

## From hypes to whimper

### NCB branch closure yields dicey results

INAM AHMED

The hype over closure of loss-incurring branches of the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) has ended in a whimper.

According to the NCBs, they could achieve only a meagre 25 per cent achievement in their target to either close down or merge the 134 branches, which have been in the reds over the last five years.

And among other things, political interference from ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers is responsible for the stalled branch shedding process.

More astounding is the fact that as soon as the closure plan was rolled out, 37 of the NCB branches turned

profitable overnight.

These include 20 branches of Sonali Bank, six of Janata, 10 of Agrani and one of Bangladesh Krishi Bank. However, bankers question the 'miraculous' recovery and doubt that this was a case of 'creative auditing'.

In case the recovery was genuine, it again demonstrated huge thefts in these branches during the loss-making years.

Meantime, Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed at a meeting with the NCBs yesterday himself questioned the 'miraculous' performance of the branches and asked the banks concerned to appoint audit firms to check on the records. He also asked the

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## Leash on long arm of a vile law

### Release of CrPc 54 detainees unless case filed in 72 hours, Law Commission proposes

ZAYADUL AHSAN

Police can arrest a person under Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPc) or Section 86 of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Ordinance only if they have logical reasons to suspect that he is involved in a cognisable offence.

And, the police will have to file a specific case against the person detained under Section 54 within 72 hours of the arrest. Otherwise, he will be released.

These were two of a set of recommendations the Law Commission yesterday sent to the law ministry on prevention of abuse of sections 54 and 167 of the CrPc and their amendment.

Section 54 empowers the police to arrest a person merely on suspicion, while section 167 allows the police to take a detainee on remand to make him divulge information.

Human rights organisations and the civil society have long been demanding amendment to the

sections, saying that the police make indiscriminate arrests under section 54 and abuse section 167 to torture detainees. There are also widespread allegations that the police in most cases realise money to spare a detainee from torture during remand.

The Law Commission also suggested an end to physical and psychological torture on a detainee during remand. It recommended that the police produce a detainee

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## Go for 25pc growth

### Saifur asks taxmen to raise tax-GDP ratio

RAFIQ HASAN

Minister for Finance and Planning M Saifur Rahman has asked the National Board of Revenue (NBR) to increase the growth of revenues by at least 25 per cent in the current fiscal.

The directive came yesterday at the minister's first meeting with the NBR officials after passage of the current budget.

Saifur said that given the current 10-11 per cent tax-GDP ratio -- one of the lowest in the world -- the revenue earning should grow by 40 per cent.

The government's target of revenues could be achieved, if "all leaks are plugged" and the NBR supervises the collection activities properly, he said.

The tax-GDP ratio in Nepal was more than 16 per cent, he pointed out.

The government set in the current national budget a target of Tk 23,750 crore in revenues to be earned from the NBR sources.

The amount is around 20 per cent higher than the previous year's Tk 20,730 crore. The target, however, was not achieved, as there was a deficit of Tk 439.2 crore at the end of the last fiscal year.

Saifur criticised the tax commissioners for their lax supervision of revenue collection.

He blamed the existing bonded warehouse system for giving unlimited facilities -- one of the main leaks in revenues. The officials have been instructed to immediately rationalise the bonded warehouse system.

The bonded warehouse should not allow any tax-free goods other than wine to foreigners and diplomats in the country.

Saifur also blasted the readymade garments sector

for tax evasion as many sell out goods to the local market.

"The garment industries is the only sector which contributes nothing to the national economy," the minister said.

About tax evasion, the minister said that there was mistrust between tax officials and businessmen.

Saifur also asked the tax officials to investigate and reveal the tax evasion cases by big companies like Akij Group and the English medium schools like Scholastica.

The tax officials have been directed to make a harmonised tax identification number (TIN) for the payment of VAT and income tax.

The minister asked the tax officials not to release any goods duty-free even to the state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

He also directed the customs officials to realise customs duty by auction, if any imported goods stay at the Chittagong port for more than 45 days.

State Minister for Finance Shah Mohammad Abul Hossain, NBR Chairman Shoaib Ahmed, and members AK Riazul Karim Manjur Mannan and Delwar Hossain also spoke on the occasion about the government's projection of increasing revenues from respective sectors.

At the meeting, the NBR officials said the deficit in revenues in the previous fiscal was because of overdue amounts with the SOEs like Petrobangla. Around Tk 800 crore remained overdue with the SOEs, sources said.

If the overdue amounts had been collected, the revenue earning would surpass the last fiscal target, they pointed out.

All tax commissioners, deputy commissioners and other high officials attended the meeting.



A student of Viharunissa Noon School and College yesterday chants slogans while her schoolmates watch in the background yesterday to protest the retirement Principal Hamida Ali.

## Ministry says Hamida Ali retired, not sacked

BSS, Dhaka

The education ministry yesterday said Hamida Ali, Principal of Viharunissa Noon School and College, was not sacked but sent into retirement as per Article 26 of Dhaka Education Board Regulations, 1979 relating to service rules of teachers of private educational institutions.

In a statement, the ministry said Hamida Ali was not removed with any motive, and mentioned provisions of Articles 26 and 27 of the regulation.

The statement explained that as per Article 26 of the Regulation, a teacher can work up to 60 years of age. The provision has been slightly relaxed in Article 27 where the age limit for the job has been raised by five years. Article 27 says, after reaching the age of 60, a teacher would be able to extend his or her job twice by two years and once by one year which would enable him or her to remain in job till 65 years.

The statement said after reaching 60, Hamida Ali had enjoyed extension for three times and completed 65 years of age limit on July 8

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## Protest rolls onto streets

### Govt won't extend Viharunissa principal's tenure

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The stand-off in the city's Viharunissa Noon School and College deepened yesterday after student, teachers and guardians expressed their resolve to stand square behind its Principal Hamida Ali, while the education minister said the government cannot extend further the contract of the principal.

Yesterday, traffic came to a standstill for over eight hours at four intersections of the city as hundreds of students, teachers and guardians of Viharunissa took to the street to protest the government decision not to extend the contract of principal Hamida Ali.

The students put up a barricade at the Baily Road crossing near the institution, leading to severe traffic tailback at Maghbazar, Kakrail and Shantinagar intersections.

Students were carrying banners that read, "We want Hamida Apa (madam)", "There is no alternative to Hamida Apa" and so on. The students and teachers skipped classes yesterday to register their protest against the government decision, which is in defiance of the institution's governing body's unanimous decision on April 30 to extend the contract of Hamida Ali by two more years. Her previous contract spanning five years expired on July 9.

Education Minister Dr. Osman Farruk yesterday said further extension of the service of Principal Hamida Ali would be a violation of government service rule.

"We can't violate the government rule by giving further extension to Hamida Ali," Dr. Farruk told the BBC Bangla Service.

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## AL links JS return to MP release

### Law will take its own course, says Speaker

STAFF CORESPONDENT

The current budget session of the parliament, scheduled to be prorogued today, is unlikely to see the return of the main opposition Awami League (AL) to the House.

The AL lawmakers will not join the House until the release of a party deputy, Col. (retd) Shawkat Ali, arrested Saturday on refusal of the bail by a magistrate court in Shariatpur.

After a meeting of the AL Parliamentary Party (ALPP) in the Sangsad Bhaban last night, AL President Sheikh Hasina told a press briefing that the arrest, when the House is in session, has curbed the MP's privilege.

On the other hand BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told the parliament that government had nothing to do with the opposition demand.

And Acting Speaker Abdul Hamid Siddiqui informed the House that the issue of Shawkat Ali was a subjudice matter and could not be discussed in parliament.

Both the speaker and the ruling party leader, however, urged the main opposition to join the House today.

Hasina said, "If his (Shawkat) release is ordered now, we'll join the parliament immediately."

The AL walked out of the Jatiya Sangsad Thursday night and did not attend the session yesterday.

Hasina alleged that the judge felt 'insecure' yesterday in hearing a fresh petition seeking Shawkat's bail, as hundreds of BNP leaders and workers -- many equipped with arms and sticks -- shouted slogans demanding death penalty to the AL MP on the court premises.

The judge of the Shariatpur District Judge's Court scheduled July 21 for hearing on the bail petition instead of granting the bail.

Speaking of the previous day's bail refusal by the magistrate court and subsequent arrest of her party legislator, the opposition leader said, "The magistrate court functions under the executive. There must have some directives from the higher authorities. General practice is that lower courts honour the High Court bail."

She said that when the MP was already granted bail by the High Court, it was expected that he would get the same treatment in the lower court.

She blasted the administration of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for taking

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## Disgruntled AJM workers clubbed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Seven workers of the Adamjee Jute Mills (AJM) were injured yesterday when police clubbed a procession of temporary workers of the jute mill at the Dhaka Baju area of the AJM premises, witnesses said.

Police also picked up at least four workers during the incident.

However, when contacted yesterday the Siddhirganj Police said they were not aware of any clubbing incidents or any workers being arrested.

The AJM management yesterday disbursed a total of Tk 23.16 crores among a total of 3,778 former officials, employees and workers who went on retirement during the last three years.

Disbursement of benefits of the first phase of the golden handshake will start today. Around Tk 290 crores will be disbursed among 19,093 officials, employees and workers in gratuity and other benefits.

Sources say, the AJM management decided to pay the last instalment of dues to 8,194 temporary workers of the mill on August 1.

Yesterday, some temporary workers went to the AJM compound expecting their dues to be paid. Realising they would not be given

their money, they brought out a procession of nearly 200 such workers around 11:00am at the Dhaka Baju area.

Police baton-charged the procession to disperse them. According to sources, police from the spot picked up Jahangir, Hizbul, Nantu and Lokman. Those injured were given first aid from nearby private clinics.

Yesterday's disbursement process started at 9:00am and continued till 4:00pm. A total of 32 booths were set up to hand over account payee cheques to the 3,778 former officials, employees and workers of the AJM.

Due to a cash crunch, nearly 2,200 of the 3,800 employees did not receive any post-retirement benefits since the last two years, while the rest were given partial payments against their total claims.

Some of the 3,800 former officials, employees and workers who went on retirement died during the last three years. A number of relatives of dead AJM personnel collected the cheques by providing nominee authorisation documents yesterday.

Relatives of dead AJM personnel who could not produce proper nominee authorisation papers were

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## Gas stations go on strike from July 16

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Petroleum dealers, distributors and petrol pump owners of the country have decided to enforce an indefinite strike from July 16 to press home their six-point demand.

Their demands include reasonable increase of commission and rent of tank lorry, and also proper arrangement for their security and compensation for operational loss.

In a press release yesterday, Bangladesh Petroleum Dealers, Distributors, Agents and Petrol Pump Owners Association (BAPEDAPS) announced the indefinite strike and urged the authorities to meet their demands immediately.

Earlier the association submitted a six-point demand to the government.

## Hearty news for heart patients

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Heart patients of the country need not go abroad for treatment since proper treatment is available right here in Bangladesh, said speakers at a press conference yesterday.

The Cardiac Care and Research Centre of ZH Sikder Women's Medical College organised the conference to discuss the advancement in the treatment of cardiac diseases in the country.

Currently, the department of cardiac surgery performs two bypass surgeries a day. So far, it has successfully operated on 775 heart patients with a negligible mortality rate. "Only six patients died among those who underwent heart operations," mentioned the speakers.

"People tend to go to India, Bangkok or Singapore with the blind belief that they would get better treatment in those places," said Dr Shams Munwar. "However, we've

seen cases where patients returned home with wrong diagnosis or improper treatment," he added.

The speakers noted that the coronary care unit of the hospital has proved itself as one of the best in the country, where acute coronary care and heart failure therapy are made available with sophisticated and lifesaving devices.

Commenting about the operation cost, which is forbidding for many, the speakers claimed that the hospital charges are as low as it could get.

"We charge around Tk 1.5 lakh for a bypass surgery whereas the Indian hospitals like Apollo Hospital can not do it for less than Tk two lakh," said Dr Shams Munwar. "We have to bear the cost of importing disposable equipment from abroad and even the manpower cost is high since doctors and nurses are brought in from abroad. Skilled nurses from Kerala charge around

Tk 20,000," he added.

Besides, the hospital has to pay taxes unlike hospitals in neighbouring countries, said the doctors.

Dr Motiur Rahman noted that the hospital is trying to bring down the treatment cost. The charge for angiogram has already been reduced from Tk 20,000 to 14,000.

Moreover, the hospital always offers discount for people who can not bear the cost, he added.

A team of cardiologists from Parkway Hospital Group and National University Hospital of Singapore is likely to visit the hospital weekly or fortnightly to operate

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