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CRISIS-HIT NATIONS ADB to provide loans for food subsidy

AFP, Madrid

The Asian Development Bank will provide a "sizeable" amount in budgetary support to nations affected by the spike in food prices that is affecting one billion people in the region, its president said here Saturday.

The loans will help them subsidise the price of food staples for the poor, ADB president Haruhiko Kuroda said on the first day of the body's four-day annual general meeting in the Spanish capital Madrid.

"The amount depends on the requests from the affected countries," he told a news conference. "Possible total lending could be sizeable but not enormous."

The Manila-based multinational lender will also provide two billion dollars in loans in 2008 and 2009 to finance agriculture infrastructure projects such as rural roads and irrigation systems aimed at boosting farm output in the long term.

"Asia has a huge population
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Food crisis to go, spike in price to last

Food deficit stands at 1 lakh tonnes after bumper Boro harvest

REZAUL KARIM BYRON

The good news is the country at present has no shortage of food grains due to a bumper Boro harvest in progress and a huge import in the recent months.

But the bad news is food grains will continue to be high-priced in the months to come.

Latest estimates of the food ministry put the demand for rice and wheat in the current fiscal year at 2.60 crore tonnes while net production of the crops at 2.59 crore, meaning a deficit of only one lakh tonne.

This apart, organisations in private and public sectors have imported 34.73 lakh tonnes of grains including 21 lakh tonnes of rice from July 1 to April 24. This is 91 percent up on the corresponding

period last fiscal year.

During the same period, importers have opened letters of credit (L/C) for import of 50.56 lakh more tonnes of food grains including 33 lakh tonnes of rice.

According to calculations taking into account the food imports, Bangladesh now should have a grain surplus of over 33 lakh tonnes.

Back-to-back floods and Cyclone Sidr last year damaged at least 18 lakh tonnes of standing crops, posing a serious threat to the country's food security.

In this context, both the government and private sector concentrated their efforts on importing food grains to recover the deficit.

However, things began to change for the better at the start of Boro harvest last month.

Explaining how the demand for

food grains and deficit were calculated, a food ministry source said the country's population this year was estimated to be 14.56 crore. Then there was an approximate calculation that each individual requires 489 grammes of food a day. And this all put the annual demand at 2.60 crore tonnes.

On the supply side, production of Aus and Aman was 1.05 crore tonnes in FY 08 while it was 1.23 crore in the previous year.

Boro has already made good much of the shortfall resulting from floods and the cyclone. It is estimated that the yield this season will be around 1.75 crore tonnes while wheat 8 lakh tonnes.

The net food production in that case will stand at 2.59 crore tonnes—just one lakh tonne shy of the

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No arrest in murder of 2 schoolboys

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

No one could be arrested as of yesterday evening in connection with the brutal murder of two schoolboys in the capital.

Ramna police on Thursday afternoon recovered the decomposed bodies of Jewel, 9, son of rickshaw-puller Alaluddin, and Biplab, 7, son of private car driver Siddique Sheikh, of Meerertek from an abandoned house at Nayatola.

In primary investigation, it was found that the boys were killed after cruel tortures, investigation officer (IO) of the case Inspector Abul Kalam Azad said. The bodies bore stab injuries in the chest, abdomen and in the back, morgue sources said.

Detective Branch (DB) of police started investigation into the incident on Friday.

A large team of DB officials including its high-ups has been working to nab the criminals, the IO added.

The boys, who read in class I in an NGO-run school at Nayatola, had gone missing on Tuesday morning.

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OUTLAW ATTACK ON COPS

High alert in 5 N-dists

21 arrested as combing operation launched in Bagmara

ANWAR ALI, from Taherpur
(Bagmara), Rajshahi

Security was put on high alert in five northern districts and a massive combing operation launched in Bagmara upazila of Rajshahi with arrest of 21 people yesterday, a day after killing of a policeman at Taherpur.

The five districts are Rajshahi, Natore, Naogaon, Pabna and Sirajganj.

Meanwhile, Lal Pataka faction of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) has admitted responsibility of the alarming attack.

Primary police investigation found the attack, which left a policeman dead, four others injured and five of their firearms looted, was pre-planned, and that the underground operatives have regrouped taking advantage of police indifference to vigilante activities.

The local police also delayed rescue of the victim policemen.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Noor Muhammad, who visited the spot yesterday noon, also admitted police failure, and said stern action would be taken for negligence to duty.

"Such an incident must not have been a matter of one day. The perpetrators had to take preparations for long... And so, it is police failure that they could not gather information in time", said the IGP, terming the incident dangerous and alarming.

With the Taherpur incident, at least 12 law enforcers were killed and some 28 government firearms looted in attacks by outlaws in Rajshahi, Natore, Naogaon and Sirajganj districts in the last five and a half years, according to police sources.

Such incidents are recurring as the law enforcers conduct intensive raids after the incidents but

discontinue those within a few weeks.

"This time we are not going for any wholesale arrest. We kept our forces alert to avert further incidents. And we are now conducting massive intelligence operation. We will not arrest anyone for harassment, and without proper information", Rajshahi Range DIG Mokhlesur Rahman told The Daily Star.

Among the 21 arrestees this time, two are listed outlaws while four are held on suspicion, the DIG said.

Asked about 15 people kept in the open at a small field behind Taherpur police outpost, he said, many of them are eye-witnesses to the incident and they would be released after interrogation.

Police recovered a 9mm revolver loaded with four bullets, six bullets of Chinese rifle, two bullets of 303 rifle, a bloodstained knife,
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PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Farmers in Paity of Demra, Dhaka try to recover half-ripe paddy yesterday after a nor'wester damaged their crops Friday night.

8 killed, 50 hurt as nor'westers strike

STAR REPORT

At least eight people were killed and over 50 injured as nor'westers swept over Natore, Sirajganj, Bagerhat, Rajbari and Jessore districts on Friday night.

The storms also damaged huge IRRI-Boro crops and vegetables, several hundreds of semi-pucca and thatched houses and uprooted many trees, officials in district administration and Department of Agricultural Extension said.

Our correspondent in Sirajganj reported that three persons were killed in Tarash and Belkuchi upazilas as nor'westers swept over 50 villages of Sadar, Kazipur, Raiganj, Tarash, Belkuchi, Ullapara, Kamarkhanda, Shahzadpur and Chowhali upazilas.

Trees fell on Jamila Khatun, 24, wife of Abdur Rashid of Chak-Kushabari village of Tarash, and her daughter Riya, 3, and Channu Mia, 30, of Chala Satrastra area in Belkuchi, during the storm, killing them.

The storm also uprooted many electric poles, disrupting power supply to the district town. Workers of Power Development Board restored the power supply yesterday after working for eight-ten

hours.

Officials of district and upazila administration visited different affected areas yesterday and assured people of providing assistance.

News agency UNB reports: Three persons, including two of a family, were killed and over 50 injured as trees and houses collapsed during a severe nor'wester in Gurudaspur upazila of Natore.

Local administration sources said Moyna Begum, wife of Rashid Sardar, and her three-year-old daughter Dalim died when their house in Uzirpara village collapsed.

In another incident, Golam Mahmood of Dharisha village died as a tree fell on him.

The storm also damaged over 50 thatched houses and uprooted a large number of trees.

A woman was killed when a tree fell on her in Pakurikanda village of Sadar upazila of Rajbari on Friday night. The deceased was identified as Tarabanu, 70.

Our correspondent in Khulna reported that one person was killed and two others were injured as an engine boat carrying 10 persons capsized in the Bhairab at Muniganj under Bagerhat Sadar
SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

RELEASE OF HASINA

AL given go-ahead for hunger strike

Suranjit comes under fire for seeking army presence in talks with govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) yesterday got permission from the authorities to go on its token hunger strike planned earlier for May 5 demanding release of its detained President Sheikh Hasina, albeit for only in its central and Dhanmondi offices in the capital.

AL got the permission as it had sought clearance from Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Naim Ahmed.

Earlier on April 30, DMP imposed a ban on the AL's announced protest programme terming it illegal under the Emergency Power Rules 2007.

AL Acting General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam told reporters last night after a meeting of the party presidium, the organisation's highest policy making body, that they will go on a token hunger strike between 10:00am and 4:00pm tomorrow only at the two allowed places.

The meeting held in Acting

President Zillur Rahman's Gulshan residence also severely criticised Presidium Member Suranjit Sengupta for his statement earlier in the evening that the army should also be represented at the proposed dialogues between the caretaker government and political parties.

Replying to a query, Ashraf said they will not have any objection if army representatives are present at the dialogues. Terming the army as a part of the government, he said it is a matter for the government to decide who they will keep at the dialogues.

Sources said all presidium members of AL opined that an explanation should be sought from Suranjit for his statement.

Earlier in the evening, two senior leaders of AL and pro-Khaleda faction of BNP—Suranjit Sengupta and Brig Gen (ret'd) ASM Hannan Shah—said the army should also be represented at the proposed official dialogues
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BTTB to offer links within 24 hours

UNB, Dhaka

Intending subscribers of the state-owned BTTB will get telephone connections within 24 hours of payment of their demand note money.

This was disclosed at a meeting at Telecommunications Bhaban here yesterday. Chief Adviser's Special Assistant for Post and Telecommunications Brig Gen (ret'd) MA Malek attended the meeting as chief guest.

The meeting was told that the subscribers would be able to have their phone connections by filling in the prescribed form along with four copies of photograph.

BTTB, however, will take legal actions against the subscribers if the bank concerned lodges any complaint regarding payment of the demand note money.

The meeting was also informed that the shifting process of BTTB phones has also been simplified.

Besides, high-speed Internet connections will be given to 26,000 telephones under BTTB's 25 exchanges by June this year. At present, BTTB has the capacity to provide prepaid services to its 10,000 subscribers.

Addressing the meeting, MA Malek said the government stresses the need for simplifying BTTB's customer-service process considering the present competitive market.

He urged the officials concerned to play their due role in restoring confidence of the people in BTTB.

Blasts blown out of proportion

INAM AHMED

The heat was stifling. Sweat rolled down in drops and showed through T-shirts. In the deep Lawachhara rain forest, the workers in bright red overalls and red helmets were busy securing the explosive line. And then there was nothing else to do but wait. The big yellow remote explosion box with a long antennae lay on the ground, occasionally the wireless fixed to it cackling--the man at the other end of a wave recording van somewhere in a far away tea garden called for patience. Somewhere the explosive lines had been disrupted.

A good forest is never silent. Lawachhara, one of the rare rain forests of the country, was full of noises of all kinds. Thousands of cicadas were producing ear-piercing noises, rubbing their body parts together. Sometimes it sounded like the sawmill, then it was thousands of jet engines revving, again it turned into mysterious noises coming from space. We checked on the sound machine--66 decibels. A hill myna was out there making loud calls to mimic at least six different birds. These are the rascals who always mimic others and hardly make their own calls. A green-billed malkoha cackled loudly and then went silent. A rustle in the hill only about 60 metres away revealed a pig-tailed monkey--big and proud--foraging the forest bed.

Two hours went and still no news from the recording van. Then the radio cackled again and the "shooter"--the main man who detonates the explosives--quickly got up on his feet. He quickly attached two wires to the big yellow box and checked on the instruments. Then we heard the first sound--a dull boom somewhere in the forest, then another and another.

Chevron's 3D seismic survey had started. Earlier in the day, we saw the explosion sites like small domes of about two feet in diameter where the earth had been bored up to 70 feet to set the explosives.

The shooter tweaked with a black knob on the yellow box and then pushed the red one. We waited 25 metres away in apprehension, our ears and body strained. Then came the noise--a dull thud and almost instant vibration under our feet for a second. A few dry leaves fell off the trees and it was over. We checked on the sound meter--52 decibels, lower than the noise the cicadas were making. The myth of Chevron "causing loud explosions to destroy the forest" was broken to us!

Later, we talked to the IUCN zoologist who accompanied the blasting team to the site if he had noticed any disturbance to the wildlife. "No, nothing at all," was the reply. Later in the day, we met Ronald Halder, a doctor-turned-environmentalist who happened to have witnessed the explosions. He was also of the same view--the explosions are so mild and

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PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

The charred ground, top, after Chevron detonated explosives underground for its 3D seismic survey in Lawachhara rain forest where many trees were chopped down and stolen long ago. Chevron employees, right, head into the jungle to conduct the survey. They prepare equipment, bottom, for an underground explosion in the forest.



Jamaat rejects constituency delimitation

UNB, Dhaka

Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid yesterday demanded withdrawal of the Election Commission's draft gazette notification redemarcating 133 out of the 300 parliamentary constituencies.

In a statement, Mojahid said the EC took the decision ignoring public opinion.

The Jamaat leader said following re-demarcation, confusion has deepened among the political parties as well as the people whether the parliamentary elections will be held as per the roadmap.

Mojahid urged the Election Commission to hold the general elections as per the existing demarcation of the 300 parliamentary constituencies.

No polls with Khaleda in jail

Reiterates Delwar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP is moving step by step towards street agitations, said pro-Khaleda BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain yesterday, asking party leaders and workers to be prepared for that.

"The state of emergency for a long time itself is a kind of terrorism. BNP will lead in changing the existing situation," Delwar said while addressing leaders of the party's Pabna district unit at his Nam flat in the city.

No "manipulated" election
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