

Govt eyes \$350m WB credit next fiscal year

UNB, Dhaka

The government expects over \$350 million as development credit support from the World Bank in the next fiscal year beginning July 1.

The amount will be made available after approval by the bank's board in June this year, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman indicated after a meeting with a World Bank mission here yesterday.

"We've received very good commitment. We expect at least \$350 million this year," he said, expressing the hope that the bank's board would endorse the credit under the second phase of its development credit support programme.

World Bank executive Sadiq

Ahmed, who led the mission, told reporters after the meeting that Bangladesh needs to raise its GDP growth to at least 7 percent to come out of the poverty trap.

Rahman also endorsed the notion, saying that such a growth rate is a must for Bangladesh to achieve the millennium development goals that include halving poverty by 2015. "For this, we need additional supports from external development partners."

Apart from looking for supports from external sources, the finance minister said local resources must be used in priority areas in a prudent manner and without wastage.

During the discussion, the World Bank mission inquired

about the progress of setting up an independent anti-corruption commission as well as governance, domestic revenue mobilisation and project implementation capacity.

It felt that the privatisation process has slowed down and needs to be accelerated.

The finance minister briefed the mission about the latest development regarding the anti-corruption commission, saying the commission will be an excellent one equipped with prosecution and financial authorities.

The new procurement act, effective from October last year, will be a good instrument to curb corruption in government purchase, he told the mission.

Help AL realise its 15-point demand

Hasina urges professionals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked professionals including engineers to help her party realise its 15-point demand including a stop to violence and corruption by the ruling coalition activists' and curbing of price spiral of essentials by February 10.

"We have placed a set of demands before the government to free the people from the miserable situation created by the BNP-Jammat-led coalition government in only two years of its rule," Hasina told the concluding session of 48th convention of Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh at its premises in Dhaka.

Political vengeance of the coalition government has been pushing the country towards a disastrous and dangerous situation, she noted. "Moreover, politicisation and nepotism by the ruling alliance have created a suffocating atmosphere where the government officials, who are not loyal to the ruling parties, are

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PHOTO: STAR

A 102cm-long Gharial, a crocodilian species, believed to be less than a year old, was captured on January 1 in the Padma in Nagarghat.

Gharial found in Padma

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

A baby Gharial, considered globally one of the most critically endangered crocodilians, was captured from river Padma here early this month making wildlife biologists optimistic about its quiet breeding in Bangladesh.

Some fishermen netted the 102cm-long juvenile, believed to be less than a year old, on January 1 from the Padma of Nagarghat on the outskirts of Rajshahi city.

Informed after 15 days, zoologists of Rajshahi University Prof M Altaf Hossain, Dr Abdul Mannan and Dr Selina Parveen purchased the Gharial at Tk 500 from Abdullah, a fisherman who was rearing it in a ditch at

Nagarghat.

"The accidental capture significantly indicates that the fish-eating reptiles are still surviving here," Prof Altaf Hossain said.

RU zoologists wondered these reptiles were surviving amidst massive sand-mining, human disturbances, intense fishing, siltation and pollution.

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PERC REPORT

Huda terms comment on Airport Road baseless

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda yesterday termed the report of the Public Expenditure Review Commission (Perc) on the beautification and development of the Airport Road 'totally baseless', 'irresponsible' and 'adventurous'.

He said the Perc report should not be taken into cognisance as it was prepared in an irresponsible manner.

The commission should not have made such remarks before

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2 cops feared dead in Barisal boat capsized

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Two assistant sub inspectors (ASI) of police are feared dead in a boat capsized on Wednesday at Charvata on the estuary of Dhanshiri-Gabkhan-Bishkhal rivers, about four kilometres from Jhalakati town.

The accident happened when a boat carrying 10 armed police and Ansar personnel was hit by a double-decker motor launch MV Belayet near Char Vatarakandi at about 9:45pm. The boat was headed for Ponabalia to conduct a raid.

Eight police and Ansar personnel were rescued by the local people, but Assistant Sub Inspector

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Outlaw quizzed over VDP man's killing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Paikgachha police yesterday quizzed an alleged underground operative for his alleged link to the killing of a VDP (Village Defence Party) member.

Akram Hossain, son of Syed Hossain of Tala in Satkhira, was interrogated yesterday morning. Police nabbed him bullet-hit after a brief gunfight with his gang at Katipara Bazar on Wednesday night, sources said.

Akram's accomplices from the outlawed organisation also snatched a police rifle during the shoot-out, they added.

Meanwhile, Batiaghata police held Jahangir Sheikh of Batiaghata.

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Prayer Timings		
January 23		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-45	6-20
Juma	12-15	1-20
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-45	5-51
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation



PHOTO: STAR

Tailors stitch time away under the shade of Bulbul Lalitkala Academy in Old Dhaka in their everyday efforts to stay afloat, but gluts of readymade clothes now threaten to force them out of job.

REDUCED RATE BTTB to show separate bills for int'l calls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) plans to show bills for the international calls made through its recently introduced special access code (012) in a separate head from February.

The state-owned lone land phone operator is to produce the separate call index to bring transparency in its billing sheet as the calls those calls would fall in reduced rate category, sources said.

Currently, the BTTB shows distinct call indexes for local, NWD (nation wide dialling) and ISD (international subscribers dialling) calls. Under the new plan, it would introduce a fourth call meter for 012.

"It will facilitate customers as they will be able to monitor their billing account," said a top BTTB

official on condition of anonymity.

The BTTB had already asked all of its exchanges to exhibit the new call meter, he added.

To remain competitive with operators of the internet telephony, the BTTB introduced reduced call rates for five international destinations -- the US, Canada, Malaysia, the UK and Australia.

A call made to fixed phones or cell phones in the first three countries was fixed at Tk 7.50 per minute. But BTTB subscribers will have to pay Tk 18 per minute for dialling to mobile phones in the UK and Australia.

The BTTB would soon bring Italy, Germany, France, Singapore and Indonesia within its reduced call rate bracket, sources said.

BTTB subscribers having NWD facility will be able to enjoy the reduced call charges.

MANIK KILLING Int'l journo's forum calls for broad govt probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has demanded a thorough government investigation into the death of Khulna-based journalist Manik Chandra Saha of the daily New Age and a stringer for the BBC Bengali Service.

The IFJ, which represents over 500,000 journalists worldwide, in a letter on January 16 to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia expressed outrage at the death of the journalist. According to available information, despite several witnesses to the attack, the bombers managed to leave the scene after killing Manik Saha and the police are yet to release a statement, the IFJ letter faxed to the Prime Minister's Office also said.

Saha had recently informed the Dhaka Bureau chief of BBC World Service that he was under threat over his previously published articles on the illegal activities of a

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Drama in JS on blasphemy law

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday saw a drama on non-introduction of a blasphemy law by a ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) lawmaker as a private member's bill.

Abdul Mannan, chairman of a parliamentary standing committee and a former minister, turned up to the House after the Maghrib break to table his Dharmabomanona Nishindha Ain (blasphemy bill).

A few minutes after he took seat, his top treasury bench colleagues - BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar Hossain and

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Listed criminal held after shootout

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tejgaon police yesterday held a listed criminal in Green Road area after exchanging gunshots with a gang.

A police team went to Mostafa Goli in the area and approached a five-member gang at about 4:15pm. At this, the gang fired at the law enforcers, locals said.

Police nabbed Shahidul, an accused in a murder case and a listed criminal of Tejgaon area, while the others fled.

Babu, another alleged criminal, was hit by bullet but managed to escape, police added.

Budget revision likely if revenue target missed

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government may revise the budget next month if it fails to achieve the revenue collection target by that time, the finance minister informed International Monetary Fund (IMF) in a letter last month.

In a Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) attached with the letter, Minister for Finance and Planning M Saifur Rahman said, "We intend to track revenue performance closely and if shortfalls persist, we will take corrective actions in the context of a revised budget in February 2004."

Already, a resource committee yesterday began initial deliberations on possible revisions of the budget. The meeting, with the finance minister in chair, made a primary review of the resource and expenditure scenario, especially that of the Annual Development Programme (ADP), a finance ministry source said.

Bangladesh Bank governor, finance secretary and high officials concerned were present in the meeting.

In the MEFP, Saifur presented the IMF with an account of the revenue collection by National Board of Revenue (NBR) in the current fiscal year (FY). He said, "Total revenue rose by 15 percent year-on-year, but on account of non-tax revenue," especially the dividends earned by Bangladesh

Bank (BB).

The minister expressed concern at the meagre first quarter revenue collected by the NBR, which rose by 9.4 percent, compared with the 15 per cent annual target, largely due to shortfalls in customs duty receipts.

"We expect tax revenue to grow faster in the remainder of the year, along with an acceleration in the registration of additional Vat [value added tax] and income tax payers, and the phase in of the programmed revenue measures," Saifur noted in the MEFP. He sought the Fund's continued support for the country's economic, financial and reform programmes till December next.

For FY05, Saifur emphasised revenue mobilisation and improved efficiency of the tax system. In the memorandum, he also conveyed the government's determination to strengthen the tax administration, starting with plans to expand the Large Taxpayer Unit in early FY05 to cover withholding tax and Vat.

"We will decide the appropriate coverage of relevant taxes by the second PRGF [Poverty Reduction Growth Facility] review in consultation with the Fund staff," the memorandum read. "In addition, we intend to rationalise the tax system by reducing trade taxes, including supplemental duties in FY05 budget."

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PROTEST OVER CASE DISMISSAL

AL calls hartal in Satkhira tomorrow

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Satkhira district Awami League (AL) has called for an eight-hour hartal on Saturday in the district protesting the dismissal of the case filed with Satkhira court against 27 leaders and activists of the ruling BNP for attacking AL chief Sheikh Hasina at Kalaroa on August 30, 2002.

The ruling party armed cadres attacked Hasina's motorcade and besieged her car for 10 minutes, throwing shoes and bricks at it. They also fired shots and blasted bombs at noon, while she was going to Jessore via Kalaroa after

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Non-govt pry teachers warn of 72-hour strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of Bangladesh Non-government Primary Teachers Association (BNPTA) yesterday at a rally threatened a 72-hour hunger strike from May 24 if their one-point demand for nationalisation of their job was not met by May 20.

They also threatened to wear white shrouds and 'fast unto death' if the government still declined to meet their demand.

The BNPTA ended a 48-hour hunger strike at 3pm yesterday at Muktagong in the city yesterday

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Outlaws threaten to kill 9 Satkhira newsmen

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

The Purba Banglar Communist Party (Janajuddha), a left wing terrorist outfit based in the south-west, yesterday threatened nine journalists of Satkhira with violent death like Manik Saha's in a week.

The Janajuddha, which claimed responsibility for the killing of Manik Saha on last Thursday, has sent a letter to Satkhira Press Club president and general secretary that said nine more journalists working with different dailies are on its hit-list. Gaffar alias Tushar, Satkhira commander of Janajuddha, signed the letter.

The journalists facing death threat are Mizanur Rahman of The Janakantha, Kalyan Banarjee of The Prothom Alo, Suvash Chowdhury of The Bhorer Kagoj, Ram Krishna of The Jugantar,

Shahin Golar of The Khabor Patra, Kazi Dulal of The Gramer Kagoj, Abul Kalam of The Purbanchal, Abdul Bari of The Dinkal and Raju of The Sangbad, all working as Satkhira correspondents.

"I am Gaffar (and) my party nickname is Tushar (and) I have killed Manik Saha. Now guerrillas of my party will kill you throwing bomb in broad daylight," said Gaffar.

In the letter, he also asked the journalists not to write anymore about Manik Saha.

Meanwhile, referring to the latest death threats in Satkhira, Sigma Huda and Advocate Elina Khan of Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights demanded of the government to ensure safety of the journalists.