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Rich-poor gap widens

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The income disparity between the poor and the rich widened in six years until 2004, a new national survey has revealed, making it a case that growth does not touch everyone equally.

The Poverty Monitoring Survey Report 2004 of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has further revealed that per capita income disparity between the urban poor and rich has deepened at a faster rate than in rural areas.

Inequality has broadened between the urban and rural people, too.

Household income comparison shows even a grimmer picture. Here, the poor's income level has dropped while the rich's increased to such an extent that the national household income increased by 10.18 percent in the six years.

The rich (non-poor as dubbed by the BBS) saw a household income

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PICTURE OF INCOME DISPARITY			
HOUSEHOLD	%CHANGE		
	ALL	POOR	NON-POOR
NATIONAL	10.18	-3.56	13.36
URBAN	8.45	-5.34	7.96
RURAL	0.49	-7.32	3.23
PER CAPITA	%CHANGE		
	ALL	POOR	NON-POOR
NATIONAL	17.51	4.82	19.38
URBAN	14.60	2.22	11.54
RURAL	6.91	0.54	7.97



STAR GRAPHICS

HC rule on govt as HR body not formed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday asked the government and the Parliament Secretariat to explain why it (government) should not be directed to form a National Human Rights Commission for protecting human rights.

The rule came after Supreme Court lawyers Abdul Momen Chowdhury, KM Zabir and Zahur Islam filed a writ petition about the urgency of forming the commission, a key election pledge of the ruling four-party alliance.

A Division Bench of the HC asked the law secretary and secretary of the Parliament Secretariat to submit their reply in eight weeks.

The petitioners said establishment of a human rights commission is indispensable for social, economic and political rights and for administration of justice. It is needed also to prevent corruption

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New pay scale to get cabinet nod Monday

WB, IMF have reservations about it, says Saifur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday said the new pay scale for government employees will be approved in next Monday's cabinet meeting.

"Those who give us money, the IMF and the World Bank, have reservations about the pay scale," said Saifur on return from US and Turkey after an 11-day trip.

"They have told us to implement the pay scale in accordance with our capability, keeping in mind that it does not affect the inflation rate," he added.

Speaking to reporters at Zia International Airport, Saifur pointed out, "The government can afford the secretary committee recommendations on the new pay scale."

The pay commission had proposed about 90 percent pay hike, but the secretary committee recommended a 60 percent increase considering the government's capacity.

Former cabinet secretary Mujibul Haq, who headed the pay

commission, however said the recommendations were made considering the government's capability and inflation.

He told BBC Bangla Service last night that when the government said it would not achieve desired revenue growth this fiscal year, the commission recommended implementation of the new pay scale in phases.

About the impact of the new pay scale on inflation, he said there was already an inflationary trend. So it should be considered whether the salary needs to be increased for inflation or the increased salary would lead to higher inflation.

He suggested balancing the two sides by tightening unproductive public expenditures.

During his visit to Washington, Saifur met the new World Bank (WB) president, managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), director of the USAID, and six US congressmen and senators.

Saifur requested the WB president to strengthen cooperation for poverty alleviation in Bangladesh.

"He said cooperation will continue, but to make it more effective, we need good governance. Otherwise money alone cannot make any impact."

The WB president also noted that in order to continue the democratic process, the country must come out of the politics of conflict, Saifur said.

On the issue of increasing interest rates, both the WB and IMF said that the whole world is coming out from the "low interest regime."

The WB has committed \$800 million loan this year. Of this, \$300 million will be pumped in as development support credit. Health, Nutrition and Population Sector Programme will get another \$300 million and flood rehabilitation \$200 million.

On the issue of the IMF's \$80 million fourth tranche of the Poverty Reduction Growth Facilities (PRGF) loan that has remained suspended from January this year, Saifur said, "They will soon release this loan."

As part of fulfilment of an IMF condition, the government has

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New wind in Bimstec

Negative list exchange for FTA in June, foreign secretaries meet in Dhaka May 31

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Officials of the member countries of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (Bimstec) will meet in Colombo in the first week of June to exchange the negative lists of sensitive goods in the run up for a free trade pact among them.

Import duties on items on the negative lists would not be brought down to zero as it would hit domes-

tic industries in Bimstec countries, said RS Ratna, director, Regional and Multilateral Trade Relations, Ministry of Commerce, on Friday.

Under the proposed free trade agreement (FTA), import duties on items kept out of the negative list would be zero for increasing intra-Bimstec trade volume.

The member countries have agreed to an initial list of about 1,300 items in their negative lists of goods

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SAARC SUMMIT

Pakistan may declare date for Nov 12-13

Congo ambush won't deter Dhaka, says Morshed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pakistan is likely to formally announce a fresh date for the 13th Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Summit in Dhaka -- November 12-13 -- as proposed by host Bangladesh.

Talking to reporters yesterday, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan

said India has agreed to attend the summit on November 12-13 while other member states have already given their green signal to attend it anytime.

He mentioned that Indian External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh telephoned him on Friday night and expressed India's

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WB IMMUNITY BILL JS body to place report with note of approval

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on finance ministry will submit a report recommending passing of the much-talked about bill that proposes immunity to the World Bank in its operation in Bangladesh when the parliament session resumes today after a two-day recess.

The bill, finalised on April 30 amid strong protest from the opposition, is likely to be passed in this session that will continue until May 17, sources at the parliament secretariat said.

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69 Bangladeshis arrested in Kenya

Cops probe their 'links' to terrorism, drugs, human trafficking; Dhaka asks its mission for report

STAR REPORT

Kenyan police said yesterday they were investigating 69 Bangladeshi nationals arrested in the country's port city of Mombasa for possible links to terrorism, drugs and human trafficking, reports AFP.

The suspects, who were seized in the overnight operation, were living in two houses in a plush area of

Mombasa, heavily guarded by private security.

Foreign Minister Morshed Khan said yesterday the government asked the Bangladesh mission in Kenya to update the foreign ministry immediately on the incident. They might be fortune-seekers and had gone there through fake travel agencies, he observed.

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BNP man killed in 'crossfire'

'Highway robber' dies in 'shootout'

STAR REPORT

A BNP man allegedly linked with outlaws was killed in 'crossfire' in Kushthia and an alleged highway robber died in a 'shootout' with police in Jhenidah yesterday.

Police said Rapid Action Battalion (Rab)-6 on Friday night arrested Hasanuzzaman Babu alias Nata Babu from his house in Ailchara village in the sadar upazila, reports our Kushthia correspondent.

Babu, president of Ailchara unit BNP, admitted his involvement with outlawed Purba Banglar

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'Hundreds' die in Uzbek cop firing

Killing ensues protest over arrest of 23 on charge of Islamist militancy

AGENCIES, Andijan, Uzbekistan

Thousands of terrified Uzbeks fled for the border yesterday but hundreds angrily returned to the square where police fired on demonstrators to put down an uprising against country's authoritarian US-allied leader. A human rights monitor said about 200 people were killed.

Uzbek President Islam Karimov said 10 government troops and

"many more" protesters were killed but refused to be more specific. He spoke at a news conference in the capital Tashkent a day after the unprecedented clashes in his tightly controlled country, which he has led since before the 1991 Soviet collapse.

The violence erupted after days of peaceful protest in the eastern city of Andijan, against the imprisonment of 23 local business leaders

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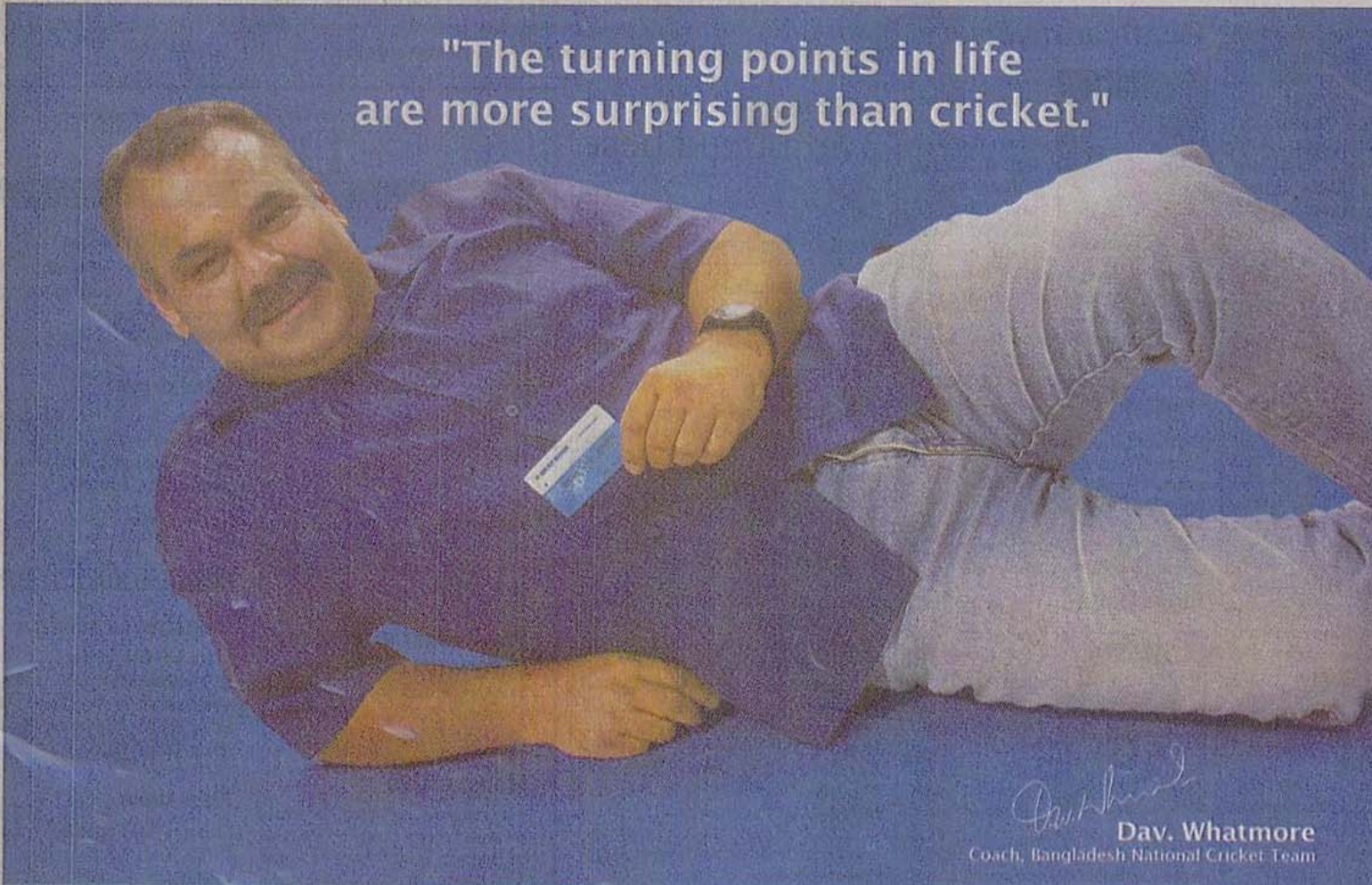
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