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Saifur rules out transit on bad roads

India termed "aggressive" neighbour



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance and Planning Minister Saifur Rahman yesterday ruled out transit and transshipment to India, saying the country's "entire road transport system will collapse within three months if the facilities are provided".

"Transit and transshipment to India is impossible because of the poor conditions of the roads," he told a seminar on trade with India and economic security of Bangladesh in the city. "The roads and bridges are not for trucks with a capacity of 30 to

35 tonnes."

Saifur, chief guest of the seminar's inaugural session at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) auditorium, also termed India aggressive and a difficult country to live with.

"But we have to live with them. So, any bilateral issue will have to be handled with cautiously and diplomatically," he said.

The finance minister acknowledged that Indian goods are cheaper and of better quality, and therefore flood "our markets".

"We have opened up our market to foreign goods and there is no reason why there should be a restrictive policy for Indian goods."

Saifur, in this regard, asked businesspeople to increase cost effectiveness of local products. "India is a regional power with a population of over one billion. They would not buy our goods, if these are not cost effective."

He singled out informal trade with India a potent threat to local industries but said it "cannot be stopped completely because of

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Amnesty's concern for arrestees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amnesty International has expressed concern for the safety of 15 opposition politicians, a columnist and a human-rights activist held incommunicado since December 8.

Opposition politicians were arrested without a warrant and are at a risk of torture during detention, a press release of Amnesty International said yesterday.

It said police arrested Awami League (AL) leaders that include Tofail Ahmed, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Shafi Ahmed, Mukul Bose and Sheikh Bazlur Rahman. Muntasir Mamun, a columnist, and Shahriar Kabir, a human-rights activist, were also arrested.

The press release said all except Tofail Ahmed were arrested in their residences. Tofail Ahmed was

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Why arrest of Shahriar, Muntasir, Shafi won't be declared illegal

High Court grants Tofail bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A division bench of the High Court yesterday instructed the government to send Shahriar Kabir, Muntasir Mamun and AL leader Shafi Ahmed to jail custody from police custody.

The court also issued a show cause notice on the government to explain within three days why the arrests without any specific cases and their subsequent remand would not be declared illegal.

Another High Court division bench granted Awami League presidium member Tofail Ahmed ad-interim bail, and issued a show cause notice on the government to explain within four weeks why Tofail would not be granted permanent bail.

This bench also started hearing the criminal revision of Saber Hossain Chowdhury yesterday. Saber's lawyers have challenged the legality of the remand order and refusal of Saber's bail.

On Saturday night, the police arrested Saber Chowdhury, Shahriar Kabir, Muntasir Mamun and Shafi Ahmed from their residences under Section 54. The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) court refused their bail petition on the following day, and placed them on a three-day police remand.

On Sunday night, Tofail Ahmed was arrested, on his arrival from abroad, from the Zia International Airport in connection with a murder case filed in 1996.

Yesterday, the division bench of Justice Hamdul

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Maria 'killer' arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday arrested the prime accused in Maria murder Momin, 22, in a shootout in Uttar Moishundi in Sutrapur two weeks after the death of the two-and-a-half-year-old girl.

Police also nabbed four accomplices of Momin, gang leader of a crime gang. They are Mithu, 23, Swapan, 22, Rubel, 24, and Zia, 23 from different parts of the city.

On Monday, police arrested Milon alias Mamun, an accused in the murder case in Keraniganj. Police said Milon later confessed to his involvement in the murder. On the basis of the information given by Mamun, Sutrapur police raided different areas including Sutrapur, Keraniganj and Narayanganj and caught them.

Sources said Momin fired at the police during the hunt. Police fired back at him leaving him injured.

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PHOTO: STAR

Prime accused in Maria murder case Momin (in handcuffs) and his accomplices in police custody after their arrest yesterday.

AL calls off tomorrow's hartal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League yesterday called off the countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal on December 12 in view of the Biswa Ijtema, the second largest congregation for Muslims across the world.

The AL withdrew the hartal call just a day after calling it on Monday in protest at the killings in the serial movie theatre blasts in Mymensingh and subsequent arrests of its AL leaders and workers.

Following an extended meeting of the AL presidium at its Dhanmondi office in the city on Monday, the party announced the shutdown as part of a four-day long series of programmes.

As part of the programmes, the

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US not sure of al-Qaeda in Bangladesh

Indian claim belied

AFP, Washington

The United States yesterday said it could not say whether the al-Qaeda terror network was active in Bangladesh, following a string of weekend bomb blasts that killed 17 people.

India's foreign minister Yashwant Sinha last month triggered a diplomatic row with Dhaka by claiming that "some al-Qaeda elements" had

taken shelter in Bangladesh.

But State Department spokesman Richard Boucher was unable to say whether the United States agreed with India's assessment, when asked if al-Qaeda may have had a hand in a volley of blasts in northern Bangladesh.

"We're all aware that al-Qaeda has had a presence in many coun-

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Detention of 2 journalists raised with Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

The US government has raised with Bangladesh government the detention of two foreign journalists in Dhaka and noted that a free press is critically important for the functioning of democracy.

According to a US State Department press release issued on December 9, the US government discussed the detention of the journalists with Bangladesh officials both in Washington and Dhaka.

The press release said a free press is critically important for the

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Khaleda leaves for Thailand tomorrow

REZAUL KARIM

A unique honour is awaiting Prime Minister Khaleda Zia as her Thai counterpart Thaksin Shinawatra will come here tomorrow to accompany her to his country for a three-day visit.

"I never knew about this type of visit -- a head of government coming to accompany another head of government to his country. This is really a unique honour for our prime minister and is unprecedented in the world. It's a big diplomatic success of Bangladesh," said Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan.

Khaleda Zia will leave here for Thailand tomorrow on a three-day official visit at the invitation of the Thai Prime Minister. She will lead a 42-member official delegation.

Besides, a 13-member high-profile business delegation will also visit Thailand with Prime Minister



Khaleda Zia to boost bilateral trade and Thai investment in Bangladesh.

The Thai prime minister will arrive at Shah Amanat Chittagong International Airport in a special aircraft at 11am to accompany Khaleda Zia to his own Chiang Mai

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Politicking with ADP projects

Review body finds 100 schemes with political tinge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A government appointed commission identified more than 100 projects in the current annual development programme (ADP) as politically motivated and unnecessary and suggested discarding these projects for better utilisation of development allocation for important projects.

The commission -- Expenditure Review Commission -- also suggested a guideline and criteria for selection of projects and allocation of funds to improve the quality of development expenditure. However, the commission did not recommend chopping the size of the Tk 19,300 crore ADP.

Also, the commission suggested framing of a defence policy and allocation of defence budget in line with the policy to bring about transparency and accountability in defence expenditure.

The commission yesterday submitted its 125-page interim report to Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman at his office in Bangladesh Secretariat. The commission members briefed him on the major issues the report touched upon.

"Whatever factors the commission identified as being responsible for the public resource wastage

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Six-shooter Lawson

Bangladesh sink to new low

SPORTS REPORTER

West Indies fast bowler Jermaine Lawson took six wickets for three runs as records tumbled at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The 20-year-old Jamaican needed only 15 balls to inflict a stunning collapse on Bangladesh and wind up the first Test of the Coca-Cola series inside three days.

The home side, set to score an improbable 397 runs to make the visitors bat again, were bundled out for 87 after the tea break. It was their lowest total in 16 Tests. Previously it was 90 against Sri Lanka in an Asian Test Championship match last year.

The meek surrender by an innings and 310 runs was the biggest margin defeat suffered by the fledgling Test nation. It was also the seventh largest margin defeat in the history of Test cricket. The West Indies' first innings score of 536 is the second highest total on this ground.

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PHOTO: STAR

Jermaine Lawson is congratulated by team-mates after claiming Bangladesh's last wicket to carve an innings victory for the West Indies on the third day of the first Test at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.