

Banks asked to cut interest rate

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Parliamentary Committee on the Ministry of Finance yesterday asked all commercial banks to slash interest rates to prop up investment and employment.

Mushfiqur Rahman, chairman of the committee, presided over the meeting at the Sangsad Bhaban. Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan, representative of Bangladesh Association of Banks, high officials of the finance ministry and different commercial banks attended the meeting. Members of the committee were present.

Saifur disclosed in the meeting that the finance ministry would sit with the business leaders to discuss fiscal and monetary policies every three months to improve investment. Funds from the World Bank would be used to improve infrastructure problems, he said.

The finance minister said commercial banks charge high rates to earn excess profit. The spread between the cost of fund and lending rate in Bangladesh is as high as 4 percent, which should be between half a percent and 1 percent, the minister said.

He said banks spend lavishly on luxury, which does not reflect the social condition of the country. "Rooms of the bank executives are larger than the one used by the

prime minister," he said.

He said such luxurious spending must be stopped to lower interest rates and added that the government has lowered rates on savings interments to pave the way for cutting lending rates by banks.

Saifur said he was criticised by his cabinet colleagues for lowering rates on savings instruments, which affected the small savers and pensioners. Still, the government stuck to its decision to help banks cut their lending rates, he said.

The BB governor said interest rates in Bangladesh are the highest compared to Pakistan, India or Sri Lanka. He said in spite of initiatives by the central bank, the banks are not responding positively.

Addressing the meeting, President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) Abdul Awal Mintoo said the Bangladesh Bank should intervene to cut interest rates of banks.

He said the central bank should give interest to commercial banks on their cash reserve requirement.

Representatives of commercial banks said the government should not impose any restrictions on commercial banks to cut rates.

The banks have started slashing interest rates following the measures taken by the finance ministry and the central bank. Rates would be cut further in the coming days, they said.

Saber surprised at ignorance of Haris

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina's Political Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury yesterday said people would not be confused by 'immature' comments by Haris Chowdhury.

"The prime minister's political secretary lacks common sense to understand the difference between a non-MP being included in a parliamentary steering committee and a political secretary of the leader of the opposition conveying a letter as her envoy," a statement of Saber said.

The statement expressed surprise over 'ignorance' of Haris, the prime minister's political secretary.

On Friday, Haris ridiculed the AL leadership for sending a non-MP to the CPA headquarters with a letter of the opposition leader and objecting at the same time to the inclusion of non-MPs in the steering committee for the CPA conference.

1 killed in road mishap during hartal hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A businessman was killed yesterday when a pick-up hit his autorickshaw at College Gate, Shyamoli during the hartal hours.

Syed Abdul Qader Badsha, 45, was going to visit his father at Tajmahal Road, Mohammadpur from his residence at Block-B in Mirpur section-1 on a three-wheeler.

A speeding pick-up hit his mishuk from behind at College Gate at around 12:30pm, injuring both Qader and the driver.

Locals rushed Qader to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where the doctors declared him dead. The driver is now undergoing treatment at the orthopaedic hospital.

On information, former water resources minister Abdur Razzak and Qader's relatives rushed to the DMCH.

The victim's relatives said he had a sweater factory in Gazipur and several other businesses of food items and garments accessories.

Incidentally, Faruk, 30, an office assistant of New Model High School at Dhanmondi, was run over by a pick-up van on Mirpur Road on August 28 during hartal enforced by the Awami League.

Hizbut chief

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turned into a murder case.

The accused in the case include Zahid, Sanullah Nuri, Mahmudul Hasan, Hossain Selim, Mizanur Rahman, Syed Hossain, Jamal alias Kamal Sharif, Islamil, Mofazzal Mohammad Abbas and Saiful.

The complainant in the case said Panni sent his men to distribute leaflets among the people of Pagla area. His men were also distributing similar leaflets by his men in Gazipur and Madaripur, where also they made attacks on local people, the complaint added.

"We preach our ideology through our leaflets," Panni told journalists at Fatullah Police Station yesterday. "If one is convinced we are right, one may follow us. We never force any one."

About the Pagla incident, Panni said, "I know nothing about it." He has over 200 supporters across the country, he added.

In reply to a question, he said his followers keep hammer and gul (tobacco powder) with them to protect themselves from attacks by others on some pretext.

Meanwhile, a book titled 'Islam Islam No' written by Panni was banned during the Awami League rule.

Police said they are trying to find national and international links of Hizbut Touhid. They suspected the organisation gets foreign funding.

Earlier on May 5 this year, Hizbut Touhid operatives killed a man at Gournadi in Barisal. A Hizbut member was killed in Kushtia this month, police mentioned.

"The Hizbut Touhid men seem to be very much organised and trained to fight against their rivals," said Helal Uddin, superintendent of police (SP) of Narayanganj.

Niko

FROM PAGE 12 responsible for the costs associated with a 6.67 per cent carried interest in the PSC held by the state-owned exploration and production company Bapex.

In announcing the acquisition, Niko said it is anticipated that approximately US\$17.5 million would be required to fulfill the initial obligations under the PSC and the JOA.

"US\$2 million was paid to ChevronTexaco prior to closing and US\$10 million put in an escrow account to cover past and immediate future costs of drilling and other activities," it said.

The announcement, made from Calgary, said future drilling and other activities beyond the escrow account would be funded with Niko's internal financial resources. The initial obligations are expected to be complete within the next 8-9 months.

"Niko, through its subsidiary, has agreed to indemnify ChevronTexaco for all claims and losses arising from environmental and other matters on block 9 lands, whether they arose before or after the closing."



PHOTO: STAR

Member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of China Jia Qinglin meets with visiting BNP Secretary General and Minister for LGRD Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and BNP Senior Joint Secretary Tareq Rahman at the People's Great Hall in Beijing Friday.

Man gets life

FROM PAGE 12 strangled her," the judgement observed.

Nilufer, 25, a meritorious law student of Dhaka University and daughter of a retired judge, was killed at her husband's North Bashabo residence on December 2, 1992.

The marriage took place in 1978. Nilufer was then a student of law, and her husband an engineer and contractor. Their only son Shouma is now 20 years old.

Mahbub filed a murder case with Sabujbagh Police Station, accusing domestic help Belal on the day Nilufer was found dead at their North Bashabo residence.

Harun-or-Rashid Khan, father of the victim, also filed a written complaint with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court during the investigation of Mahbub's case.

Belal gave a confessional statement before a metropolitan magistrate after being pressurised by Mahbub. But his statement was retracted later and Belal divulged the truth regarding the crime to the magistrate.

Police submitted a final report on April 12, 1995. Meanwhile, the complaint filed with the CMM's court was revived as a case with the same police station. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) was directed to probe the matter.

The CID submitted a charge sheet against Mahbub and Belal on April 22, 1995. Both the prosecution and the defence completed their argument on August 27. The court framed charges against the two on January 1, 1997 and the trial began on June 14, 1998.

Sixteen out of the 24 prosecution witnesses were cross-examined during the trial. The court also

recorded the statements of seven defence witnesses.

After the conviction, Mahbub was sent to Dhaka Central Jail, while Belal was allowed to go on his own bond.

Mahbub threatened the photojournalists taking snaps when he was being taken to the prison.

Jalalur Rashid, the victim's elder brother, expressed his satisfaction with the judgement, though he would prefer the death penalty.

"My father could not hear the judgement as he died on July 10 this year," he sighed.

Anjumara Ara Rashid, Nilufer's mother, is seriously sick and is not in a position to talk.

Assistant Public Prosecutor Jahanara Begum and Advocate Prakash Ranjan Biswas appeared for the state and advocates ABM Sharfuddin Khan Mukul and Abu Syed Sagar defended the accused.

Muktangon

FROM PAGE 12 suggestion of disturbing rallies.

"We take out all microbuses when political activists come to hold rallies, hunger strikes or any other programme."

He claimed that they were running the renting business ever since they developed the space filling lowlands 15 to 20 years ago.

Leader of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) Hasanul Haq Inu stressed the need for preserving the venue for holding rallies and other programmes according to the DCC declaration, evicting encroachers.

A leader of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) echoed the same voice. He also called for preservation of some more spaces for the purpose.

According to the drivers, about 80 microbuses that park in Muktangon pay Tk 1,000 each a month to two separate owners and workers associations – Tk 800 to the owners and Tk 200 to the workers groups.

A driver said the associations did not use the funds for the welfare of the drivers or owners.

Transport leaders, police, political influentials and the DCC employees share the money, he said.

Another driver, however, dismissed the allegation.

Zakir Hossain said they stopped taking contributions to the their fund following a government directive and ruled out the involvement of DCC employees.

Rafiq Bhuiyan, President of the Muktangon Microbus Owners Association, could not be reached for comment.

Dhaka sides with Palestinian cause at Nam meet

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan now attending the UN general assembly in New York has expressed Bangladesh's solidarity with Palestine President Yasser Arafat and called upon the quartet (US, Russia, EU, UN) for full implementation of the Palestine Road Map.

Khan made the statement during the Nam (Non-aligned Movement) ministerial meeting on Palestine held in New York on Friday, according to a message received here yesterday.

He said peace in the Middle East can only be achieved through realisation of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people which includes their right to self-determination and to an independent and sovereign state with Jerusalem as its capital.

"As a member of Nam Ministerial Committee on Palestine, Bangladesh would continue to remain at the forefront of pursuing a two-state solution as envisaged by the Security Council resolution 1397," he said.

At the end of the meeting, the Nam ministers issued a joint statement expressing their grave concern at the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. It also condemned the continuing and escalating Israeli military campaign against the Palestinian people, in particular Israeli threat against the safety and freedom of President Yasser Arafat.

Khan also attended a Nam foreign minister's meeting where he laid emphasis on the linkage between peace and development and called for addressing the twin challenges of peace and socioeconomic progress in the developing world.

He underscored the need for a comprehensive approach to counter terrorism, which also addresses its root causes.

The foreign minister called for a more comprehensive role of the UN in Iraq's political transition, reconstruction and institution building.

Hasina

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and a daughter.

Although there will be no formal programmes to celebrate her birthday, the AL and its front organisations leaders, workers and admirers will wish her at her Dhanmondi residence.

Different front organisations of the AL will organise mild mahfil on the occasion.

Nasrullah Khan

FROM PAGE 12 ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in early 2000 to wage a joint struggle against the Musharraf-led military regime.

Musharraf, Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali and government ministers expressed condolences on the death of the politician in separate messages to the bereaved family.

Benazir and Sharif, who are both living abroad in exile, also sent messages to the family and paid tribute to Khan's services to the cause of democracy in Pakistan.

Khan will be buried on Sunday in his home village of Khangarh in Muzaffargarh district of Punjab province.

CPA meet

FROM PAGE 1 Secretariat yesterday briefed the CPA headquarters in London about the preparatory works.

Meanwhile, no further move was taken by the speaker to ensure the opposition's participation in the conference as the CPA headquarters is dealing with the issue.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will inaugurate the conference on October 7 at Bangladesh-China Friendship Auditorium. So far, 522 delegates are expected to join the conference from 154 parliaments of 48 countries. Of them, 403 are MPs, including 52 speakers and 75 women MPs.

AL workers

FROM PAGE 1 used batons to disperse a gathering of the Mohila Awami League near the Saarc fountain on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue in Dhaka.

The demonstrators, led by AL Women Affairs Secretary Ivy Rahman, Mohila Awami League President Ashrafunnesa Mosharaf and General Secretary Fazilatunnesa Indira, were clubbed when they tried to march towards the Russell Square through Panthapath, breaking a police barricade.

At least six women pickets suffered injuries and another two workers -- Sonali and Rani -- were picked up by police.

The activists who paraded through Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue from Shahbag intersection alleged that they were charged mindlessly by both policemen and police-women.

At least 15 women activists were injured in a melee when police picked up another 16 demonstrators of the Jubo Mohila League, including its top leaders Nazma Akhter, Apu Ukil, Shamima Akhter and Adiba Anjum Mita, from Road No 27 at Dhanmondi when they were trying to stage a procession.

Ten people were injured when police clubbed a procession of Lalbagh AL near Hosseni Dalan in the old quarter of the city.

Police sealed off the Bangabandhu Avenue headquarters of the AL early yesterday by putting up barbed wire fences.

The Dhaka city unit of AL brought out a procession inside the barricaded area at about 10:00am. Police in force blocked their way out.

Another procession brought out from the AL central office by the party's Presidium Member Motia Chowdhury was also hemmed in by police at about 7:00am.

Demonstrators led by former home minister Mohammad Nasim, MP, staged a sit-in near Russell Square on the Mirpur Road for four hours from 11:30am.

A procession of the party led by frontline leaders Abdus Samad Azad, Abdur Razzak, Obaidul Kader and Abdus Shahid marched down the Mirpur Road.

A woman leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), student wing of the AL, was injured when police charged baton on their procession near the public library at Shahbagh.

Shafiuddin Bitu, photojournalist of the Daily Inqilab, suffered head injuries when a stray stone hurled by

Free trade

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encounter, the source said the recent ban on exports of cement, CI sheets and rods to India's north-eastern states has only made the list of Dhaka's products facing entry problems longer.

These issues will figure prominently in the three-day FTA talks bringing pressure on parties to remove these impediments. "It remains very important in Dhaka's concern in view of the staggering trade imbalance," he observed.

Pointing to launching of Dhak-Agartala bus service last week that was agreed in the JEC meeting, the source said it proved that both sides could work jointly and move forward ignoring side issues.

Foreign loans

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same time, we have tilted more toward supplier's credit and hard loans in recent years."

Between independence and June 30 this year, Dhaka has received as much as \$1,110 million worth of supplier's credit and 84 percent of such credit was received in the last 13 years.

Between fiscals 1990 and 1996, it alone accounted for \$344.76 million. From 1996 to 2001, such credit added another \$212.15 million and in the last two years, \$385.93 million more.

Bangladesh's outstanding debt on June 30 stood at \$1703.32 million from the previous year's \$16275.33 million.

Bangladesh received loans and grants worth \$2522.21 million in 2002-03 fiscal. Of this, the government fetched the major chunk -- 79 percent or \$1552.87 million, other public sectors claimed \$366.1 million, private sector \$279.64 million and NGOs \$279.64 million.

Dhaka paid less debt service liability (DSL) of \$902.12 million in last fiscal compared to \$915.10 million of the previous fiscal.

But there is one positive side in the current trend, which is that the government's capability to repay foreign loans has increased. Compared to exports, the DSL ratio in the last fiscal was 13.78 percent, whereas in the earlier fiscal it was 15.29 percent.

Against the total foreign currency earnings, the DSL ratio last fiscal stood at 9.39 per cent against 9.85 percent of the previous one. Bangladesh earned \$9603.84 million through exports and remittances in the last fiscal.

10,000 troops

FROM PAGE 12 and elsewhere, which have put a strain on America's armed forces. Some 20,000 of the "weekend warriors" are in Iraq and in nearby states.

Families of some of the part-time force members have expressed concern about disruptions to their lives.

The two brigades called to active duty on Friday will serve for a total of 18 months, 12 of them in Iraq.

a BCL activist at police hit him on the Bangabandhu Avenue.

Police picked up at least eight activists of the Awami Sechhasevak League, the volunteer front of the AL, from a demonstration at the Dainik Bangla intersection.

Another two activists of the front were arrested from Uttara.

The AL truncated its hartal programme by six hours in Sylhet division in view of a religious programme.

Our Chittagong bureau adds: The hartal disrupted cargo handling in the key port and shut most mills and factories in the industrial belt.

The strike shut the stock exchange, most banks, businesses and schools. Chittagong city AL General Secretary and Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury addressed a rally and held the four-party ruling alliance responsible for the spate in crime, including abductions, in the port city.

Our Khulna correspondent adds: The strike shut down Mongla port, mills and factories, most banks, businesses and schools. Roads were deserted of vehicles except for pedal rickshaws and train communication to and from the city was snarled.

Production in Crescent and Platinum Jubilee jute mills were stopped. Our Barisal correspondent adds: Incidents of bomb explosion, torching of rickshaws and blocking of roads marked the hartal in the city.

Pro-strike pickets exploded bombs on C&B Road and Band Road and in Sagordi and Chand Mari areas. They also blocked the Chan Mari Road for about half an hour.

Our correspondents said the strike in Bogra, Manikganj and Gopalganj was observed peacefully.

Govt backs out

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harassment.

Besides, the amendment does not have any guideline on how the fines should be slapped and leaves it entirely to the discretion of the judge. This creates a scope for abuse of the provision for fine and exchange of bribes over fixing the fine, as well.

The amendment also stipulates that before imposing any injunction on development works of a government institution, the court must first hear the government's version. In case of dealing with private citizens or organisations, the court must hear both parties before imposing the injunction.

Moreover, if the verdict of the case goes against the party that got the injunction order, that party will be liable to pay up to Tk 50,000 as demurrage.

Lawyers argue that this amendment will delay justice. The hearing of such a case cannot begin before the government sends the necessary documents to its lawyers. And this will also enable the powerful parties to get the upper hand.

For instance, if the injunction is on land encroachment, the process will help the encroacher to take possession of the land beforehand and appear before the court with necessary preparations before the injunction comes into effect.

Section 35 (b) of the amendment dictates that if any party fails to file petition or objection within a stipulated date, that party will have to deposit between Tk 1,000 and Tk 5,000 before the court accepts the petition.

Besides, the court can direct the parties to deposit Tk 2,000 to Tk 10,000 if it feels that the hearing is being delayed by filing an interim petition.

If anyone prays for adjournment of a case more than three times, he/she has to deposit Tk 6,000.

Lawyers object to this, saying it will allow one party to adjourn the case to the government's benefit and affect the other.

Vajpayee

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ture where it is providing training to militants. They are constantly recruiting young people for terrorist training," Vajpayee said.

He said that during his meeting with President Bush, the US leader acknowledged that cross-border terrorism has increased and that it should be stopped.

Asked whether it was fair to assume that his peace initiative started in Srinagar in April has ended in New York with the slinging match, the prime minister said "whatever has happened is not right and should not have happened. I do not think the peace initiative is over, it should continue".

Vajpayee rejected a suggestion that continuing the peace process was a sign of India's weakness.

During the 45-minute interaction, Vajpayee answered questions on developments in Iraq, UN reforms and his talks with various leaders, including Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Asked about Pakistani Permanent Representative at the UN Muni Akram's remarks in the General Assembly Friday that India was the "Mother of all terrorism," he quipped "Do I have to answer this? The level of the debate has come down. It is not good. I do not know the context but it is wrong. India is the mother of one billion people."

Maintaining that India has been fighting the war against terrorism for years, Vajpayee said the country would fight on its own. Now India's fight had become part of the fight against global terrorism.