

Saifur seeks Delhi help for roads

Indian countervailing measures go against free-trade dictum, businessmen told

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, *New Delhi*

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday sought Indian investment and technical assistance in developing Bangladesh road sector and pressed for greater access of its goods to the Indian market.

Saifur, now on a goodwill visit to India, also urged New Delhi to dismantle tariff and non-tariff barriers.

Bangladesh has drawn up an

ambitious plan to develop its infrastructure and welcomes Indian investment in the sector, Saifur told reporters after his address to members of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), the apex body of Indian industrialists, in New Delhi.

India can employ in Bangladesh the expertise in building its own infrastructure to help promote trade between the two countries, said



Chairman of Confederation of Indian Industry International Arun Bharat Ram, right, talks to Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman in New Delhi yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

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Alleged killer of Srikanta arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTG

An alleged member of the killing squad that murdered Srikanta Raxmit was arrested here Monday night.

The arrestee, Kamrul Hasan alias Titu, 27, was placed on a seven-day remand for interrogation yesterday. The Detective Branch (DB) police arrested Titu from Chhiriapara of Choumuhani under the Double Mooring Police Station at around 9:30pm.

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Aid tapers by one-fourth

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Foreign aid disbursement during the first eight months of this fiscal dropped one-fourth compared to last fiscal's same period.

And once again, the government blames cross-conditionalities of donors and red tapism for the fall in foreign assistance, which was one of the reasons for the government to slashed this fiscal's annual development programme (ADP) by Tk 2,100 crore.

During July-February of this fiscal, \$547 million in foreign aid has been disbursed against last

fiscal's \$680 million for the same period, marking a 24 per cent drop.

Because of the poor disbursement situation, the aid pipeline remains bulged at around \$5.5 billion.

Three years' figures since FY00 show that foreign aid has been continuously on the wane -- from \$1.575 billion in the first year to \$1.369 billion in FY01 to \$1.25 billion in FY02.

At the recently concluded Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr Kamal Siddique told donors that time consuming and complicated

procedures governing aid allocation, procurement, disbursement and reporting and monitoring requirements are leading to slow disbursement of aid.

In January, the government and donors formed three working groups on procurement, financial reporting and auditing and training. These groups have been working to identify modifications of government and donors' policies, procedures and practices to improve efficiency, and accountability and transparency of development assistance.

At the BDF meeting, the Asian

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'Politics, not business barrier to gas export'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main problem of exporting gas to India is political, not commercial, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman told BBC Radio yesterday.

"Our government is not that anti-export, but there should be a safeguard issue in it. But the opposition parties have made our lives miserable. To take a decision on this issue, we need to reach a political consensus," said Saifur, now on a goodwill visit to India.

Referring to the reports of two national committees on gas, Saifur said, "The committees had said there was some exportable gas surplus, having regard to the country's own requirement. This is more of a political problem than a commercial one."

"I believe if a resource is not

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BSF takes back 9 push-in victims from no man's land

BSS, *Thakurgaon*

After an 18-hour ordeal on the no man's land at the Pariya frontier, nine Indian citizens were taken back yesterday afternoon by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) after a failed push-in bid, official sources said.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) thwarted the first push-in bid at 6:00am on Monday, following which the nine Indians were herded together by the BSF near pillar

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Rohingya refugee repatriation starts again

123 depart for home; 150 more will go today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Cox's Bazar*

Repatriation of Rohingya refugees resumed Monday after over a couple of years with the return of 123 refugees from 20 families to their homeland Myanmar.

Another 150 refugees are expected to return today.

The repatriation process began following an agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar under the mediation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The Rohingya refugees have been in Bangladesh for the last 12 years.

They will be repatriated twice a week -- on Mondays and Wednesdays. Officials said 21,658

refugees are still waiting for repatriation.

According to official estimates, 250,877 Rohingyas crossed border and took refuge in Bangladesh between October 1991 and June 1992 to escape persecution by Myanmar's military regime. Since then, 2,33,727 have returned home.

After 1992, many more entered Bangladesh, but the government did not recognise them as refugees. These people are now scattered over Cox's Bazar, Bandarban and Chittagong.

The birth rate in the refugee camps surpassed the repatriation rate, which increased the number of Rohingyas sheltered in Bangladesh.

Depression over City huffs on hot spell

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The city is living through a severe hot spell, though the depression in the Bay of Bengal is over.

Last night, the depression crossed the Myanmar coast, south of Akiyab, and turned into a land depression, the meteorological office said.

The office announced that the sea was safe and asked the ports not to show any cautionary signal.

The met officials further said that the heat wave was not unusual. Yesterday, the highest temperature in the city was 36.1 degrees Celsius and the lowest 27.8 degrees Celsius. In the morning, the humidity was 65 per cent and in the evening 61 per cent.

The sufferings of the city dwellers increased owing to e r r a t i c

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Land remains hills' Achilles heel

PINAKI ROY, *back from CHT*

A vital body constituted to resolve land disputes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) sits on its hands while land clashes rage upsetting the peace process.

The Land Commission, thrown up under the landmark CHT Peace Agreement five years ago, is yet to start business, while about 35,000 cases of dispute grew as the real millstone around the region's neck.

The cases, most of which pit Bangalee settlers against the tribal

people in Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari hill districts, still hold the potential for igniting a fresh spate of violence, locals said.

The CHT peace pact, signed between the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) and the past Awami League government on December 2, 1997, brought an end to decades of bush war that claimed hundreds of lives in the region.

Land dispute was in the eye of the violence and foot-dragging on the key issue may further frustrate the tribal people, tribal leaders said.

"Most problems of the CHT would stand resolved, if the government settled disputes over hilly lands," said Gautom Chakma, a prominent PCJSS leader.

The contour of land conflict is even greater. Over 35,000 cases are pending before law courts, but many more go unreported as tribal people generally tend to skirt litigation, locals said.

And the land disputes are snowballing every day. As the hills people

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