

Saifur vows to tighten grips on cellphone operators

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday vowed to tighten grips on mobile phone operators as the companies remit huge amount of money, creating additional pressure on the shaky foreign exchange reserve.

"These cell phone companies are minting money. They are remitting huge amount of money, putting tremendous pressure on foreign exchange," Saifur told reporters, emerging out of a meeting with different regulatory bodies to review the overall situation in the telecoms sector.

These companies were supposed to bring in foreign currency, Saifur observed. "Apart from giving dividends, they are buying

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JU students torch buses after man dies in road crash

JU CORRESPONDENT

Students of Jahangirnagar University (JU) set two buses ablaze and vandalized another protesting the death of a man in a road accident on the Dhaka-Paturia highway near JU campus yesterday.

Abdul Jalil Munshi, 80, resident of Islamnagar adjacent to JU campus, was killed when a Dhamrai-bound bus from Dhaka ran over the rickshaw he was travelling on near Meer Musharraf Hossain hall gate.

The rickshaw puller Abdul Motaleb, 40, was injured in the accident while Jalil's son-in-law Sarukh survived miraculously without a scratch.

Following the incident at 11:00am the highway was closed to traffic for three hours as JU students went on a rampage. The angry students torched two buses and smashed the windows of another. Firefighters arrived at the scene around 1:00pm but the two buses were already badly burned.

Rapid Action Battalion and police brought the situation under control around 2:15pm.

Australia keen to increase Bangladeshi immigrants

Visiting minister tells PM

UNB, Dhaka

Australia is willing to train up Bangladeshi nurses and gradually increase the number of skilled Bangladeshi immigrants there.

Australian Immigration and Multicultural Minister Amanda Vanstone conveyed her country's willingness to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia during her courtesy call on the prime minister at her office yesterday.

Vanstone also discussed enhanced scholarships for Bangladeshi students in Australia.

The prime minister told the Australian minister that his country could take skilled professionals like doctors and engineers from Bangladesh.

In reply, Vanstone, also a senator, told the prime minister that

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Myanmar, India sign gas deal

AFP, Yangon

India and Myanmar agreed yesterday to consider ways of transporting natural gas from fields off western Myanmar to the energy-hungry giant next door, officials said.

The deal, along with two other pacts on satellite imaging and education, was signed after talks between visiting Indian President Abdul Kalam and junta leader Senior General Than Shwe in Yangon.

But India's top foreign ministry official Shyam Saran told reporters in Yangon that they did not discuss the house arrest of Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"It did not come up in the talks," he said.

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IMF suggests tighter monetary policy

Says fuel price rise is inevitable

UNB, Dhaka

International Monetary Fund (IMF) has suggested further tightening of Bangladesh Bank's monetary policy to ease inflationary pressure.

"This is the key challenge for the authorities in Bangladesh," Thomas Rumbaugh, IMF adviser for the Asia and Pacific, told a press briefing at the IMF Resident Mission in Dhaka yesterday.

The IMF official said this replying to a question whether their prescription to contain inflation would be possible if the government raises the fuel prices further and the import cost increases due to the soaring

dollar prices.

He insisted on increasing the interest rates further as a means of tight monetary policy. "Some further increases in interest rates may be required to bring inflation in line with other countries," he said.

The briefing was organised at the end of an 8-day mission of an IMF team led by Thomas that reviewed the recent economic developments and the implementation of policies supported by the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) arrangement.

"It's inevitable that the government will have to adjust the oil prices," Thomas said, adding that

the price hike will have onetime impact on the inflation, not a permanent one.

"That's why Bangladesh Bank needs to keep very prudent monetary policy so that the inflation does not go up," he said.

During their visit to Bangladesh, the mission members met Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman, Finance Secretary Siddiqur Rahman Chowdhury, Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Salehuddin Ahmed and senior government officials.

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Bangladesh's HR situation better than many countries

Moudud says

UNB, Dhaka

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed has claimed that human rights situation in Bangladesh is better than those of many countries in the world.

"I won't say we don't have human rights problem, but I must say the situation is better here than in many countries of the world," he told reporters yesterday, giving his reaction to the US State Department report on human rights 2005.

The US report released in Washington on Wednesday said human rights record in Bangladesh is very 'poor' and the government continued to commit numerous abuses.

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Court asks cop to submit probe report against Sunny

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday directed the investigation officer (IO) of two cases filed against the JMB military commander Ataur Rahman Sunny and six others to submit the probe reports of the cases immediately.

This is the first time that a court directed the authorities concerned to submit reports of the cases filed against JMB (Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh).

Metropolitan Magistrate Abdur Rouf Khan passed the order saying

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PHOTO: STAR

A burned bus is being removed to clear the congestion it created on Dhaka-Paturia highway near Jahangirnagar University in Savar. Angry students set fire to two buses and vandalised as road accident killed one yesterday.

UN action against Iran looms ahead

Tehran digs in for clash with US

AFP, Tehran

Iran's hardline regime was yesterday digging in for a showdown against arch-enemy the United States, with its supreme leader vowing not to halt a disputed nuclear drive despite looming UN Security Council action.

"Today, the Iranian people and the officials of the Islamic republic of Iran, more powerful than before and like steel, will stand against any pressure or conspiracy," a defiant Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said.

He vowed that Iran, "relying on Allah and using wisdom and rationale and by maintaining unity, will continue on the path to advanced technology, including nuclear technology."

The International Atomic Energy Agency on Wednesday opened the way for Security Council action against Iran, which despite its denials is suspected of using an atomic energy drive as a mask for weapons development.

Envoys of Britain, China, Russia and the United States are expected to meet in Geneva on Wednesday to discuss the situation.

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Two of a family crushed under train

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Two of a family were crushed under a speeding train in Kalihati upazila in Tangail yesterday noon.

The victims were identified as Amzad Hossain, 55, of Ramdevpur village of Kalihati upazila and his seven-year-old granddaughter Lovely.

Sources said the accident occurred at around 12:00 noon when a North Bengal-bound inter-city train from Dhaka hit Amzad and his granddaughter while they were crossing the train tracks near Hatia.

Police recovered the bodies and sent those to morgue for autopsy.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Asit Baran Adhikary, right, leads a team of surgeons operating an open-heart surgery on a conscious patient. The first-ever such surgery in Bangladesh was done at a Mirpur clinic yesterday.

MEGHNAGHAT-2 POWER PROJECT PDB signs deals with unskilled consortium

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Power Development Board (PDB) finally signed two agreements yesterday for the Meghnaghat-2 450 megawatt power plant project with Belhasa-Orion-Stegag (BON) consortium, which actually had not won the bid.

A PDB press release said that under the 22-year agreements -- a power purchase agreement (PPA) and a land lease agreement (LLA), the consortium will sell power at US 2.78 cents per unit and start operation within 37 months.

Orion chief and managing director of BON consortium Obaedul Karim and PDB secretary Talebar

Rahman signed the agreements.

The BON's bid had been highly irregular since the beginning. Initially, the BON included Japanese Nisso Iewi as the lead bidder along with the Orion and Belhasa. The consortium was qualified on the basis of Nisso's expertise as neither the Orion nor Belhasa had the experience of setting up a power plant.

However soon after it was selected in 2004, the consortium replaced its lead bidder Nisso with German company Steag. The cabinet purchase committee in March 2005 rejected the bid as such

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SECOND TEST Tharanga steals the Bogra show

BISHWAJIT ROY, from Bogra

Upul Tharanga hit his maiden Test hundred as Sri Lanka wrested back control of the second and final Test from Bangladesh on an eventful second day at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium here yesterday.

The 21-year-old left-hander scored a sublime unbeaten 160 to spoil a dream morning of the Tigers that saw the Lankans reduced to 43-4 courtesy to quick blows by young paceman Shahadat Hossain.

But Tharanga's ton only in his third Test eventually guided the islanders to finish the day on 302-8 with a lead of 68 runs in reply to Bangladesh's 234.

Although wickets fell around him thick and fast, Tharanga, who started the day on 12, batted like a true Lankan Lion in his unfinished 429-minute vigil at the crease that featured 19 fours and two sixes off 297 deliveries.

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Father demands punishment to militant son

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Father of JMB chief Abdur Rahman's bodyguard demanded exemplary punishment to his son yesterday.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain Gazi, in a statement issued to the press, demanded his son Abdul Aziz alias Hanif must be punished for the crimes he committed being involved with militant organisation Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). Hanif was arrested along with Abdur Rahman on March 2 in Sylhet.

Amjad said Hanif, who is his fifth son, left his home at Koira upazila in 2002 quitting his studies in a madrasa. He never returned home after that.

Amjad said he, his six other sons and relatives will not go for any legal procedure to help Hanif.

Prayer Timing		
March 10		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-05	5-40
Juma	12-30	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-12	6-15
Esha	7-30	8-00
Source: Islamic Foundation		