

COMMUNICATIONS MINISTRY JS body finds fund diversion, inaction

Smells a rat in burst of
roadworks in monsoon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary body yesterday flayed the communications ministry for failing to begin road maintenance work despite allocation of a huge fund under the annual uplift plan and for diverting part of the fund to unproductive purposes.

Members of the parliamentary standing committee on the planning ministry including Minister M Saifur Rahman expressed dissatisfaction at the Roads and Highways

(R&H) Department's failure to begin Tk 505 crore roadworks and diversion of Tk 46 crore from the fund to house and building construction.

The communications ministry got the fund under the Annual Development Programme to maintain 13,823.13 km roads across Bangladesh in the current 2003-2004 fiscal year.

The committee at a meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban asked the ministry to refund the money

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PHOTO: STAR

LEISURE RUSH

Tourists flocked to Cox's Bazar during a two-day break from routine life as the International Mother Language Day holiday on Saturday, a day after the weekend gave them a chance to enjoy spring in the world's largest beach.

HR state key to German support

Visiting MPs tell press

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A visiting German parliamentary delegation yesterday underscored upholding human rights as a pre-condition for greater economic and technical support for Bangladesh.

Not giving any threat of withdrawing support rather, we attached so much of importance to human rights as the first 30 articles of our constitution deal with valuing human rights," Johannes Pflug, chairman of the German Parliamentary Group for Relations with South Asia, said at a press conference.

"We also heard about human-rights violations in Bangladesh and had some reports on this from

various organisations but could not verify due to time constraints," Pflug said.

Josef Winkler, a German Green Party lawmaker, said, "During meetings in Bangladesh, we raised the issue of human rights but couldn't verify for ourselves."

Representatives of Bundestag (German parliament) also emphasised that the opposition's presence in the House should not be hampered and "its work must be given full visibility", urging the main opposition party to return to the Jatiya Sangsad and challenge the government only in parliamentary fashion.

Pflug led a group of nine

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Hasina rules out JS return chance

Tells German MPs
situation not congenial

UNB, Dhaka

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday dismissed the possibility of returning to parliament under the present situation and blamed the ruling coalition for vitiating the atmosphere in House.

"We had gone to parliament, but we're not allowed to speak on public misery and national issues... My microphone was switched off and filthy words were hurled by ministers at me. In this situation, we can't join parliament," she told a visiting delegation of representatives of Bundestag (German parliament).

During the one-hour meeting at her Sangsad Bhaban office, Hasina exchanged views with the German parliamentarians on issues of governance, especially the functioning of

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KARNAPHULI GARDEN GOLD HEIST

Three killed over booty share

Police looking for ringleader Babu

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three men involved in the February 5 looting of 53 kg of gold from two jewellery shops at Karnaphuli Garden City in Dhaka were gunned down Friday night over the share of booty, officials investigating the heist said yesterday.

Shahin, Sentu and Zahidul Islam were killed separately by hit men hired by the ringleader of an underground gang of criminals identified as Babu, investigators said quoting a fatally wounded Zahid who made a statement to police before his death at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) early yesterday.

Shahin was shot dead at Shyamoli on Friday night while police recovered the body of Babu the same night from Hemayetpur in Savar. Zahid was taken to Iqbal Road in Mohammadpur where the killers pumped five bullets into him, leaving him fatally wounded.

The three men were liquidated after they kept pressing Babu for their share of the booty -- proceeds from the sale of 20 kg of gold they had given Babu.

Zahid told police that Babu was supposed to give him and the two others Tk 45 lakh from the sale of the gold but had been dilly-dallying for

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

SOE sell-off through ministries illegal

Privatisation Commission writes PM

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The Privatisation Commission (PC) has requested the prime minister to cancel a cabinet committee decision to privatise majority of the state-owned enterprises (SOEs) through various ministries because the decision is unrealistic and in violation of the relevant law.

Although privatisation is one of the top reform agenda of the BNP-led alliance government, a shifting government policy has stalled privatisation of 34 SOEs over the last one year although all of them have been closed.

The shifting policy also stopped the PC from handing over 14 SOEs even after issuing Letter of Intent (LOI) to interested entrepreneurs.

More than 60,000 employees of 42 SOEs were given the axe since the government took office while only

four SOEs -- Zinat Textile Mills, Deshbandhu Sugar Mills, Nishat Jute Mills and Cornflower Mills Limited -- were privatised through the PC.

The government inaction regarding closure of the mills and handing them over to the private sector is failing to create new jobs, sources said, adding the machinery of these SOEs are also rusting.

As per an official plan, the government is supposed to privatise 100 more SOEs by 2005. But there has been very little progress so far.

PC Chairman Enam Ahmed Chowdhury says it's not the commission's fault that the process has stagnated. "Privatisation has slowed down since April because of lack of appropriate regulation," he said.

The stagnation arose out of a cabinet committee plan to involve the ministries in privatisation

instead of the PC, although there is no explicit rationale behind such a plan.

In early February, the PC in a report to the prime minister said the commission was left with only six SOEs for privatisation due to the cabinet committee decision, although the PC was legally made and equipped to handle privatisation of all SOEs.

Legally, only the PC can privatise SOEs.

At the same time, the World Bank also wrote to the government in a similar vein following its Appraisal Mission on Enterprise Growth and Bank Modernisation. "It is crucial for the government to make a decision on this (the PC's effectiveness) quickly to ensure that the privatisation process proceeds without legal hitches and is

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

372 Rajuk staff axed, same fate awaits 41 more

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) yesterday fired 372 of its staffers who were appointed during the last Awami League (AL) regime.

Another 41 Rajuk employees also await the same fate, as the Ministry of Housing and Public Affairs decided recently to sack 413 of them following an inquiry regarding their appointment process.

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Toll-takers gun down trader in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Extortionists yesterday shot dead a businessman as he failed to pay them toll at Karipol village in Mirpur upazila.

A gang led by infamous criminal Karibul Islam of the locality opened fire on Mizanur Rahman Mithu, 40, son of late Minhaz Mdndal, at Karipol bridge when he was returning home by a motorcycle at around 2:00pm and left him dead on the spot, police said.

Locals rushed to the spot and caught Karibul of Yusufpur village under Daulatpur upazila, while

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AMAR EKUSHEY OBSERVANCE

Sirajganj bomb blast hurts 7, two bombs retrieved in M'singh

AL-BNP clash leaves 25
wounded in Begumganj

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A powerful bomb blast wounded seven people during an Amar Ekushey exhibition at Damdam Bazaar, Ullapara in Sirajganj while police recovered two bombs from near the Shaheed Minar at Phulbaria Degree College in Mymensingh on Friday night.

The explosion took place at around 8:00pm on the first night of the exhibition when a folk song programme was going on. Local youths organised the three-day exhibition marking the International Mother Language Day.

Among the injured, three were admitted to Sirajganj General Hospital.

Our Mymensingh correspondent said the bombs were wrapped in papers and some local people on suspicion reported to police about them at around 10:00 on Friday night. A police team led by Additional Superintendent of Police

MD Akkasuddin Bhuiyan rushed there.

Police cordoned off the area until army bomb experts from Ghatil Cantonment led by Major Ali Reza recovered the bombs at about 3:00pm on Saturday. After exploding the devices at Kushtia, the army experts said there were no splinters in the abandoned bombs.

They said the bombs weighing about a kilogram contained gunpowder and were made locally. The experts put the range of the bombs at up to 50 yards.

The recovery sent a chill among the people, prompting authorities to hurriedly shift the main programme of offering wreaths to the nearby Pilot High School Shaheed Minar.

The college authorities cancelled the Ekushey programmes at the Shaheed Minar. However, Ekushey programmes were observed in the town amid tight security.

The ASP later told The Daily Star they were probing the matter and

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Canon
Digital camera

RANGS GROUP

U-19 WC CRICKET India's run ends

SPORTS REPORTER

South African brought a high-flying India down to the earth as the second phase of the 5th ICC U-19 World Cup resumed yesterday after a days break.

India ran South Africa close before losing by just three runs. On a disappointing day for Asian giants, Sri Lanka also suffered a 19-run

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'My sorrows all for you'

Abducted hotelier writes his son

MONIRUL ISLAM MONU, Bandarban

Seventeen days into his abduction, a resort hotel director wrote an emotive letter to his son back home on

Thursday, moving his family in Bandarban to tears and renewing doubts about law-enforcement agencies' rescue operation.

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WB team talks BDF agenda with Saifur

Focuses on law and order, governance, aid utilisation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two World Bank (WB) vice-presidents yesterday discussed the deteriorating law and order, governance, aid utilisation and other issues with the finance minister as a preparation for the upcoming

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Tk 8 lakh looted from JB in Rajshahi

BSS, Rajshahi

Miscreants looted Tk 8 lakh from the cash counter of the Janata Bank's Corporate Branch at Shaheb Bazar in the city yesterday morning.

Police quoting bank officials and witnesses said 3/4 miscreants went to the counter and suddenly snatched the money when the cashier left his chair for a while at about 10:45am.

Guard and other officials caught one of them -- Abdul Haque, 45, a resident of Gandaria in Dhaka -- and handed him over to police, while others fled with the money.

Police picked up the cashier and guard for interrogation. A case was filed with Boalia Police Station.

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