officials are also facing the axe on charge of

joining the AL-sponsored so-called Janatar Mancha to topple the previous BNP government back in 1996.

An unofficial cell of three former and two incumbent secretaries based in Hawa Bhaban, BNP's election office, made the lists of officials for transfer or sacking with the nod of the Prime Minister's Office, according to sources.

The cell distinguished some officials having pronounced political bias towards Awami League on the basis of the following criteria-- those who had served as field level officials (DC, SP, UNO, OC etc.) in the last five years, those who served different ministers of the Awami League government and those, as reported by the government's intelligence agency, who were actively involved in Awami League politics in student life. In addition, the officials who presumably have been undesirably benefited by the AL in the last five years have also been categorised as 'biased towards the AL. On the other hand, some officials believed to have been 'depred' have been promoted and transferred.

Sources said a number of officials have been queuing up at the Hawa Bhaban, widely referred to as the unofficial headquarters of the informal cell on transfer and posting. There are allegations that they had been lobbying with the committee members or those close to the committee.

A number of bureaucrats told The Daily Star that the recent reshuffle had grossly politicised the administration and that if this trend continued, the civil administration would no longer be free from politics.

Meanwhile, Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina has been saying that she would reinstate the officials retrenched and reward the officials affected by the government actions.

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Spring harbinger... cuckoos herald the advent of spring. Today is the first day of Falgun, the Bangla month of flowers and festivities.

Two college students murdered in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two college students who went out of their homes at East Sheorapara in the city on Monday night were found murdered yesterday morning.

Ashraful Alam Swapan, 22, a B.Com student of Dhaka College, went out of his house but did not return home.

Local people found him dead in front of a house at Sheorapara yesterday morning.

Being informed by local people, the victim's sister Hosne Ara went to the spot and identified the body with marks of injury. Alam was the second of two sons and three daughters of Abu Taher.

Neither Kafrul Police nor the victim's family could say anything about the reason for the killing.

The victim's mother, Fatema Begum, filed a case with Kafrul police but none could be arrested in connection with the killing.

In other incident, Sultan Nasir Uddin Taki, 19, a first-year student of BN College at Mirpur, went out of his house to call an auto-rickshaw for one of his family members.

He was found dead at Adabar in Mohammadpur yesterday morning.

Mohammadpur police recovered the body from near the tempo stand at Adabar at about 11 am yesterday and sent it to the DMCH morgue for autopsy. The body bore marks of injury caused by sharp weapons.

Police could not say anything about the reason behind the killing.

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PHOTO: STAR

Parents mourn the death of Ashraful Alam Swapan, gunned down in Sheorapara in the city's Mirpur area yesterday.

Sharp rise in bronchiolitis infection among children

NAIMUL HAQ

Bronchiolitis infection among children aged less than one year has shown an 'unprecedented rise' in the city, child specialists said.

At least 50 per cent beds in paediatric (children) wards in most of the city hospitals are now occupied by those with bronchiolitis infection. Besides, many newborn babies have been infected and this is quite unusual in Bangladesh, they told The Daily Star.

Bronchiolitis is a viral disease of the lungs that usually affects the narrow windpipes. The virus --

respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)-- causes secretion of mucous to block the narrow space in windpipes, resulting in an 'abnormally hurried breathing.'

Most of the hospitals including Dhaka Shishu Hospital, Institute of Child and Mother Health (ICMH) and Dhaka Medical College Hospital reported 50 to 70 per cent rise in admission of children with the viral disease this winter compared to that in previous years. The hospitals also reported an increase in the number of children with the infection at their outdoor wings.

General practitioners (GPs), however, usually

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PHOTO: STAR

Maksudur Rahman, 6, suffering from respiratory ailments lies in a bed at the Dhaka Shishu Hospital yesterday.

Iranian FM arrives tomorrow

M ANWARUL HAQ

Iranian Foreign Minister Dr Kamal Kharazi arrives in the city tomorrow on a two-day official visit which, officials say, will contribute to further strengthening bilateral economic and political ties.

Dhaka and Tehran are active members of the OIC and the D-8.

Dr Kharazi's visit is also being viewed as significant against the backdrop of changing scenario in the region, developments in the Middle East, setting up of a new government in Afghanistan and tension between arch nuclear rivals India and Pakistan.

Dr Kamal Kharazi is likely to carry a letter from Iranian President Mohammad Khatami for Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

Besides calling on the Prime Minister, Dr Khatami will also meet the Speaker and visit the Persian Department at Dhaka University.

He will also go the National Monument at Savar to pay tributes

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Is bank interest haram?

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance and Planning Minister M. Saifur Rahman yesterday said in the parliament that "if (bank) interest is haram (prohibited) then we all are living on haram", prompting a Jamaat-e-Islami MP to ask the chair to expunge the comment.

The lawmaker of Jamaat, the key component in the BNP-led coalition government, said Saifur's comment goes against the spirit of Islam and the constitution as well.

On a point of order, Mia Golam Parwar also claimed that the finance minister's remarks would mislead the people about Islam's definition of interest and profit. "The finance minister has put question marks over whether interest is haram (prohibited)," the Jamaat lawmaker said, accusing the minister of confusing interest with profit.

Earlier, replying to a question

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No funds for puja: IU VC's decree

IU CORRESPONDENT, Kushia

A decision by the vice-chancellor of Islamic University (IU) not to allocate funds for celebration of Saraswati Puja on the campus has whipped up concerns among Hindu students, teachers and employees of the institution.

At a meeting on Monday, Prof. Mustafizur Rahman, the vice-chancellor, told the Puja Uddhapan Committee led by the IU proctor that the university was not in a position to cooperate with the committee in celebrating Saraswati Puja to be held on February 17.

The vice-chancellor also said the university would not grant funds, nor would it provide security and transport facilities.

About 400 Hindu students, teachers and employees of the university have been celebrating Saraswati Puja on the campus since

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Kutubuddin Ahmed told The Daily Star yesterday.

Now the lobbyist firm will draft a bill seeking duty-free access of Bangladeshi apparel to be placed before the US Congress, he added.

According to the study, Bangladesh's apparel face high tariffs in the US. "In 2000, the 16 categories of apparel that represented more than 80 per cent of apparel imports from Bangladesh were assessed a trade-weighted average tariff of 15.5 per cent," the US lobbyist firm said.

If Bangladesh can gain duty-free status in the US market it would add one per cent in the country's national income and help workers employed in the RMG industry to retain their jobs, the study said.

However, the impact of quota-free benefit would be somewhat larger for Bangladesh as it would potentially increase the export and create more jobs in the RMG and textile industries.

The country's readymade garment sector is facing its worst crisis in recent times, which has aggravated after the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US. The shock forced closure of many factories and made about 400,000 RMG workers jobless.

The initial shock came due to the US's special treatment to other apparel exporters namely Jordan, Mexico,

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