

Rich-poor gap widens

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level rise of 13.36 percent while the poor found it decreasing by 3.56 percent.

The urban poor's household income fell by 5.34 percent between 1999 and 2004 while the non-poor's income increased by 7.96 percent.

For the rural poor, household income fell even deeper by 7.32 percent. Rural non-poor however saw a 3.23 percent rise.

A look at the per capita income shows that it increased by 17.51 percent at the national level. But the share of the poor in this growth was little which accounted for only 4.82 percent of the growth while the non-poor witnessed 19.38 percent rise.

The per capita income of the urban poor increased by only 2.22 percent, but it increased by 11.54 percent for the non-poor. At rural level, it increased by 0.54 percent for the poor and 7.97 percent for the non-poor.

A few research organisations, such as the Centre for Policy Dialogue, have long been talking about this divide using different proxy indicators such as terms of trade in agriculture, wage differential and rural inflation rate. A year ago, the CPD had categorically said the growth benefits have been unequally distributed, a truth that has been vindicated by the BBS.

Explaining the trend, Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of the CPD, said the sources of growth militated against the poor because of structural problems, leading to today's situation.

The participation of the poor had been relatively limited in the remittance earning which further exacerbated the income maldistribution.

"In the farm sector, the productivity growth does not tell the whole story as it could not create demand for labourers. And in the non-poor sector growth was discriminatory as it was the rich who controlled the land and waterbodies to produce more livestock and fish."

In the non-farm activities in the rural and peri-urban areas, the labour demand that has been created has mainly been for the more skilled. Thus the unskilled poor have been left behind. The labour intensive export-oriented manufacturing sector could not absorb the surplus

labourers. Similarly, the poor could not participate in the service sector growth for lack of education and skills.

"Continuation of such a situation will threaten social coherence and democracy," notes Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of economic think-tank Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

Dr Debapriya points out that the findings of the survey show that the 5 percent plus annual GDP growth of the last several years was not taking place in favour of the poor.

"The survey proves that the disparity between the rich and poor is only widening every year," he adds.

Debapriya pinpointed some of the reasons for the poor becoming poorer.

"Not all of the rural people could participate in the agricultural development in the country. Additionally, the rise of income in the non-poor sector (like fisheries and livestock) did not reach the poor," Debapriya adds.

"The difference between wages of skilled and non-skilled workers in the non-farm sector has also widened. These have resulted in widening of income disparity," he observes.

The growth in the export-oriented sector did not take place in such a way that could absorb the rural workforce significantly, he says.

The modern service sector that grew in the urban areas is not labour-intensive while these require certain educational qualification that the poor segment lacks. As a result they could not tap the jobs in this sector.

"In the context of the PRSP, not only absolute poverty alleviation but income distribution has to be a policy variable for sustainable development, regrettably the current version of the PRSP does not adequately address this concern," he added.

"The situation has also been created by corruption and rent-seeking behaviour," Dr Debapriya remarked. "This income inequality may emerge as a threat to social cohesion and inhibit democratic transition."

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China opposes new US textile quotas

AP, Beijing

China said yesterday it opposed a US decision to impose new quotas on some Chinese clothing imports, calling the move a violation of international standards of free trade.

The Bush administration announced Friday it would reinstate quotas on three categories of clothing imports from China, responding to pleas from domestic producers that a surge of Chinese imports was threatening thousands of American jobs.

The move "violates the spirit of free trade and the basic principles of the World Trade Organization," Chinese Commerce Ministry spokesman Chong Qian said in a statement on the ministry's Web site.

China is a dominant competitor in the \$350 billion-a-year world textile trade, and its shipments into the United States spiked sharply after Jan. 1, when global quotas in effect for three decades were eliminated.

The latest U.S. action will impose limits on the amount of cotton trousers, cotton knit shirts and underwear that China can export to the United States which American retailers argue will drive up prices for US consumers.

"The Chinese side urges the United States to correct its error in order to prevent the implementation of trade protectionism measures from casting a shadow on the trade relations between the two sides," Chong said.

He also said China retains the right to take "further measures under the framework of the WTO," but he did not specify what those measures might be.

Karzai urges US action over Quran

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghan President Hamid Karzai urged the United States yesterday to prosecute and punish anyone found guilty of desecrating the Quran as anti-US protests flared for a fifth day.

Sixteen Afghans have been killed and more than 100 hurt since Wednesday in the worst anti-US protests across Afghanistan since US forces invaded in 2001 to oust the Taliban for harbouring Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network.

Newsweek magazine said in its May 9 edition investigators probing abuses at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay found that interrogators "had placed Quran on toilets, and in at least one case flushed a holy book down the toilet."

Muslims consider the Quran the literal word of God and treat each book with deep reverence.

"I'm proven that this happened, then we will strongly ask the American government to put on trial and punish whoever is the culprit," Karzai told a news conference. Such sacrilege was unacceptable to every Muslim.

The United States has tried to calm global Muslim outrage over the incident, saying disrespect for the Quran was abhorrent and would not be tolerated, and military authorities were investigating the allegation.

International Muslim groups in Saudi Arabia also called on the United States to investigate and punish those responsible.

The 57-nation Organisation of the Islamic Conference said the report had enraged hundreds of millions of Muslims and would "provide fanatics and extremists with excuses to ... justify their acts of violence and terrorism."

PM avoids Nasir

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Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah Al Noman, former commerce minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury MP, former minister for water resources Engineer LK Siddiqui, BNP Whip Syed Wahidul Alam MP, State Minister for Forest and Environment Jafrul Islam Chowdhury, Sarwar Jamal Nizam MP, Chittagong city Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Moulana Shamsul Islam, and Jamaat leader Afsaruddin Chowdhury were present at the ceremony.

Besides, newly-elected Chittagong City Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury attended the function.

Since Mir Nasir lost to Mohiuddin by a margin of over 90 thousand votes in the CCC mayoral race, newspapers have reported that he had been asked to tender his resignation as the state minister or face the axe.

WB immunity bill

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May 17, sources at the parliament secretariat said.

Meanwhile, main opposition Awami League representative in the parliamentary body gave a note of dissent against the bill, terming it a violation of the constitution and democracy.

The bill was placed in parliament on October 31 last year amid widespread criticism by the opposition political parties, the civil society and rights groups.

Another witness who declined to be named said "many, many dead bodies" were stacked up by a school near the square. The city's hospital was cordoned off and officials could not be reached for casualty figures.

An AP reporter said she saw at least 30 bodies. All had been shot, and at least one had his skull smashed. She said there were large pools of blood and hundreds of spent cartridges on the streets.

A group of foreign journalists

HC rule on govt

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and alleviate poverty, they stressed. "...the hapless people of Bangladesh are groaning in injustice and the sound of their cry should reach an institution for doing justice, like human rights commission," reads the petition.

Dictatorship and tyranny have not ended and needed to be contained by such a commission, the petition said.

"...leaders of the country are guarded at the cost of the people and their valuable lives get all sorts of protection but the people are exposed to liquidation and ruination," it added, emphasising the need for a human rights commission for protecting them.

Recalling that setting up of a human rights commission was a major election pledge of the ruling BNP, the petitioners said people voted for them trusting their commitment. It is imperative upon the respondents to do this to honour the commitment, they said.

According to sources, a draft bill on National Human Rights Commission, prepared in 2003, is gathering dust at the Cabinet Division.

The government formed a cabinet committee headed by the law minister on December 10, 2001 to

Khaleda asks engineers

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followed in all sectors and standard products to be produced through best utilisation of resources.

The quality of products has to be flawless, she said, in view of the emerging open competition among a great lot of products on the international market.

And the engineers will have to play their role properly in the overall efforts for industrialisation and ensuring quality production, she told the engineers.

Khaleda said that, in the changed global perspective, Bangladesh today faced with multifarious challenges. "Sometimes this challenge is economic, sometimes political, sometimes social and technological," she added.

Skilled human resources are need of the hour to successfully face these challenges, she said, adding that her government has been implementing multifarious programmes to that end.

"Though not yet at desired level, Bangladesh is now advancing quickly on the highway of prosperity," Khaleda said.

She said country's progress in socio-economic sphere is being appreciated and followed as examples in various international organisations and forums.

An amount of 7.6 billion US dollars was earned from only export in the last fiscal and recently the volume of private investment increased remarkably, she said.

She said many big companies of the world have shown interest in investing in Bangladesh, and already many of those started their operations.

'Hundreds' die

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accused of Islamic extremism. A mob reportedly seized arms from a local garrison, before raiding the prison where the men were held and freeing them, along with thousands of other inmates.

They also took control of administrative buildings in the city and took government workers hostage, according to reports.

Just before dusk, troops moved in and opened fire on the crowds in the city square.

Men, women and children fled in panic. One woman spoke of "indiscriminate firing", and said she saw "bloody corpses" lying in a ditch.

In the eastern city of Andijan, hundreds of protesters gathered at the square, displaying the bodies of six people killed in Friday's bloodshed and tearfully denouncing the government.

"Our women and children are dying," said Daniyar Akbarov, 24, who claimed to have seen at least 300 people killed in the violence.

Big military trucks loaded with soldiers cruised the streets and troops backed by armored vehicles surrounded the heavily fortified police headquarters.

Earlier, soldiers loaded scores of bodies of those killed onto four trucks and a bus after blocking friends and relatives from collecting them, witnesses said.

Lutfulo Shamsudinov, the head of the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan, said he saw about 200 victims being loaded onto trucks near the square in Andijan, the fourth-largest city with a population of 350,000.

Indonesia has been shaken by a series of earthquakes since the massive December 26 earthquake that generated tsunamis, killing almost 220,000 people around the Indian Ocean, mostly on Sumatra island.

Malaysia's Meteorological Service Department said in a statement that the region around Sumatra and India's Nicobar Island and Andaman Island "is still very unstable."

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Law Minister Moudud Ahmed on September 19 last year said at an international conference that differences of opinion among ministers were blocking efforts to establish a human rights commission. "I had great difficulty convincing my cabinet colleagues about the commission, which is now under consideration of the cabinet."

He also said, "We are committed to setting up the commission. I hope I will be able to convince my cabinet colleagues about its necessity."

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Truck torched after it runs over schoolboy

UNB, Bogra

Agitated people torched a truck after it ran over a schoolboy in the town yesterday.

Witnesses said the truck hit a rickshaw in which Tanvir Hasan Rabbi, 8, son of Shamsul Haq Khan and a student of class three of Bogra Zila School, was going to school. Rabbi fell on the road.

"But the driver drove his truck over Rabbi instead of halting it. Rabbi died instantly," says a spot account of the tragic end of the boy.

Locals chased and halted the truck, set it ablaze and beat up its driver Milton and helper Rubel. The truck and his helper were later handed over to police.

The protestors also put up road barricades in front of Namajgarh truck terminal demanding punishment to the truck driver and shifting of the terminal to Bhober Bazar.

They took out a procession carrying the body of Rabbi and submitted a memorandum to the deputy commissioner.

2 Gopalganj

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capital and two places in Gopalganj district to nab their fellows, sources said.

Raihan hails from Mostafapur in Madaripur and Belal from Trishal in Mymensingh.

Recently extremists killed two policemen after abduction from Tekerhat area.

Raihan, a student of Zameya Rashidia Madrasa at Dakkhinkhan under Uttara in the capital, is now undergoing treatment for bullet wounds he received during fire exchange between police and extremists.

A revolver, a shutter gun and eight bullets were seized from the possessions of Raihan and Belal after their arrest while two other extremists fled away, police said.

Extremist activities have increased in Gopalganj and its adjacent areas in the recent time, BDNIEWS Gopalganj correspondent reports.

Police arrested a number of suspected members of banned extremist organisation Harkat-ul-Jihad, and filed cases against its suspected leaders.

Indian HC staff

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The Indian nationals told the two officials that they crossed the border and came to Laksham at the invitation of some BNP leaders to erect the dais for Prime Minister (PM) Khaleda Zia's meeting.

The nine Indian nationals were arrested on March 11 for entering Bangladesh territory without passports. The PM's visit to Laksham was cancelled following the incident.

Before visiting the jail, the Indian officials met Comilla Deputy Commissioner Md Mizanur Rahman and Superintendent of Police Aurangajib Mahubb.

New pay scale

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invited tender for the privatisation of Rupali Bank. The IMF, now satisfied with this move, has decided to release the fund, Saifur said.

"The tender has generated much enthusiasm among international bidders," Saifur said. "When I made a stopover in London while returning from Washington, some people told me that they want to buy Rupali Bank," he added.

7 cops sued

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The Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka.

The court however said it will issue its order on the case today.

Shamsul has named three witnesses in the case saying they had seen four armed policemen demanding money from his son before shooting him to death.

"Sohel brawled with the policemen as they demanded quick bucks from him," he quoted the witnesses assaying.

Nayek Habibur Rahman and constable Mohammad Rokanzuzman shot Sohul eight times in his head, chest and legs at point blank, Shamsul added.

He said constables Mohammad Mohsin and Mohammad Monjurul assisted the killers.

They killed him despite his repeated claims to be innocent, Shamsul said, adding that there is no general diary or case against his son.

OC Jane Alam and sub-inspectors Mohammad Sagir Mian and Kamal Hossain tried to divert the cold-blooded murder, he said. "They did not receive our case, though we made several efforts."

He demanded the arrest of the accused and a CID (Criminal Investigation Department) probe into the killing.

Immediately after the incident, police described Sohul as a mugger and said they shot him when he and his three cohorts hurled bombs at them.

But the rickshawpuller who was carrying Sohul home at Manipuripara in Tejaona had claimed Sohul's innocence.

9 US troops

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forces, Iraqi civilians have also suffered heavy losses.

In the oil refining town of Baiji, a car bomb blast killed five Iraqis on Friday evening, police said.

Two policemen and two civilians were killed in clashes in the town of Samarra on Saturday, police Captain Hassem al-Sulami said.

Iraqi officials hope the country's security forces will improve after two years of US training and eventually take over security.

But they can hardly defend themselves - thousands have been killed - and US troops still have to conduct major operations against guerrillas like the one in Anbar.

Four of the American troops killed were in an amphibian vehicle hit an explosive device on Wednesday, the military said.

The Anbar offensive is focused on an area near the Euphrates north and west of the town of Qaim, close to the Syrian border, which Iraqi officials say is used by insurgents to cross over into Iraq and carry out attacks.

Damascus denies Iraqi accusations that it allows guerrillas to enter Iraq from its border.

Marines launched several air strikes on targets on Friday, including a "terrorist" safe house, the military said. A second air raid targeted insurgents manning a vehicle checkpoint.

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