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ADB ANNUAL ECONOMIC FORECAST

Bangladesh limps in post-MFA race

Economy bogged down in violent politics, high oil prices, quota phaseout

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

While China and India are taking over the global market, confrontational politics, high oil prices and adverse impacts of the quota phaseout in textiles are the major

bane holding Bangladesh back from exploiting its potentials.

"Frequent hartals are really affecting the economy," observed Hua Du, Asian Development Bank's Bangladesh officer-in-charge, yesterday.

Hartals cause a 3 to 4 percent loss of the gross domestic product (GDP), said her colleague Rezaul Karim Khan, a senior economist of the ADB.

Launching the bank's flagship

PRANAB-JOY MEET

Court orders judicial probe into BSS report

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday ordered a judicial probe into the validity of the news-item provided by the state-run news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) on Opposition Chief Sheikh Hasina's son Sajib Wajed Joy's meet with India's defence minister.

Advocate Hemayet Uddin Mollah, law secretary of Awami Juba League's city unit (North), yesterday filed a defamation suit against BSS Managing Director Gaziul Hossain Khan and Delhi correspondent Jahangir Hossain with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Warm reception awaits Chinese premier

Talks to focus on trade, investment, agriculture, education, defence issues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao flies into Dhaka this afternoon on a two-day state visit to Bangladesh that will further strengthen the excellent bilateral ties and cooperation in a wide range of areas including trade, investment, agriculture, education and defence.

The visit is being viewed as another milestone in the 'time-tested' brotherly relations between

the two nations since they established diplomatic ties in 1976.

Sources said talks between Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and her Chinese counterpart will cover bilateral, regional and also international issues of common concern. Several agreements between the two sides will be signed during the visit.

Jiabao will also hold talks with President Iajuddin Ahmed.

Moreover, he will have meetings

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Wen Jiabao

Visit to take partnership to new height

Says Chinese envoy

UNB, Dhaka

Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's visit will take to a new height the China-Bangladesh partnership in all-round cooperation, particularly in the productive fields of trade, industries and investment, the Chinese mission in Dhaka said yesterday.

"This visit aims at enhancing mutual trust, deepening friendship, expanding cooperation and planning the future in the spirit of being good neighbours and good partners," Chinese Ambassador Chai Xi told the news agency in an exclusive

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Govt plans to procure 9 lakh tonne rice

Drive begins April 25

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With a target to collect nine lakh tonnes of rice and one lakh tonnes of paddy during the current boro season, the government will start a procurement drive from the 25th of this month.

The procurement prices of rice and paddy have been fixed at Tk 14.50 and Tk 13.25 per kg, an increase by Tk 1.25 for rice and Tk 0.85 for paddy from the previous rates, considering the supply constraints and upward trend in the market, sources said.

A high-level meeting of the Food Planning and Monitoring

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Activists of the National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled show off eight demands of the disabled inked on a placard at a colourful procession in the city yesterday to mark the National Disabled Day.

Recruiting agents drive up migration costs

PORIMOL PALMA

An unholy competition among overseas employment recruiting agencies is helping to drive up prices for migration, leaving workers destitute at home and vulnerable abroad to exploitation.

A Saudi company has to pay 200 rials to the government for each foreign worker it engages. The companies themselves used to pay the fee, but they later passed the charge on to the recruiting agencies when they saw that the agencies were competing among each other to buy visas for foreign workers.

As a result, Bangladeshi recruiting agents in Middle Eastern countries buy visas from local employers at highly competitive rates, ranging from 600 to 800 rials or Tk 9,000 to 12,000 in the case of the Saudi Kingdom, a managing director (MD) of a recruiting agent said, requesting anonymity.

"This practice of charging fees is not legal according to the Saudi government, but it is a widely exercised open-secret in the country," the MD said.

Employers used to provide visas and airfare to the workers free of cost 10 years ago, but once the sharp

competition set in, visa prices began increasing while salaries for workers went down, according to the Welfare Association of Repatriate Bangladeshi Employees (Warbe) and the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU).

The government-fixed rate to migrate to the Middle East is only Tk 70,000, according to official sources. But none of those who go to the Middle East countries pay less than Tk 1.5 to 3 lakh, as has been learnt from a number of recently returned migrant workers.

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JS set to miss out on CPA's Sydney meet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh parliament will have no representation at the executive board meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) in Sydney on April 10-15 because of the speaker's 'courtesy visit' to China at that time, sources said.

Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui, a member of the CPA board, was invited to attend the meeting but the speaker has asked him not to leave office in his absence.

Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar is now attending the April 2-8 Inter Parliamentary Conference (IPU) in Manila and will then visit China for a

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Teletalk SIM on sale at six times higher price

STAR REPORT

State-owned mobile phone company Teletalk's SIM (subscriber's identification module) card for cellular connection is now selling in the open market at a rate about six times higher than the company's offered price, even though the authorities have suspended distribution of subscription forms and have not appointed any dealer.

Some shops in Mohammadpur, Mirpur, Mouchak and other areas of the capital were found selling Teletalk SIM cards, attractive to

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ACC remains divided over staffing

Sends 3 organograms to govt, bars journo from speaking to members

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has decided to send as many as three draft organograms to the government for a final decision after the three-men Commission remained divided over staffing even four months into its launch.

The members at a meeting yesterday also decided not to speak to journalists on the grounds that media reports create confusion about the Commission.

Two commissioners of the anti-graft watchdog drafted as many organograms, while the other one was prepared almost 10 years ago by

the Hamid Committee. The government had formed the committee to recommend reforms to the now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac).

Sources said an organogram draft by experts of Dhaka University was rejected, as it recommended

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JS body chief blames all but one developer

Tells of 5,000 acre grabbed land

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the land ministry yesterday said encroachers have grabbed over 5,000 acres of land in the areas around the capital.

Briefing newsmen after a meeting of the committee, committee Chairman Mahbubur Rahman disclosed the name of only one developer, accusing it of grabbing over 500 acres in Savar.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

7 Hindu devotees killed in stampede

AGENCIES, Gopalganj

Seven devotees were killed and more than a hundred others injured in a stampede during 'Mahabaruni Snan', a holy dip for the Hindu community, in Kashiani upazila of Gopalganj district yesterday.

The dead include four women, two men and one child. They are -- Arati Palit, 62, Jilapi Das, 62, Arati Pal, 58, Putul Patra, 45, Chandrakanta Halder, 57, Mahadev Dey, 35, and Milon Dhar, 10.

The weeklong fair began yesterday morning at Orakandi, 40 kilo-

metres northwest of Gopalganj town, marking the 183rd birth anniversary of Sri Sri Harichand Thakur, the founder of the 'Matua' community.

Locals said the stampede took place at about 8:30am when around one lakh people gathered on the banks of two big ponds -- Kamonasagar and Dudhsagar -- at the village to have the holy bath.

Indian High Commissioner Veena Sikri who was staying in Gopalganj rushed to Orakandi to console the devotees.

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Two DB men 'abducted' by outlaws

A CORRESPONDENT, Madaripur

Two officials of the Detective Branch (DB) of police were abducted here allegedly by activists of the outlawed Purbo Bangla Sharbohara Party.

Sub-Inspector (SI) Hasnain Azam and head assistant of the local DB office Kamrul Hasan were abducted from Satarbia village under Shibirpur union of Rajoir upazila of the district on the morning of April 4.

The fate of the two has remained unknown to police since then. Police arrested three persons on suspicion.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

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