

IMF's anti-poverty loan review begins today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission begins a 12-day consultation with the government today to determine whether Bangladesh will get the third instalment of the anti-poverty loan.

Bangladesh already got two instalments of the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF), each of \$70 million, by fulfilling a number of IMF conditions.

During the meetings, the IMF will want to know about the government's steps regarding introduc-

tion of market-based interest rate on savings instruments.

The government has already reduced interest rates on savings instruments to fulfill the IMF's conditions for the PRGF loan. But the Fund wants further cuts.

In addition, it will want to know about the government's plan for savings schemes for pensioners and widows.

An energy pricing formula to periodically increase prices of electricity, petroleum and gas will be on the discussion table, too.

The current budget will be reviewed by the mission and the

next budgetary programmes discussed.

The six-member IMF mission to be headed by Nissank Weerasinghe will also take note of the government's steps on reforming the nationalised commercial banks. The government is now in the process of appointing an adviser to Rupali Bank for its sell-off and giving a company management contract to run Agrani Bank.

Besides, the mission will look into the result of the restriction on lending by the NCBs.



Photo shows detainees filing into a court hajat after their arrest yesterday as part of an ongoing police drive against opposition activists. Nearly 15,000 people have reportedly been detained since April 18.

Cloud overshadows healthy economic situation: Lummaux
UNB, Dhaka

A European envoy yesterday feared that a patch of cloud was appearing to overshadow Bangladesh's economic situation, which looks very encouraging these days.

"The situation is very encouraging. But, perhaps, cloud is appearing," French Ambassador Michel Lummaux said about how he visualises the economic development against the backdrop of political unrest and hartal.

The concern was expressed at the monthly luncheon meeting of foreign investors at a local hotel.

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RU APPOINTMENTS VC, pro-VC sued

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Seventy-four Rajshahi University (RU) officials, including the vice-chancellor and pro-VC, were sued yesterday following the 'controversial' appointments of 544 third and fourth class employees.

The accused are VC Prof Faisul Islam Faruki, pro-VC KAM Sahadat Hossain Mondol, the treasurer, register, deans of seven faculties, provosts of 15 residential halls, heads of 47 departments and the director of Barind Research Museum.

Eminent lawyer Abu Aslam filed
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Constitution amendment bill withdrawn

BSS, Dhaka

The 14th Constitution Amendment Bill placed on March 17 to introduce 45 reserved seats for women in parliament was withdrawn yesterday.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed sought permission of the chair to withdraw the bill as the House resumed its session after a one-month recess.

The Amendment Bill also sought provisions of displaying portraits of the president and prime minister in the government offices and transfer of power to the concerned executives on expiry of the tenure of local government representatives.

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Kidnapping fear stalks Kushtia

AMANUR AMAN, Kushtia

At least 13 teenagers have been abducted in the district since January 1. Of them, two were killed as their families failed to buy off their freedom, police rescued three, four are still missing and the rest were freed for hefty ransoms ranging from Tk 50,000 to Tk 2 lakh.

The spate of kidnapping and ransom demands has triggered off a widespread terror among the parents, guardians and teachers of

school and college going kids. Many of the panic-stricken guardians have stopped sending their children to school at all while some others, who can manage to do so, are accompanying their wards to and from the schools and waiting at the school gates all day long.

Authorities of a number of schools have also issued notices of caution to students and their guardians against possible abductions and asked police to ensure students' safety.

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Ctg AL starts collection of no-trust signatures

UNB, Chittagong

Chittagong Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury launched a three-day signature collection drive from Monsurabad to mobilise support of at least 25 lakh people to Awami League's no-confidence move against the government.

Members of outlawed political outfits abducted five school goers in January alone. They are Bipul Hossain, 12, of Alampur village, kidnapped on January 1; Sabita Bagchi, 12, and Shusmita, 12, of

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Violence fear hangs over today's Indian polls

Kashmir's ruling party chief escapes third attempt on life, ethnic separatists kill two in Manipur

AGENCIES, Srinagar

A shadow of violence hangs over today's Indian election, which will also take place in Srinagar, summer capital of disputed Jammu and Kashmir state and the centre of a 15-year insurgency against the Indian rule.

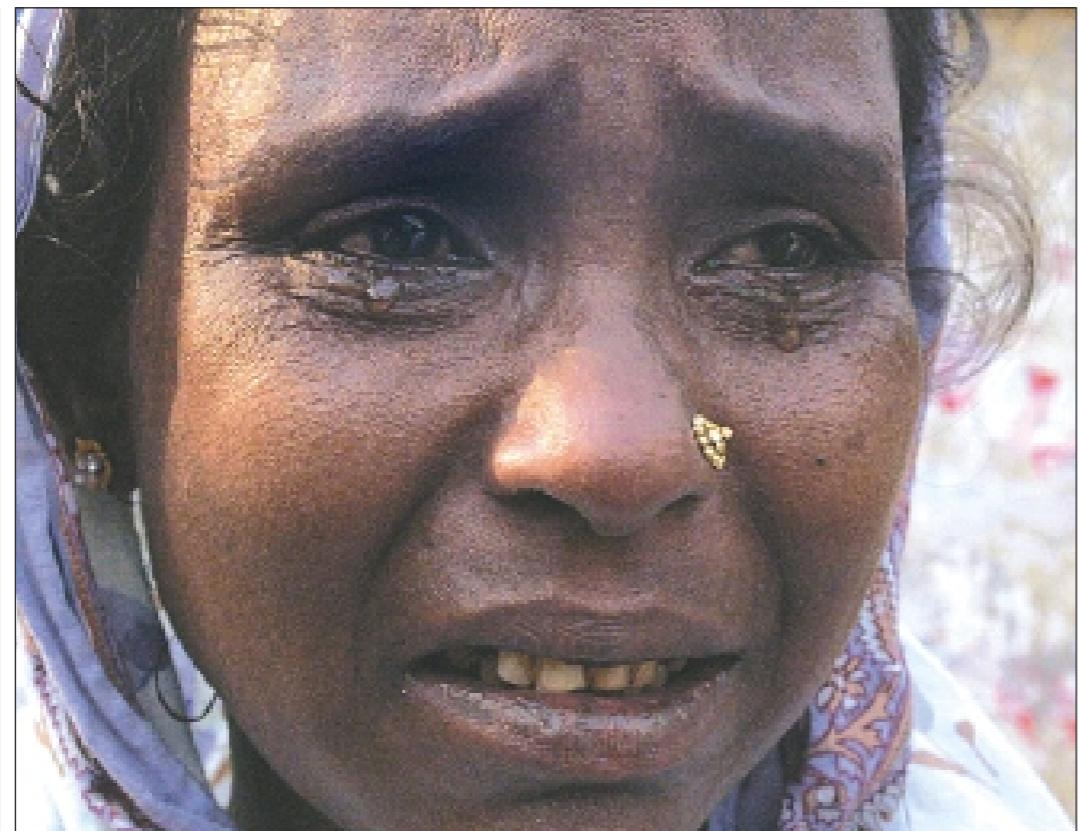
Muslim militants have threatened to disrupt the vote and carried out a series of attacks when polling took place in Kashmir's Baramulla constituency on April 20.

Mehbooba Mufti, the popular chief of Kashmir's ruling party escaped a bid on her life yesterday when suspected Muslim rebels threw a grenade at her convoy after an election campaign rally in southern Kashmir.

The grenade missed its target but killed one and injured 15 including a cameraman for an Indian television news channel, police said.

Much of the city was already

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HELPLESS, INNOCENT

Saleha's teenage son Alauddin was picked up by police from Shahidnagar in Mohammadpur on his way to work in a factory yesterday morning. They took him to a magistrate's court in Old Dhaka, with Saleha trailing them expecting a ready release of her minor boy by the wise judge. But, her hopes were crushed by the magistrate's pre-determined order to send Alauddin to the central jail. Many of his fellow arrestees, who had some money with them, could arrange for bail, but Alauddin was not one of them. "Where am I going to get the money for my son's bail? I don't have any money; he does not have any money," cried Saleha, a destitute devoid of any substantial earning, at the court gate waiting for some miracle that might get her son released without further harassment.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Final probe finds graft against DFP DG

REZAUL KARIM

A final investigation has found the director general of the Department of Films and Publications (DFP) guilty of massive corruption and misconduct.

The final inquiry report said it has been proved beyond doubt that DG of DFP Syed Mahbubur Rahman has embezzled over Tk 18 lakh

through fake bills without making four documentaries and three video films.

His actions were in violation of articles 3 (B) and 3 (D) of the Public Servant (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1985. "The allegations against the accused person have been proved undoubtedly and he has been found guilty," the inquiry

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Prayer Timings

April 26

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-20	4-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Magrib	6-29	6-34
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

4 children killed in US gunfire

Howard flies into Iraq; boat attack disrupts oil exports

AGENCIES, Baghdad

Four schoolchildren were killed by gunfire in Baghdad, shortly after a roadside bomb ripped through a US military vehicle, witnesses say.

Some witnesses said the children, all aged around 12, were shot dead by US troops who had opened fire randomly after the blast on Canal Street in eastern Baghdad. At least five other people were wounded.

The children had left their nearby school to look at the burning Humvee, the witnesses said. Children and some passersby were "celebrating" the attack near the vehicle when the deadly shots were fired.

The US military had no immedi-

ate word on the incident.

"I saw a child lying on the street with a bullet hole in his neck and another in his side," said a driver who witnessed the incident. "He had his schoolbag on his back. Some 15 minutes later his relatives came and took his body away."

Australian Prime Minister John Howard flew into Baghdad yesterday, just hours after suicide bombers took their war to the sea for the first time with an unsuccessful attack on Iraq's crucial offshore oil terminal.

Howard, a strong US ally, was scheduled to spend six hours at Baghdad's heavily guarded airport, where Australian troops are involved in air traffic control, to

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