

Collateral-free farm loan from Apr 14

Saifur asks NGOs to cut rate to 12pc, warns of govt funds freeze

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Following the interest rate waiver on agriculture loans, the government yesterday asked nationalised commercial banks (NCBs), including Bangladesh Krishi Bank, to provide collateral-free loans to farmers from Pahela Baishakh (April 14).
The government believes the waiver of cumulative interest on farm

loans will directly benefit around 15 lakh small and marginal farmers, as it will free them from the burden of loan and associated harassment.
Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman at a cabinet meeting yesterday instructed the banks also to revoke all orders on attachment of property against certificate cases on agriculture loans and arrest warrants against farmers.
Prime Minister Khaleda Zia

chaired the weekly regular cabinet meeting at her office.
Interest rates on agriculture loans would be lowered to 8 percent from 10 percent at the same time.
The rates on loans given by micro-credit NGOs through Pali Karma Sahayak Foundation need to

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8



Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina, left, exchanges views with business leaders at Hotel Purbani International in Dhaka yesterday where the businesspeople asked her to give up hartal as a political tool.



PHOTO: STAR

Security in Old Dhaka tightened

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has beefed up security in violence-scarred Old Dhaka deploying uniformed and heightening intelligence watch after a spate of businesspeople killings.

A high official told The Daily Star yesterday that the government deployed uniformed police in force and 100 undercover police teams, each comprising 20 men, in different business hot spots in the old quarter.

A large number of intelligence agents have also been dispatched to Old Dhaka, a matrix of narrow lane and by-lanes, to hunt down criminals and uncover their hide-outs.

The plainclothes police teams

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

Same killers out to wipe out witnesses

Cops say on trader, son murders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Killers of Old Dhaka businessman Shamsul Haq and his son Russell Sheikh continue threatening their family on the phone as police and intelligence agencies have failed to hunt prime suspect Kajal and others down even four days into the double murder.
Police say they have mounted watch on and around the house of the businessmen after they received a complaint from the family and Detective Branch, Criminal Investigation Department (CID),

Special Branch and other agencies concerned are working separately to net the criminals.

Several teams have left Dhaka for undisclosed destinations to arrest Kajal and his associates.

Police suspect that the same killers of Shamsul and his son killed Buddhu and Hannan at the Mitford hospital premises Tuesday night and watch trader Rejaul Karim Selim on March 4 in a desperate bid to conceal their identity.

"We are aware of that (Tuesday's killings) and their killing had links to

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Essentials' prices still high

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After experiencing an unchanged price situation in the kitchen market for the last three weeks, city dwellers might again face a price hike, especially of vegetables, if the current drought like situation lingers on for another week or more, city traders cautioned.

The price situation, especially of vegetables and spices stayed the same since the last rise three weeks ago. The prices of soyabean oil, atta, pulses and ginger, which experienced a significant rise during the previous months, seem unlikely to come down immediately, traders in the city kitchen markets said.

In the city's Hatirpul kitchen market yesterday, per kilogram ginger was selling at Tk 65-70 from Tk 35-40 three weeks ago, soyabean selling at 58-60 a litre, a two-kg packet of atta at Tk 32, up from Tk 28 only 3-4 weeks ago, and pulses especially masur (lentils) was selling at Tk 44.

In the same market the prices of all sorts of powder milk like Dano, Diploma, Kwality and other baby foods remained unchanged as they were for the last two to three weeks.

In city's Palashi kitchen market per kilo tomato was selling at Tk 10-12, potato was selling at Tk 8-10, local beans Tk 12-15, cucumber Tk

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Altaf sees prices down

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury yesterday at the first meeting after his takeover claimed that prices of all essentials went down except for sugar and ginger.

Speaking to the businesspeople at the meeting, Altaf alleged a few created a monopoly in the essentials market, leading to an unusual price hike.

"We have to trace those responsible for the price spiral," Altaf added.

He assured the meeting that the government would take 'all possible measures' to ensure security of the traders.

The minister, listening to the problems the business community faces, said if the interest of import

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Tk 28,000cr audit objections remain unresolved

Pac asks audit office to resolve pending issues in 6 months, volunteers to share workload

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Public Accounts Committee (Pac) yesterday asked the comptroller and auditor general (Cag) to resolve within the next six months thousands of pending audit objections regarding finances of different ministries between 1971 and 1990.

Sources concerned said this period could alone account for over Tk 20,000 crore of alleged embezzlement out of the total unresolved audit objections involving Tk 28,000 crore during the 1971-2002 period.

Due to the heavy backlog, Pac decided to share the workload with Cag while Pac will deal with the cases from 1990 till 2002. The committee will discuss its overall progress on October 31, said

advocate Harun Al Rashid, a committee member.

"We have asked the Comptroller and Auditor General's office to dispose of pending objections and recover public money or suggest ways to take actions against those responsible. Cag will clear up as many cases as possible and inform the committee about its progress every two months," Rashid told The Daily Star after a meeting at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday.

Pac also formed a subcommittee to find the 'culprits' in misappropriation of over Tk 12 crore in purchase of medicine and equipment in 16 offices of civil surgeons, blaming high officials of the health ministry for the 'robbery'.

The five-member subcommittee

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Countdown to AL deadline begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Countdown to the April 30 deadline for the fall of the government set by the main opposition Awami League (AL) begins today amid a frenzy of political manoeuvring.

The AL has already announced a series of anti-government programmes and casting around for allies in street demonstrations and the ruling alliance leader BNP has unveiled a month-long programme from today to head off the opposition plan.

The BNP is also pressing Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad not to join the opposition agitation and former president Badruddoza Chowdhury is planning to turn his alternative platform into a political

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Magura businessman abducted, Ctg trader hacked to death

STAR REPORT

An unidentified armed gang abducted a leading businessman from his home in Magura town on Tuesday night in what appeared to be a ransom-motivated incident and unidentified criminals hacked to death a fish trader on the bank of Karnaphuli river in Chittagong the same day.

Police and witnesses said the gang stormed the house of wholesale grocer Sanatan Paul at Natun Bazaar in the southwestern town at about 11:00pm and injured his employee with gunshots as he tried to resist the abduction of the 45-year-old, our Magura correspondent reports.

Biswajit Saha, 26, who worked for Sanatan as a staff, was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with forehead wounds for better treatment.

Police seized a microbus from Abalpur village in Jhenidah, a neigh-

boring district, and found three bullets in the vehicle the abductors are believed to use in the kidnap.

Police could not rescue the victim nor arrest any suspect until 4:35pm yesterday.

Officer-in-Charge of Magura Sadar Police Station Mirza Sarafat Ali described the incident as ransom-intended.

PRIME SUSPECT FOR MURDER HELD

In the other incident, Karnaphuli police arrested 50-year-old fish trader Abdul Rahim's business partner Abdul Momin, 25, a poultry trader, from his house in the same area at 4:00am yesterday on charge of killing Rahim.

They retrieved Rahim's body from a bush at Maizzertek in Char Lakhya at around 10:00pm and sent it to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) for autopsy, our

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Declare Sangsad complex nat'l heritage

Urge architects of Asia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Architects Regional Council of Asia (Arcasia) has urged the government to declare Bangladesh's Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex as part of national heritage.

The Arcasia, a body of professional architects, has also asked the government to take necessary measures to place the monuments on the World Heritage List. It also invited international community of architects to extend support to this end.

The Arcasia at its recently held 24th council meeting has requested the government to refrain from constructing the residences of speaker and deputy speaker in the parliament complex to keep Louis I Kahn's master plan intact.

Asian architects bodies that represent the Arcasia are Institute of Architects of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

AL lawmaker charged with power abuse

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bureau of Anti-corruption (Bac) yesterday pressed charges against former state minister for jute and Awami League lawmaker AKM Jahangir Hossain for allegedly forcing jute ministry officials to rent his wife's house for the textile ministry's liquidation cell.

Bac said in the charge sheet that renting the house, some 15 miles from the Secretariat, caused loss to the public exchequer.

It also filed a case against three others including two high officials of Bangladesh Jute Research Institute (BJRI) for alleged misappropriation

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Prayer Timings		
April 1		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-40	5-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-55	5-00
Maghrib	6-21	6-24
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation