

## EC commissioner pledges help after MFA phase out

UNB, Dhaka

European Commission Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy pledged to help Bangladesh weather possible shocks from phasing out of the MFA, asking the government to come up with imaginative but feasible proposals for the bailout.

His assurance came when Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury met him at the EC office in Brussels Saturday to convince him of the need to ease some conditions of the rules of origin (ROO) that determine business concessions from the European countries.

According to a message received here yesterday, Lamy said the EC is now framing a new GSP (generalised system of preference) scheme with favourable ROO that will come into effect in 2006.

He admitted that some transitional measures are needed in the meantime to help RMG-producing countries to face the problem associated with quota elimination through the phasing out of Multi-fibre Agreement (MFA).

Lamy said he is "fully aware" of the problems Bangladesh may face following MFA phase-out on January 1, 2005, and will do his best to devise some useful mechanism to help face the challenge.

He however suggested that countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Laos, Cambodia who fear adverse situation after quota elimination may benefit by directly approaching advanced developing countries that are tending to monopolise the market.

He also advised that countries like Bangladesh, who fear uneven competition in the post-MFA era, should talk to other international players on this issue.

"The giant RMG producers should be aware of the consequence

of their unbridled monopolisation of the global RMG market," he said, emphasising that Bangladesh apparel producers should try to explore the Japanese market.

Currently Bangladesh has little or no access to the huge Japanese RMG market, he noted.

Calling upon the EC to ensure effective market access in the EU for the least developed countries, Altaf said the much-appreciated Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative of the EC could not deliver expected results due to the stringent ROO.

The commerce minister drew attention to the fact that elimination of quotas by the end of the year threatened Bangladesh with a major unemployment crisis.

He pointed out that more than 3 lakh workers will be jobless even if only 20 percent of the 3,400 RMG industries of Bangladesh shut down in the wake of quota elimination. About 1.8 million workers, 80 percent of them women, are employed in the garment industries of Bangladesh.

Explaining the difficulties Bangladesh faces to meet the conditions tagged with the GSP scheme, mainly due to limited textile base, he drew attention to the fact that relaxed ROO enabled Bangladesh to raise its RMG exports to Canada by as much as 140 percent in 2003.

Replying to a query, Altaf informed the EC trade commissioner that the government has formed a National Coordination Council to reconcile conflicting interests of the RMG exporters and textile producers.

He mentioned that the government is seeking to adopt a balanced strategy so that the interests of the RMG sector can be duly protected without harming the local textile industries.

## Proshika chief

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yesterday, also did not receive any fresh warrant of arrest. A jail official said the bail order did not reach the Dhaka Central Jail till 7.30pm last night.

The HC granted ad interim bail for two months to Faruque, arrested on May 22, in nine out of 15 cases filed by the Bureau of Anti Corruption.

The court also issued rule upon the government to explain why the petitioner should not be granted regular bail.

Faruque will stay out of trouble if warrant of arrest is not issued in any of six other cases pending against the top man of a leading NGO.

A top prison official told The Daily Star last night he was unaware of any new arrest warrant until them but he would not be surprised if there is one by the morning today.

Guarded by an army of police, Faruque went to DMCH at 12 noon.

"We sent him for medical check-up as he was suffering from diabetes," said a prison official.

A doctor of medicine did general check-up in the hospital after Faruque underwent echocardiography (ECG), X-ray and ophthalmologic (eye) tests.

During the two-hour stay there, police did not allow any journalists to talk with Faruque and kept lens men at bay.

Meanwhile, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OPHRD) yesterday urged the government to release Faruque, says a Proshika press release.

In a letter to Prime Minister

## Stringent acid control law suggested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Acid Control Council yesterday suggested formulating strict acid control regulations within two weeks.

The ninth council meeting held at home ministry's conference room with State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar in the chair also proposed to motivate young generation about the adverse effects of acid attacks, meeting sources said.

Council members also advised to set up burn unit in all district hospitals in a bid to strengthen their services to the acid victims, sources added.

The meeting also sought to include acid victims, acid traders and public representatives in district-level acid control committees.

The idea of airing programmes on acid victims' sufferings on electronic media and door-to-door visits by field-level staff of health ministry throughout the country to create mass awareness was mooted.

Among others, Home Secretary Omar Farooq, director general of the Department of Narcotics Control, representatives from industries and commerce ministries and Acid Survivor Foundation attended the meeting.

## Trader shot dead

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him," said the victim's nephew Habibur Rahman.

The robbers took some cash and tried to turn tail by the taxicab when locals pulled the cab with stones and smashed its glasses, Habibur added.

Under attack, the robbers abandoned the cab near Kazi Tower and took refuge in it from where police later picked up three for interrogation.

Police said they are yet to identify the motive behind the murder.

## Govt stops grain

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the permission of the prime minister.

The ruling coalition also directed Deputy Minister of CHT Affairs Moni Swapan Dewan not to spend more than 25 percent of the cash allocation -- about Tk 1 crore -- in emergency fund on his own.

Moni Swapan can now only allocate Tk 25 lakh on his own and can spend another Tk 1.5 lakh out of this fund as deputy minister.

"The government seems to be limiting my power. Still, I have to carry out the job the prime minister has tasked me with. I cannot do anything without her approval," Moni Swapan told The Daily Star by phone last night.

The government reallocated 15,500 tonnes of grains for repatriated indigenous refugees in the FY 2004-2005 budget, which was withdrawn from the last budget.

With the permission of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, the deputy minister last year allocated the indigenous refugees 7,500 tonnes of grains from the emergency fund, as the refugees demanded.

"I had earlier implemented some income-generating small projects with grains for the poor of small ethnic communities in outlying areas. But I could not do anything last year, as it was spent on the indigenous refugees. This year all is gone," he said.

Other allocations for the CHT region remains the same -- 28,000 tonnes of grains for Bangla-speaking people in cluster villages, 2,100 tonnes for former guerrilla members of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity and 10,000 tonnes for the army in special fund.

## Dhaka, Khulna

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and 15 superintendents of police attended it.

Abdul Aziz said they will increase police patrol on highways and search all modes of transport during the anti-crime drive.

Coming out of the meeting, M Mahubb Alam, superintendent of police, Bagerhat, said they will adopt new tactics to hunt law-breakers in Khulna, Bagerhat, Sakshira, Jessore, Narail, Jhenaidah, Kushtia, Chuadanga, Meherpur, Magura, Rajbari, Faridpur, Madaripur, Shariatpur and Gopalganj districts.

## KL unlikely

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"When Malaysia was tasked to chair the OIC, we were also tasked to reform the organisation to make it more current to meet the challenges of globalisation," the foreign minister said.

In an interview with Chief Editor of the private news agency Enaytullah Khan last week, Albar said it would be easier to work for reforming the organisation if his country holds both the chairman and secretary general's posts.

"That being the reason," he pointed out, "we thought the best way is to put up our candidature" for the OIC secretary general.

When asked about Malaysia's position on Bangladesh's candidature for the same post, Albar said his country would go ahead with its bid for the OIC post because Malaysia wanted to work for the much-awaited reforms and restructuring of the OIC.

Turkey is another country vying for the post of OIC Secretary General.

The issues of electing a new OIC secretary general and reforming the OIC are expected to be discussed when foreign ministers of the member states meet in Istanbul, Turkey, for a three-day conference beginning today.

## 20km express

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at every congested area in Old Dhaka and all intersections in other busy areas for smooth transport of traffic and cargo.

The highway project is additional to other under-consideration schemes including the underground train service in the capital, a top official of the communications ministry said.

The government will also consider other projects in the future for further improvement of the traffic system in Dhaka where congestion is threatening to spin out of control because of growing population, he said.

"We are examining all possible ways to make the capital livable for its residents, whose number is going to double by the next decade."

Earlier, a local firm had proposed to set up 25km underground train line in Dhaka at a cost of Tk 2,000 crore.

The government also sought co-operation from Russia to set up the subway system in Dhaka and Moscow agreed to extend technical support.

A decision on the project is still pending.

## Iraqi sovereignty

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and have full control over their natural resources, a delegate who requested anonymity said.

The meeting was to reaffirm these priorities and call for a "quick return to sovereignty and self-determination for the Iraqi people," he added.

Representatives from Iraq and neighbors Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Syria and Turkey will hold a meeting on the sidelines, at the suggestion of host Turkey.

Delegates were also to tackle the conflict in the Middle East with OIC members reviewing a 200-page dossier titled "Palestine, Jerusalem, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Arab boycott of Israel," and pass more than 50 resolutions concerning Israeli occupation of Arab territory, an Arab minister said.

Central to discussions would be "ending the occupation of all Arab territories, lifting the siege of the Palestinian people and their president Yasser Arafat, solidarity with the resistance of the Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian people as well as a call for the deployment of international (UN) forces in the Palestinian territories," he told AFP.

Strong criticism from the OIC loomed for the United States, already ostracized in the Arab and Islamic world because of its deeply unpopular war on Iraq and its staunch support for Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

The conference was to "denounce the unilateralism" of Washington's foreign policy and stress the importance of the

"roadmap" for peace in the Middle East -- a blueprint for separate Palestinian and Israeli states by 2005 that is currently dead in the water.

Host Turkey is meanwhile hoping for a resolution supporting the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) because of its vote in favor of a UN-sponsored peace plan in April that would have ended Cyprus' nearly 30-year division.

The internationally-recognized Greek Cypriot south overwhelmingly voted down the proposal, but nonetheless joined the European Union on May 1.

The TRNC, recognised only by Turkey worldwide, enjoys observer status at the OIC.

"This would not be a formal recognition of the TRNC but rather a reinforcement of ties, and a call to end the (economic) embargo on the Turkish part of Cyprus," an Arab minister said.

"The Arab countries don't have a unified position on this question and will try to find a formula which will not endanger their excellent relationship with Greece," the ministers said.

OIC Secretary General Abdelwahab Belkeziz paid a visit to the TRNC last month during which he said his organisation would "do its best" to help Turkish Cypriots improve their economic, political and commercial ties.

Turkey was also strongly in the running to take over the four-year position of secretary general, with 59-year-old Ikmal Eddine Ihsan Ogali pitted against contenders from Bangladesh and Malaysia.

## 103 unapproved

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This cut means the new ADP will have 869 projects instead of 972 that were initially proposed.

At a National Economic Council meeting (NEC) on May 29 chaired by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, the government approved the Tk 22,000 crore new ADP. It contained 123 recommended new and 238 non-allocated new projects.

The planning ministry incorporated all the 123 projects in violation of the rules and the projects show specific allocations against them. It is unusual to show specific allocation against projects that are supposed to be cleared by several authorities first.

When the anomalies came to Finance Minister Saifur Rahman's notice, he instructed the ministry to take these projects out of the main annual programme and put half of them on the list of attached unapproved new projects without any allocation in annual development project of 2004-05.

The planning ministry, unfazed by ministerial criticism, went on to add 300 unapproved new projects and sources said lobbyists had many of them included.

Some of the new unapproved projects incorporated by powerful lobbyists after the NEC approved the ADP include survey for Dhaka city tube railway, special development of Dhaka and Rajshahi universities, expansion of Jamia'ul Falah and construction of a polytechnic institute in Kishoreganj.

"It means that throughout the new fiscal year, hordes of lobbyists will continue to put even greater pressure on the government to get allocation against the projects of their choice," said a planning ministry official, wishing anonymity.

"This will lead to implementation of the projects favoured by strong lobbies, not the ones with higher priorities," he added.

The ongoing ADP projects will need four to five times the funds allocated this fiscal year. Planning ministry officials said under relentless pressure from lobbyists the government tries to keep everyone happy by making nominal allocation to each project. But the projects cannot make much progress with the insufficient funding which ultimately go down the drain, the officials added.

## Six fishermen

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The strong winds and rough seas made searching for the lost fishermen too dangerous.

"The sea is so choppy and rough that we can't go out there," Kibria said.

A rescue official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said he was hopeful that many of the missing were able to swim to small islands that dot the coast, or were rescued by other boats.

Faridul Alam managed to swim ashore at Cox's Bazar beach Saturday after his boat sank.

"High waves tossed our boat about and it suddenly went down," Alam told The Associated Press from his hospital bed. "Only four of us managed to swim ashore."

The Daily Star correspondent from Barisal reported 24 people missing or feared dead, as seven fishing trawlers and motorboats capsized in the rough Bay.

Thirty-six of the 60 fishermen on the lost vessels were rescued ashore, Kuakata residents said yesterday evening.

Other fishermen rescued Mainuddin, who swam for hours after his trawler FB Alauddin along with two motorboats capsized near Narkel Baria off the coast Saturday afternoon.

The monsoon depression over the central Bay and its adjoining area moved northwest and was centred about 770km southwest of Chittagong port, 735km southwest of Cox's Bazar Port and 585km southwest of Mongla Port.

It is likely to intensify further and cross the Orissa coast near Bhubaneswar by this morning, a special weathercast by the meteorological department said.

(Material of AP, Reuters and BSS has been used in this report)

## No headway in Jubo Dal leader, cell phone trader murders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Investigators failed to arrest anyone till yesterday evening in connection with the killings of Jatiyatbadi Jubo Dal leader Kamrul Islam Biplob and cell phone trader-cum-repairer Morshed Mollah.

Mostafizur Rahman, father of Kamrul who is also a contractor of Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority, lodged a case with Mirpur Police Station on Saturday night accusing six people.

In the FIR (first information report), Mostafizur said that hired goons of Shamsheer might have murdered his son to grab a piece of Kamrul's land in Mirpur Section-1.

Sources said the local lawmaker recently 'insulted' Shamsheer after he erected boundary wall around Kamrul's plot.

Morshed's brother-in-law Niaz Haider, meanwhile, filed a case with Dhanmondi Police Station on Saturday night. In the FIR, he said that eight to 10 people killed the mobile phone trader inside his shop, Star Tel.

However, Morshed's family was not cooperating with them in tracking down the killers, police claimed.

"Morshed's wife mentioned two names while she was mourning on Saturday, but now she is keeping her lips tight before police," said the officer-in-charge of Dhanmondi Police Station.

Bangladesh Mobile Phone Traders' Association demanded immediate arrest of Morshed's killers and urged the government to place the case under the Speedy Trial Tribunal.

The association in a press release yesterday also urged the government to ensure security of all mobile phone traders.

## Pvt firms

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arrange interconnectivity among them on their own, pushing the cost of business higher, industry sources said. Allowing private interconnection operators would attract substantial foreign investment and enable local companies to form joint venture, they added.

The BTRC chairman said the commission has already finalised the interconnection guideline for existing and incumbent operators both in fixed and cell-phone segments.

He said private infrastructure companies would provide interconnection and other necessary services to telecoms operators, not end-users.

"This will bring competition to the sector and lower call charges," Murshed noted.

He said the government plans to reduce import duty on mobile phone handsets to help boost demand for cellular phone connections. The BTRC had proposed to lower mobile handset tariff at a flat Tk 1,000 to increase Bangladesh's teledensity and tele-reach, which is one of the lowest in South Asia.

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman in the proposed budget for the FY 2004-2005 suggested a uniform import tariff of Tk 1,500 for a handset.

The current duty is Tk 3,000 to Tk 4,000, depending on the price.

The number of mobile phone subscribers has grown around 85 percent a year on average in the past three years, according to Swedish telecoms equipment maker Ericsson. And the number is expected to reach around six to eight million by 2006.

## Indian

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agencies are likely to continue questioning Akhtar Hussain Qutubuddin Ahmed, a Dubai-based Indian businessman who was deported to Mumbai late Saturday night, in the city itself, putting off plans of shifting him to Delhi, in connection with his alleged attempt to sell Indian nuclear secrets to diplomatic mission in Dubai, police sources said.

Central police and intelligence agencies who questioned Ahmed at Sahar International Airport last night where he was detained on arrival from Dubai, have reportedly decided to keep in abeyance their plan to move him to Delhi for further probe, sources said.

"From the angle emerging out from Akhtar's questioning it appears that we may have to interrogate him in Mumbai itself," an intelligence official told PTI.

Ahmed allegedly procured the nuclear secrets from his brother who is a nuclear scientist in Mumbai, sources said, adding, his brother may also be summoned once relevant documents are received from Dubai on Sunday.

Central intelligence agencies and Mumbai Police officials are likely to meet this morning to decide future course of action.

Dubai police had arrested Akhtar when he allegedly sold Indian nuclear secrets to "diplomatic missions of a number of brotherly countries in UAE".

The arrest came almost two years after a surveillance operation by the security forces to find out whether he had worked with a network.

## Red Cross urges release of Iraqi prisoners

AP, Geneva

All Iraqi prisoners of war and interned civilians should be released when sovereignty is transferred to a new Iraqi government, according to rules governing war, a spokeswoman for the international Red Cross said yesterday.

"If we consider that the occupation ends June 30, that would mean it's the end of the international armed conflict," Nada Doumani of the International Committee of the Red Cross told the news agency by phone from Baghdad.

According to article 118 of the third Geneva Convention, prisoners of war should be repatriated without delay at the end of hostilities. Article 133 of the fourth convention says that interned civilians should also be released when conflict ends.

It remains to be seen whether the occupation effectively ends with the handover of sovereignty, however, and Doumani stressed that "the situation on the ground determines the facts."

"This is the legal situation: When the conflict ends the prisoners of war should be released according to the Geneva Conventions," she explained. "Therefore ... all people detained in relation to the conflict should be released unless there are penal charges against them."

Although Iraqis will run their own affairs after June 30, about 150,000 U.S. and other coalition troops will remain in the country to help

## CID presses

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Kashem Madhu and Haji Yakub are evading capture.

The CID submitted the chargesheet after a case was filed under the Arms Act for illegal possession and transportation of the huge consignment of deadly weapons seized at the Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited jetty on April 2.

Kabir Uddin Ahmed, CID assistant superintendent of police for Chittagong region, submitted the chargesheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Chittagong, showing 50 people as witnesses.

Police arrested 18 people, including Marium Begum, a local union parishad member. MA Aziz, Badsha Mia, Sheikh Ahmad, Mojibur Rahman, Akhter Hossain, Jahangir Alam and Jasim, believed to be part of a smuggling syndicate, are also among the arrestees.

Another case was filed with Karnaphuli Police Station on the same arms cache busted during off-loading from boats FT Shah Amanat and MV Khazer Dan on the Karnaphuli river.

The chargesheet of the second case filed under the Special Powers Act is yet to be prepared.

## Portugal dwell

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player during the team-talk, you don't see that glint in their eyes," he told the *Jornal do Brasil*.

His behaviour on Saturday appeared to reflect that sentiment.

It cannot be easy for a man accustomed to the cut-throat competition of South American club football to accept such a lethargic, uninspired display from his team.

## Iraq car bomb

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from his home in Baghdad's mainly Sunni Muslim Adhamiyah district.

The US-led administration has warned of the risk of an upsurge of attacks in the run-up to the formal handover of sovereignty to an Iraqi government on June 30.

**CARBOMB**

The car bomb that killed 12 people went off about 300 yards from US Military Camp Curvo as a police patrol stopped the bomber, who was travelling in the wrong direction on the road.

Lt. Col. James Hutton, a spokesman for the 1st Cavalry Division, which runs Camp Curvo, said 12 were killed and 13 were wounded in the blast. He said there were no US casualties.

Among the dead are four policemen and the bomber, said police Capt. Abdul-Razzaq Kadhem.

"I think this is the last gasp of the terrorists," Kadhem said. "Iraq will not die. We will survive this, we will survive this."

Police sealed off the area, but two charred bodies of policemen -- covered by blankets -- could be seen in one of the damaged police cars.

Eight civilian cars were damaged, Kadhem said.

The attacked marked the third car bombing in less than a week. Bombers blasted targets in two Iraqi cities Tuesday, killing 15 people -- including a US soldier -- and wounding 50.

A senior Iraqi police officer was shot and wounded during an assassination attempt.

General Majid Almani Mahal, commander of Atraf police station in Baquba, was attacked late Saturday as he drove through a suburb of the city 60km north-east of Baghdad.

"I have escaped from an assassination attempt," he said. "A group of armed people in a small car shot me."

The attack took place near an industrial neighbourhood five km south of Baquba at about 6:00 pm (16:00 GMT) on Saturday, Mahal said.

Baquba, which has a large US military presence, has witnessed a string of attacks including a suicide bombing last Tuesday which killed one American soldier and one Iraqi.

(Reuters, AP and AFP)

improve security under a U.N. resolution approved unanimously by the U.N. Security Council on Tuesday.

After the handover of sovereignty, detainees held by the Iraqi authorities will be subject to Iraqi law. But current prisoners who