

Obaidul Quader, Kamal Majumder submit wealth statements

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detained Awami League (AL) Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader submitted his and wife's wealth statement to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday showing movable and immovable properties worth over Tk 1.10 crore.

Quader, one of the corrupt suspects as per the ACC's second list of 21 big fishes, sent his wealth statement through Kashimpur prison authority.

According to the statement, the AL leader and his wife have movable properties worth Tk 38.19 lakh and immovable properties Tk 72.17 lakh.

Quader's properties include four acres and 74 decimals of land worth Tk 12 lakh in Noakhali which he inherited from his father, a three-katha plot worth Tk 9.79 lakh at Uttara, another plot worth Tk 16 lakh at Segunbagicha in his wife's name, an FDR (fixed deposit receipt) of Tk 7.56 lakh with Sonali Bank, savings certificate of Tk 8 lakh, a Toyota car worth Tk 4 lakh in his wife's name, Tk 17.24 lakh bank deposit and gold and furniture worth Tk three lakh.

The joint forces arrested Quader, a former state minister during the Awami League's 1996-2001 regime, in March.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

AGREEMENT WITH IMF EXPIRES TODAY

Last tranche of PRGF loan uncertain

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Bangladesh's agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for Poverty Reduction Growth Facilities (PRGF) loan expires today, making the release of the last instalment of the loan uncertain.

Sources said the board of IMF will meet in Washington on Friday, but there is no assurance that it would decide on releasing \$123 million, the seventh and the final instalment of the PRGF loan, to Bangladesh.

Despite various reforms in different sectors, the IMF officials are not satisfied with the revenue growth in last few years, sources said adding that this may prevent completion of the sixth, also the final, PRGF review.

The revised budget of the current fiscal set a growth of 11 percent of tax revenue, which was 19 percent in the original budget. The finance ministry sources believe that even the revised target will not be achieved.

A mission of the IMF visited Dhaka in April and submitted an evaluation report on the PRGF, which said, "All revenue targets under the PRGF-supported programme were consistently

missed, and this remains one of the main reasons (along with other missed performance criteria) preventing completion of the sixth and final PRGF review."

"The major failure during the PRGF period was the inability to improve government revenue," the report read.

It said that government revenue in FY03 was 10.3 percent of GDP while it is projected to be 10.4 percent of GDP in FY07. "While a welcome shift away from taxes on international trade underlie these numbers, no overall progress in raising total revenue has been made despite a PRGF objective to improve revenue by 1.5 percentage points," it observed.

The evaluation report, however, lauded progress in structural reforms that included strengthening central bank operations and monitoring the financial sector, privatising one of the Nationalised Commercial Banks (NCBs) and corporatising others.

The agreement for PRGF was signed in June 2003 and so far in six instalments the IMF gave \$467 million to Bangladesh under strict conditions by controlling country's economic sovereignty.

A finance ministry source, how-

ever, said that the IMF is happy with the present caretaker government's performances, which had already brought a number of much-awaited reforms.

"The IMF may approach Bangladesh with three new proposals," one official said. First of all, he said, the IMF may initiate negotiation for a new PRGF programme, secondly they may also offer a staff monitored programme and thirdly, for a close consultation in the context of regular IMF surveillance supported by written assessments of macroeconomic performance when needed to catalyse donor support.

Although the first option is better, the third option is a good transitional choice until a new PRGF programme can be finalised, sources said.

The IMF's PRGF programme came under strong criticism in many countries for strict restrictions. In 2004, Shaukat Aziz, the then finance minister of Pakistan (now the prime minister) said his country would say goodbye to the IMF for imposing conditions on the country's economic policies.

Many economists of

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

RUNAWAY TRAIN Driver, staff were drugged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The probe body formed to investigate the Sunday incident of a Dhaka-bound passenger train running for half an hour with its driver, assistant driver and a sub-assistant engineer nearly unconscious yesterday said the three railway staff were fed drug mixed in their tea.

The railway medical officials in their preliminary test did not find any evidence of taking alcohol by the three railway staff, Bangladesh Railway (BR) sources said.

The BR authorities, however, temporarily suspended the driver (locomotive master--LM) Abdul Khaleque, assistant locomotive master (ALM) Chan Miah, and senior sub assistant engineer (SSAE) Zakaria, for not stopping the train at the scheduled station.

The members of probe committee also interrogated two persons from whom the three train staff bought tea at Bhairab railway station on Sunday morning before they were numbed.

"I found something wrong with me when the train was on the way to Narsingdi station and I do not know what happened until 4:00pm Sunday," SSAE Zakaria told the probe body.

The taste of the tea was not normal, he added.

"It is clear that the tea they took was mixed with drugs and the doctors who examined them said no evidence of taking alcoholic beverages was found," said Sarder Sahadat Hossain, divisional

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

Nepali PM urges king to step aside

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has urged the embattled king to abdicate before upcoming polls, state media said on Sunday, increasing the pressure on the once revered monarch.

Koirala said King Gyanendra, who was forced to end an unpopular period of direct rule last year, should consider a ceremonial role or risk seeing the monarchy scrapped altogether.

But Nepal's Maoists stepped up demands yesterday for the immediate abolition of the Himalayan nation's monarchy, rejecting a new proposal to replace an unpopular king with a four-year-old prince. Nepal's prime minister, a political moderate seen as sympathetic to the idea of keeping the throne, said King Gyanendra and his equally unpopular son, Crown Prince Paras, should step aside and make way for young Prince Hridayendra, the next in line.

The new infant king would therefore have a strictly ceremonial role, and this could also reconcile

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7



PHOTO: STAR

Workers of Dhaka Wasa in Gulshan-1 in the capital pump sewage from a manhole and dump it on the street yesterday.

US envoy discourages forming political party 'under pressure'

UNB, Dhaka

US Ambassador Patricia A Butenis has said Washington does not want to see any sort of military involvement in Bangladesh politics, as they think it will be a mistake.

The outgoing US envoy also discouraged formation of any political party under any kind of "pressure".

"I don't want to see anybody coerced or forced to join a new party, and certainly we do not want to see military involvement in poli-

tics...I have made this point before that military should not take any sort of political role," the envoy made the remarks during an interview with UNB at US embassy yesterday. Butenis, who leaves Dhaka shortly for her next assignment in Iraq, said people may be interested in forming third, fourth or fifth political party. Prof Yunus had also tried to float a party and still may be group of people up there to bring together a new party, which is fine.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

Palestinian cabinet gets to work amid aid hopes

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas's emergency cabinet met for the first time yesterday since Hamas's bloody seizure of Gaza, with signs a crippling Western aid freeze may soon be lifted.

EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana announced that the 27-nation bloc -- the biggest donor to the Palestinians -- would provide some direct funds to the new government and is seeking a way to send aid to the impoverished Gaza Strip.

Minu's aide with criminal charges held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested a BNP leader and close aide of the arrested Rajshahi mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu from the city early yesterday.

The arrestee, Mamunur Rashid Mamun, city unit organising

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

Prayer Timing		
June 19		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-05	4-40
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-50	6-55
Esha	8-15	8-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		

36 killed in fierce battle in Iraq
3 US soldiers slain

AP, AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi and British forces fought a fierce battle with Shia militiamen while conducting house-to-house searches early yesterday south of Baghdad, and Iraqi police and hospital officials said 36 people were killed in the violence.

More than 100 people were injured in the fighting in Amarah, the officials said. At least three of those killed were Iraqi policemen, they said.

A doctor at Amarah's general hospital said 36 bodies had been taken to his facility, though he could not determine how many were militiamen and how many were civilians. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to talk to media.

The British military in Iraq could not immediately comment on the reports, but a Ministry of Defence spokeswoman in London said details of the fighting were still "quite sketchy" but that there were no British casualties.

The spokeswoman, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with ministry policy, said that the British soldiers played a supporting role to Iraqi security forces during the raid and fighting.

The US military released a statement saying at least 20 insur-

gents had been killed and six wounded in coalition operations targeting "secret cells" in Amarah. Another suspect was detained, it said.

The men were believed to be members of a terror network that imports deadly armour-piercing weapons made in Iran known as "explosively formed penetrators," or EFPs, the statement said. They also were suspected of bringing militants from Iraq to Iran for terror training, it added.

Coalition forces came under small arms fire and rocket-propelled grenade attacks during the raids, and called in air support, the military said. The suspects were killed by fire from aircraft, it said.

The US statement did not specify whether the coalition troops were American or British.

Iraqi police said the Mahdi Army, the militia commanded by radical Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, was involved in the clashes, which lasted for about two hours before dawn.

Amarah, located 320KM south-east of Baghdad, is the provincial capital of Maysan province, a predominantly Shia region that borders Iran. Iraqi forces took over control of security from British troops there in April.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

