

Greenback's peak

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opening letters of credit (LCs) against imports fearing further price hike.

Association of Bankers Bangladesh (ABB) President M Aminuzzaman seconded Tahirul's argument and both of them denied any persuasion by the finance minister or the Bangladesh Bank (BB) for taking the move.

The government had introduced the floating exchange rate in May 2003 as a condition for the International Monetary Fund's poverty reduction loan.

The dollar started to become scarce in November 2004. And though the crisis deepened following an import surge last year and taka began to depreciate, which in turn also shot up inflation rate, a binding commitment made to the IMF has all through been keeping the BB from interfering in the market.

Import selling rate of dollar rose 5.57 percent to reach Tk 66.39 per unit in July last, which was Tk 62.89 in January. And in the inter-bank market the rate marked a 5.77 percent rise to reach Tk 64.95 in July from Tk 61.40 in January.

An IMF review mission report last month alleged, as the foreign exchange market came under continuous pressure, the authorities [BB] used suasion to avoid depreciation of the taka. The suasion mentioned by the mission refers to the central bank's informal direction in March to the commercial banks to keep the highest price of dollar at Tk 63.70, which did help steady the dollar price for a few weeks.

The IMF also urged the government to adhere to market-based principles in the foreign exchange market, not to control the exchange rate and to allow the exchange rate to reflect the market forces.

In response, BB Deputy Governor Allah Malik Kazemi in a letter dated June 26 to IMF MD Rodrigo de Rato committed not to interfere in the foreign exchange market. He said the central bank "is not now resorting to, and does not

intend to resort to suasion for this purpose".

The commitment to the IMF makes the BB unable to take any direct step to halt the ongoing dollar price spiral, while the government is greatly worried over the situation, as it would further worsen the current inflationary situation.

Sources said following the first-ever meeting of the high-powered fiscal co-ordination council late last month, where the dollar price spiral featured prominently, the BB took some indirect measures to stabilise the forex market.

Sources said on the central bank's informal instructions, the Bafeda and the ABB initiated some moves to rein in the dollar price hike.

50 hurt

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Shibir, student front of Jamaat-e-Islami, with hammers, broken bottles and hockey sticks.

Police intervened and quelled the situation before dawn.

"We got up from bed in panic to see a lot of blood down stairs. The groups were at loggerheads for the last few days," said Abdul Karim, second year student of laboratory medicine.

Shibir men took out a procession on the campus and attacked a JCD group in front of the women's hostel at around 11:00am, sources said.

"The violence was unprecedented on the campus. We closed the institute only to control the situation," said acting Principal Prof SM Tofazzal Hossain.

JCD leader Chitransu Das Rajon was admitted to Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital (RMCH) in a critical condition as he was hit by hammers.

JCD leaders Shahidul Islam, Sajjad, Selim Reza, Arifur Rahman, Abdullah Al Mamun Sajib, Abdul Jabil, Russell Mahbub and Shibir men Mehedi Hasan and Rezaul Karim are receiving treatment at the RMCH.

14yr old girl raped

UNB, Narsingdi

Miscrants killed a 14-year-old girl after raping her at Naibhata village in Raipura upazila of the district on Monday night.

Sources said Sulema Begum, daughter of Siddiqur Rahman, was abducted by a gang of five at about 8:00pm as she came out of their house, responding to the call of nature.

The miscrants took the girl to a nearby cropland and raped her by turns. They later killed the girl and left the body on the field.

Police recovered the body yesterday morning and sent it to Narsingdi Hospital for autopsy.

The victim's father filed a case with local police station.

BNP cadres kidnap journo

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Local BNP cadres yesterday kidnapped the Baulfal upazila correspondent of the Daily Jugantar for publishing a report on their criminal activities in the daily the same day.

Locals said about 25 cadres of the ruling BNP, led by Rafiq Talukder, picked up Monjur Morshed, also a teacher of a local college, from the college campus at noon and took him to the upazila resthouse.

They physically assaulted Morshed and then took him to an unknown place. Morshed remained untraced as of the filing of this report at 5:30pm yesterday.

Local journalists protested the incident and informed the police superintendent of the matter.

Morshed filed a report for the Jugantar after the BNP cadres looted 100 maunds of jatka (imma-ture hilsa fish) seized by the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) on Monday. The report appeared in the daily yesterday.

PM'S DAIS

Nine Indian decorators to be pushed back today

BDNEWS, Comilla

Nine Indians arrested while erecting a dais for the rally to be addressed by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at Laksam will be pushed back to India through Bibir Bazar border of Comilla today following instructions from the home ministry.

Laksam police arrested the Indians in presence of different intelligence agencies on March 11 when they were putting up the stage. They failed to produce necessary papers including passports.

Police and intelligence officials interrogated the Indians and produced them in a Comilla court on June 16.

The court convicted the Indians of illegal infiltration and fined them Tk 200 or seven days' imprisonment in default. The court ordered their return to India on expiry of the jail term.

Though the convicts paid the fine, they were not returned to India for 57 days. The home secretary inspected Comilla Central Jail on July 30 and instructed the authorities to take necessary steps in this regard.

The Indians are Khokan Das, Anudeb, Mehadeb, Gautam, Dilip Das, Kalipal Saha, Haricharan Debnath, Dulal Sutradhar and Dipon Dey. They all are from the Indian state of Tripura.

Dipjal's market

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and would continue the drive in Mirpur today.

Six platoons of police were on hand, but no untoward incident occurred during the drive, sources said.

Earlier, the BIWTA demolished over 50 illegal establishments on the first day of the drive along the Buriganga river on Monday.

EC plans

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17 to 18 lakh people become eligible for franchise rights each year and a large number of them fail to make it on the roll.

Eligible voters, if kept out of the voter list, have to have their names listed on their own initiative.

But after a voter list is published, such recording becomes much more difficult.

Only 1.23 lakh people were registered as voters after publication of the voter list of 2000 and declaration of the schedule for 2001 polls.

Only one lakh people were listed as voters before the fifth parliamentary polls in two years between the publishing date of 1990 voter list and announcement of the schedule for 1991 polls. January 1, 1989 was set as the qualifying date in that roll when the election was held in February 1991.

Electoral experts said the only remedy to such problems is the annual revision system. It was discussed also at the August 6 meeting of the EC.

"The system, if introduced, will leave less room for controversy centring the voter list," the EC secretary said.

THE WORK FOR VOTER LIST BEGINS
The EC secretariat yesterday issued the government printing press with a work order to print five lakh forms to be used for gathering information.

More forms will be printed later. The EC secretariat will complete recruitment and training of enumerators, supervisors and assistant registration officers, sources said.

Protect ethnic people's

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constitutional recognition, which has not been implemented even in 34 years since independence.

Dressed in ethnic costumes, people of the Chakma, Marma, Garo, Khasia, Tripura and Santal communities rendered songs and dance pieces as part of a daylong cultural programme at the Shaheed Minar.

Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil, Communist Party of Bangladesh President Manjurul Ahsan Khan, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Huq Inu, Dhaka University Teachers' Association President AAMS Arefin Siddique spoke at the programme.

Later at 12:30pm, they brought out a colourful rally that travelled to the Engineers' Institute, where a discussion meeting was held.

"Repression and discriminations against the indigenous people will not be stopped if a pro-people and democratic government does not come to power," Larma said while addressing the meeting.

Larma, also the president of Parbatya Chattagram Janasanghati Samity, said the indigenous people are still facing various forms of repression by the majority Bangla-speaking people with direct or indirect support of the government.

The Bangalee settlers have been grabbing the land properties of the ethnic people but the government is not taking any action against the persons responsible, he alleged.

The ethnic people are deprived of their rights as they do not have any constitutional recognition, Larma regretted. He also accused the government of violating the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Treaty.

Advocate Promod Mankin MP called on the government to withdraw army camps from the CHT without delay. "The army is trampling the rights of the indigenous people in the CHT," he said.

Speaking as the chief guest, Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain said the indigenous people also struggled for the country and they have to unite to achieve their rights.

"The government has been grabbing the land of the ethnic people by naming it khas land while

the forest department declared reserve forests dislodging thousands of indigenous people," Promod Mankin said. As many as 20,000 indigenous people were evicted due to the eco-park project at Modhupur, he said.

Besides constitutional recognition, the other demands of the indigenous people include ensuring their rights to land and forest, withdrawal of army camps from the CHT and immediate implementation of the CHT peace treaty, cancellation of the eco-park project in Modhupur forest, and an end to repression.

Among others, Father RW Timm, Pankaj Bhattacharjee, Khushi Kabir and Anna Minj spoke at the discussion.

Marking the day, Bangladesh Sanjukta Adivasi Khet Major-O-Sramik Federation (a federation of indigenous farmers and workers) brought out a rally parading different city roads.

This was followed by a discussion meeting held at the city's Muktagangra with federation Convenor Dewan Hemrom in the chair.

Odhikar, a human rights organisation, organised a discussion meeting on the rights of indigenous people at its office in the city.

Speakers at the meeting called upon all sections of people to come forward to establish the citizen rights of the indigenous people in the country.

The meeting was presided over by Odhikar Director Masud Alam Ragib Ahsan.

Speakers at another discussion meeting organised by Solidarity Bangladesh demanded that the government take proper steps to protect the socioeconomic and cultural rights of the indigenous people in the country.

Solidarity Bangladesh President Sheikh Faruque Ahmad presided over the meeting.

The Indigenous Peoples' Day has been being observed in 70 countries since 1995 to highlight the rights of the ethnic people across the world. Forty-five ethnic groups with a population of 25 lakh in Bangladesh are left out of their rights.

481 mobile sets seized at ZIA

UNB, Dhaka

Customs at Zia International Airport (ZIA) yesterday seized 481 mobile phone sets from a luggage of a Bangladeshi passenger from Bangkok.

The phone sets valued at Tk 40 lakh were found in the luggage of one Shamsul Huda who tried to use green channel on arrival by TG-431 flight, Assistant Commissioner of Customs Mahfuzul Hoque Bhuiyan told the news agency.

He said Additional Commissioner Magrub Ahmed seized the sets, as the passenger could not show valid documents.

A departmental case was filed and the seized mobile phone sets were sent to the customs warehouse.

Ulfa blows up two bridges, gas pipeline in Assam

AFP, Guwahati

Rebels in India's restive northeast have blown up two bridges, a pipeline and a power transformer in the latest in a string of blasts before national Independence Day festivities, officials said yesterday.

The separatist United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), which traditionally steps up violence before the August 15 holiday, claimed responsibility for the blasts late Monday in Assam, the largest state in the insurgency-racked northeast.

There were no casualties. But on Sunday four people died in a market blast that police blamed on Ulfa, which has been battling for an independent homeland since 1979.

In the latest attacks the state-owned pipeline "was severely damaged, disrupting gas supply to nearby tea garden factories," police official A. Das said.

Rebels also bombed two bridges "considered vital as the route is used to move soldiers," said a senior police official, who wished to remain unnamed.

In another blast rebels knocked out a power transformer in the state's main city Guwahati, plunging areas into darkness.

"There have been about 16 attacks so far," Assam police inspector-general Khagen Sharma said. Over the weekend the rebels blew up three energy pipelines and a rail track.

Ulfa said Tuesday it was responsible for the attacks apart for the market blast. It said it would not target "innocent civilians."

Normally Ulfa attacks government buildings, bridges, pipelines and other infrastructure as well as security patrols but causes no civilian casualties.

However, last Independence Day they detonated a powerful bomb during a parade in eastern Assam, killing 20 people -- many of them youngsters -- and stirring local outrage.

The Assam government on Tuesday announced unspecified cash rewards for people who help police spot militants. "The attacks are nothing but acts of desperation," state chief minister Tarun Gogoi told AFP.

India won independence from Britain on August 15, 1947 but has had trouble integrating the northeast, home to diverse ethnic and tribal cultures.

More than two dozen rebel groups fighting for autonomy or independence in the region -- Ulfa is the most powerful -- mark Independence Day as a "black day."

Over 50,000 people have died in insurgency-related violence since 1947 in the seven northeastern states. Some 10,000 have died in Assam since Ulfa took up arms in 1979.

Foreigners

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the security forces. The BDR jawans also replied with shots that led to a gun battle at about 2:00am, sources said.

After about four hours of fierce fighting, the criminals retreated. The BDR men, however, caught three criminals and seized one M16 rifle, one LMG, 400 bullets, a few combat uniforms and secret documents from their den.

Both sides exchanged more than 200 rounds of gunshots during the shootout.

The border guards have launched a massive arms recovery operation in the border areas of Naikhangchhari following the tips of the arrestees.

BDR sources said this was for the third time in the last two months the criminals engaged in gunrunning in Naikhangchhari border fired on the security forces. The BDR arrested five foreigners after the earlier gunfights.

The border guards this year arrested a total of 30 criminals, most of them are foreigners, from the Naikhangchhari border areas, BDR sources said.

The BDR jawans recently seized five AK47 rifles, one SMG, 35 bullets, eight point 12-bore rifles, a huge amount of explosives, empty magazines, combat uniforms and secret documents from the remote frontier areas.

Sources said, that the security forces so far conducted four operations in Alekhhong area. On July 9, for the first time the BDR faced armed encounter from the criminals. About 250 rounds were traded during the gunfight.

On July 6, BDR seized TNT explosives, 199 bullets of AK47 rifles and 91 bullets of pistol from the same area. In another operation, they seized eight rifles.

66 die in rebel attack

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and 159 soldiers were killed.

Another 50 troops had been taken prisoner, he said in a statement, and 26 Maoists were killed.

"A search has been launched for the other soldiers as well as the rebels who launched the attack," he said, adding that due to the remoteness of the region, information was difficult to access.

The clash took place overnight Sunday in the northwestern Kalikot region where the soldiers were protecting workers building a highway.

The army has confirmed two Nepalese soldiers were killed and three wounded in the battle.

Another 50 government troops had been taken prisoner, he said in a statement. Twenty-six Maoists were killed, he said.

The communists have been fighting to overthrow the monarchy since 1996, and the uprising has left nearly 12,000 people dead.

King Gyanendra sacked the government and took power in February to try to restore security in the Himalayan kingdom.

The statement was posted on the Maoist's website.

However, Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) spokesman, Brigadier General Dipak Gurung, disputed the high casualty count.

"We deny the terrorists' claims of killing 159 soldiers in western Nepal," Gurung told AFP.

"Seventy of our soldiers have contacted their local commanders in their areas in the west."

The rebel commander's statement was the first claim of responsibility for a major attack since June, when a bus bombing killed 36 people. The rebels said they were targeting security personnel but made a "grave mistake" by killing civilians on the bus.

Prabhakar said that during the Kalikot battle 26 rebels were killed,

including battalion commissar Lokesh. Another 50 government soldiers were taken prisoner and a large quantity of weapons seized, he said.

But his statement did not specify exactly how the 159 government soldiers were killed.

Earlier Monday, an army official said at least two Nepalese soldiers were killed and three wounded when Maoist rebels attacked an army camp in the country's northwest.

The attack on the camp at Pakha village in Kalkot district began Sunday evening and lasted through the night, the official said, requesting anonymity.

"A fairly large number of rebels attacked the newly-set up security camp Sunday evening around 6:30 pm and the gunbattle continued until early Monday morning at 5:00 am," the official said.

"Several rebels are also presumed to have been killed in the clash but the rebels carried away the bodies of their colleagues while fleeing from the scene as reinforcements arrived," he said.

"With the arrival of the massive reinforcement, the security forces launched a manhunt for rebels in and around the area," he said.

The army said about 200 personnel were stationed at the camp, set up to protect workers building the Surkhet-Jumla section of the Karnali Highway.

The communists have been fighting to overthrow the monarchy since 1996 and the uprising has left nearly 12,000 people dead.

King Gyanendra sacked the government and took direct power in February to try to restore security in the Himalayan kingdom.

Discovery lands safely

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Force base slightly ahead of schedule at 5:11 am (1214 GMT), ending a 14-day mission that NASA managers hailed as a success. Mission Control said after adjusting the touchdown time.

"Discovery is home," Mission Control in Houston, Texas, said as the wheels roared onto the 6,800-meter (15,000-foot) concrete runway shortly after two huge sonic booms rang out over the dark Mojave desert as Discovery approached its home planet.

"Welcome home," Mission Control told Collins and her six crew members individually seconds after touchdown.

"A job well done," she replied after a flawless re-entry into Earth's atmosphere and the one-hour descent to landing.

Nasa managers have hailed the mission as a success even though it showed they failed to resolve the insulating foam problem that had doomed Columbia when it re-entered Earth's atmosphere on February 1, 2003.

Discovery was initially scheduled to land at Cape Canaveral in Florida, but bad weather forced Nasa to shift the landing site to California.

Mission Control officials heaved a sigh of relief as a parachute deployed from the rear of the shuttle, slowing down Discovery, which then came to a full stop, safely returning the seven astronauts to Earth.

The final moments of a shuttle mission are among the most critical, and it was upon re-entering Earth's atmosphere that Columbia had burst into flames.

The tragedy was blamed on insulating foam that fell off and damaged the orbiter's left wing upon take-off.

Similar chunks of foam fell off the

external tank when Discovery blasted into space on July 26. Nasa said the debris caused no significant damage, but upon its return, Discovery was grounded with the rest of the fleet until the problem is resolved. The US space agency was optimistic that a solution would be found soon, and tentatively scheduled the next launch for September 22.

China team

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Under an agreement signed between Bangladesh and China on September 13, 2000, Dhaka was to get \$56 million to set up a DAP plant under Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC).

Of the \$56 million, \$25 million was given as "interest, subsidised and preferential (ISP)" loan and the remaining \$31 million was the suppliers' credit.

Later, Bangladesh requested China to convert the suppliers' credit into a concessionary loan due to the former's tough conditionality, which includes high interest rate (3.5 percent) and 10 percent down payment.

On April 7, China signed a framework agreement to convert the credit into a concessionary loan during Chinese Premier's visit to Dhaka.

To implement the agreement, Chinese government is sending a delegation of its Exim Bank to discuss the issue with Bangladesh government, and if possible, they will sign the formal agreement to convert the credit, a senior ERD official said.

If the suppliers' credit is converted into a concessionary loan, the interest rate on the loan will be two percent from 3.5 percent and the condition of down payment will also be waived, a top level ERD official told the news agency.

Same ADP story

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for corruption, members of the parliamentary standing committee on the planning ministry pointed out in a meeting yesterday. The committee chaired by M Akbar Ali MP expressed dissatisfaction at the poor ADP implementation.

The spending binge in the last quarter also added pressure to the government bank borrowing. While that borrowing had been negative almost throughout the year, in the last four days it shot up to Tk 4,000 crore, a finance ministry source said.

Planning ministry officials tried to quell the committee's bile, saying the government is introducing a new system to double the speed of project approval, requiring only 70 days compared to the present 105 days.

Akbar Ali told the Daily Star that they also would ask the government to amend the public procurement guideline, adding, the committee believes the present system is not only time consuming but also creates scopes for irregularities.

Out of 45 ministries and divisions, 23 ministries managed to spend from 91 to 100 percent of their revised ADP allocations, 15 from 45 to 90 percent, while the remaining seven even less than 45 percent.

The cabinet division and the civil aviation and tourism ministry have spent 94 and 82 percent of their ADP allocations in the last quarter.

The other ministries that spent 40 to 70 percent of their development allocations in the lag end of last FY include those of housing and public works, jute and textiles, industries, youth and sports, labour and employment, and Liberation War affairs. Defence, water resources, cultural affairs, commerce, environment and forest, establishment, communication, posts and telecommunications, science and technology, Chittagong Hill Tracts affairs, food and LGRD ministries and finance division are also in the same rank.

However, the ministries, on their turn, identified delays in procuring project materials, sluggishness in

construction, court injunctions and frequent transfers of project directors as major reasons for the delays in project implementation.

Except for one or two occasions, all the subsequent governments have had a tendency to start with a large ADP, which they later had to scale down ahead the end of the fiscal year, but still could not implement.

In FY04, the initial ADP size was Tk 20,300 crore, then revised to Tk 19,000 crore and finally could spend only Tk 16,817 crore of it.

C&F agents

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Reporters' Unity auditorium yesterday.

The meeting decided to form a committee of representatives from both the organisations to settle the C&F agents' problems within the next month.

The FBCFAA leaders demanded immediate cancellation of the clean reports findings (CRF) activity of re-shipment inspection.

Their other demands include withdrawal of the recent commerce ministry circular about turning all the C&F agents into limited companies, cancellation of monitoring by the NBR central intelligence cell and suspension of issuing new C&F licence for next five years.

Export-import through Benapole, the largest land port of the country, had been stopped since July 21 as the Benapole C&F agents called an indefinite strike.

The Benapole C&F association demanded cancellation of the present valuation and classification committees, and delivery of the products within 24 hours of arrival. They also demanded that the fine on non-PSI goods should not be more than 10 to 12 percent and the consignments should be weighed only during the verification.

The Federation President Abul Fazal Talukder, Secretary General AKM Khan, Hossain, Sultan, Hossain Akter, Sheikh Mohammad Faridh, Shamsur Rahman and Advisor Ali Reza Razu attended the press conference.