

Farm credit in vicious grip

Farmers pay one-fifth of loans in bribes, says Saifur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The loan disbursement process deprives farmers from proper farm credit, said Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman.

"The agriculture sector will not develop if a farmer has to spend Tk 2,000 to obtain Tk 10,000 in farm credit," said the minister in reply to a volley of questions in the Jatiya Sangsad.

The finance minister said opening new branches of the Bangladesh Krishi Bank at union level would not benefit farmers until the loan officers think differently.

He also expressed his frustration over the fact that the farmers do not get the full loan amount from the bank.

The minister also pointed out that though the government always considers loan waivers in case of crop loss, it was unrealistic to waive farm credits in a wholesale manner.

As an example, the minister drew attention to the financial hardships of the government because of the Tk 3,500 crore farm loan waiver during 1991-96 period.

Ruling party legislature Md Amjad Hossain Sarkar drew the minister's attention to the fact that farmers were facing certificate cases for non-payment of loan while industrial loan defaulters were getting away with their dues.

Saifur told the House that there were lots of cases as yet pending against industrial loan defaulters. He also advised banks to recruit

good lawyers to pursue these loan defaulting cases.

Replying to another query, the finance minister said the country's GDP growth rate would be around 5.2 percent in coming June comparing to 4.7 percent in the last fiscal.

Saifur also said, he had ordered the non-imposition of tax on small savings.

He spelt out some measures the government undertook to infuse dynamism in the capital market.

Saifur Rahman also informed the House that the government was trying to resolve problems that had risen over sending remittance from the USA following some recent developments there.

NGOs for more media focus on women

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The media, film industry and advertising agencies should have a code of conduct to project women in a way that will enhance their image and highlight their contributions to the society.

Speakers at a roundtable on "Role of Mass Media in Image Building of Women" here yesterday also emphasised proper education for women.

Dainik Prothom Alo in collaboration with NGO Coalition on Beijing Plus Five (NCBP), Bangladesh, organised the roundtable at a city hotel.

The discussants included newspaper editors, electronic media executives, litterateurs, NGO leaders, film directors, actors and actresses.

They said the media can make a historic contribution towards advancement of women. But, unfortunately, neither the print media nor the audio-visual and electronic media try to portray a 'balanced image' of women and highlight their contribution to the society, they noted.

Often, women are projected in a 'degrading' way. This is a negative approach. Women's access to information technology is also limited, which is hindering their advancement.

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SPRIGHTLY SPRING



PHOTO: STAR

Danseurs welcome the spring at the Institute of Fine Arts of Dhaka University yesterday. The national spring celebration council organised the programme.



The Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon, an environment group, yesterday protested in front of the Dhanmondi Boys' School the move to construct residence for the Speaker on the Sangsad Bhaban premises that would deface its architectural beauty.

Discontent over police promotions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities have taken an initiative to promote about a dozen police officials superseding their seniors.

The promotion committee is scheduled to meet on March 2 to take decision on 48 vacant posts of superintendent of police (SP). To fill up these vacancies, about 35 officials belonging to the 1991 BCS batch would be promoted. They are the senior most candidates, sources said.

But there is a move to fill up the remaining posts by promoting 'departmental officials' (not BCS cadre), depriving the next senior most BCS cadre officials belonging to the 1995 batch.

Departmental officials and BCS cadre officials have long been involved in a tussle over seniority and promotion.

Some 138 departmental officials were promoted to the position of

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Top jobs on contracts

REZAUL KARIM

The government has dished out 152 contractual appointments to key positions in the administration over the last 16 months or so.

With the 10 per cent presidential quota abolished, the government can now appoint all secretaries and additional secretaries on contract.

According to official estimate, there are 51 secretary-level posts, 35 held by full-fledged secretaries and the rest by additional secretaries. Twenty of the 35 secretaries are on contract and so are seven additional secretaries.

Contractual appointments, although discouraged in the past, are not unusual, serving and former top bureaucrats said.

The government usually appoints on contract bureaucrats, who have outstanding track records or are deemed irreplaceable at a given time, they added.

It can also retain services through contract officials, who play important administrative role but are about to retire or serve out their

terms.

However, the ones recently given contractual appointments have no extraordinary track records, highly placed sources said.

Some top bureaucrats have even got multiple extensions on their contracts.

Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr Kamal Uddin Siddiqui and Member of the Planning Commission Dr Shahi Mohammad Farid have their contract extended three times.

Also, the government has twice extended contracts of Parliament Secretary Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed, Communications Secretary Syed Rezaul Hayat, Education Secretary Shahidul Alam, Defence Secretary KM Ehsanul Haq, Local Government Division Secretary AYBI Siddiqi and acting Women and Children Affairs secretary AMM Reza-e-Rabbi.

Secretaries of establishment, home, health, finance, law, food and energy ministries are also on contract. So is the secretary of the Economic Relations Division.

Sources in the administration allege that favouritism and partisan consideration nowadays dictate contractual appointments.

The number of secretaries on contract will rise by the year-end, as many a secretary goes into leave preparatory retirement (LPR), they said.

On the other hand, most contractual appointees may get extension when their tenure expires.

Between March 1 and December 31 this year, 85 top bureaucrats, including 15 secretaries and 25 additional secretaries, will go into LPR.

Senior cabinet members and top bureaucrats admit that the contractual appointments have sparked rancour among junior and mid-level officials and also slowed down the administration.

The secretaries on contract prefer not to take major and prompt decisions, as there is no scope for further promotion, they said. At the

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JS runs without quorum

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The parliament yesterday started without the quorum as most lawmakers were late in turn up in the House.

The session resumed nearly 40 minutes behind schedule at 5:10pm with Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar in the chair and ran for more than 10 minutes without the required number of members in the House.

None of the lawmakers brought this quorum crisis to the Chair's notice.

Forty-six treasury and opposition lawmakers were present when the speaker started session.

The constitution and the parliamentary rules of procedure suggest that at least 60 members have to be present to make the quorum.

"If, at any time during which Parliament is sitting, the attention of the Speaker is drawn to the fact that the number of members present is

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Bush links Saddam ouster to creation of Palestinian state

AFP, Washington

US President George W Bush broadened his case for war on Iraq late Wednesday, saying that toppling Saddam Hussein would spread democracy in the Arab world and speed the creation of a Palestinian state.

"A liberated Iraq can show the power of freedom to transform this vital region by bringing hope and progress into the lives of millions," Bush said in a speech to the conservative American Enterprise Institute think tank.

The US leader drew his closest linkage yet between his accelerating campaign to disarm and topple Saddam, and languishing US efforts at breaking the deadly cycle of violence that has bled Israel and the Palestinians.

"Success in Iraq could also begin a new stage for Middle Eastern

peace, and set in motion progress towards a truly democratic Palestinian state," by depriving anti-Israel extremists of a "wealthy patron," Bush said.

"Without this outside support for terrorism, Palestinians who are working for reform and long for democracy will be in a better position to choose new leaders. True leaders who strive for peace; true leaders who faithfully serve the people. A Palestinian state must be a reformed and peaceful state that abandons forever the use of terror," he said.

Bush also refreshed his commitment to a Middle East "roadmap" to

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Over and out for Pioneer 10 after 30 years in space

AFP, Washington

NASA has lost contact with Pioneer 10, the space probe launched in 1972 on a mission of less than two years which just kept on going and defying the experts.

Pioneer 10 was the first vessel from Earth to pass through the asteroid belt and send back close-up images of Jupiter.

Just in case it came across other life forms, the space ship carried on board a gold plaque carrying images of humans, a map showing where Earth is and the date of its launch: March 2, 1972.

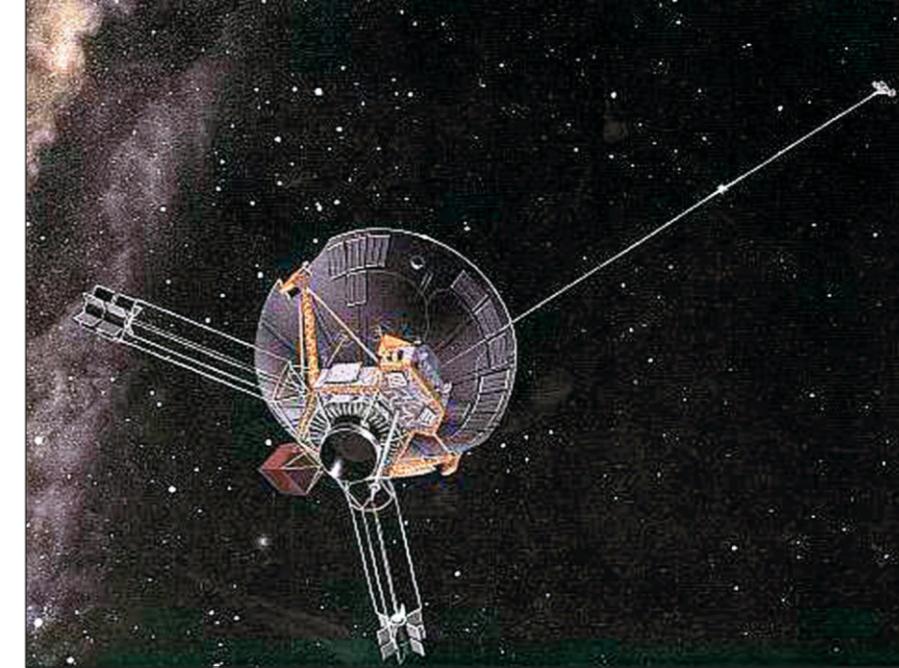
But it Pioneer's longevity which

astonished scientists and the mission was hailed by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) after it announced that it received the last signal on January 22.

Officials said the last of three efforts to contact the spacecraft on February 7 had failed. Experts had concluded that Pioneer 10's radio-isotope power source had finally broken down after three decades of loyal service.

Propelled by the most powerful engine ever used for a spacecraft, Pioneer 10 was fastest craft to leave the Earth, able to reach the Moon in 11 hours and Mars in 12 weeks.

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An undated NASA artist's concept obtained shows the Pioneer 10 spacecraft. NASA reports that after more than 30 years of travel through the solar system, Pioneer 10 has sent its last signal back to Earth.

PHOTO: AFP

Temple blown in bomb blast

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A bomb explosion destroyed a temple at Ratnapur union of the Agorjhara upazila yesterday noon.

Police said the bomb went off at the Mollapara Sarbojon Shitala Mondir at around 12 noon destroying the temple and the idol of Shitala. The one-storey single-roomed temple was under lock and key.

Police explosive experts reached the site in the evening and were probing the blast till filling of this report at 8:30pm.

Source: Islamic Foundation

Prayer Timings

Feb 28

Mar 1

Fair

Juma

Asr

Maghrib

Esha

Sun Rises

6:01 pm

6:21 am

5:30

12:15

4:15

6:06

7:15

7:45

6:01 pm

6:20

1:20

4:30

6:11

7:45

6:01 pm

6:20

1:20

4:45

6:45

7:45

6:01 pm

6:20