

## Global economy to shrink for first time in 60 years

IMF warns; OECD makes similar forecast

AFP, Washington

The IMF has said the global economy would shrink in 2009 for the first time in 60 years, as EU leaders balked at pressure to boost spending and the crisis brought a million angry French workers to the streets.

Meanwhile, the head of the OECD Angel Gurría said yesterday that the world economy is likely to shrink in 2009 despite growth in China and India.

"Global economic activity is falling -- with advanced economies registering their sharpest declines in the post-war era -- notwithstanding forceful policy efforts," the International Monetary Fund said in an interim update of its world outlook.

It slashed its forecasts to a global contraction of 0.5 to 1.0 percent, sharply lower than the 0.5 percent growth given only on January 28.

Advanced economies are expected to suffer "deep recessions" in 2009, shrinking between 3.0 and 3.5 percent, while growth will slow sharply in developing countries.

The IMF also warned that

the Group of 20 developed and emerging major economies had not done enough to fight the recession.

"Country responses to the global crisis are in an early stage... measures are still needed to restore financial

stability," the IMF said, adding that a projected 2010 recovery depended on comprehensive policy steps.

Meanwhile, EU leaders rejected pressure to pump more taxpayer cash into their faltering economies.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel insisted in parliament that the EU was already spending enough to fight the recession.

"We are in the vanguard. We are contributing an above-average amount," she said. "The current measures must work. We must allow their impact to develop."

The 27-nation European Union has adopted stimulus measures for 2009 and 2010 worth 400 billion euros (520 billion dollars), equivalent to 3.3 percent of the bloc's gross domestic product.

"I am against us Europeans (responding to) the American wish for a more voluminous economic recovery package," Luxembourg's Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker said.

Washington, citing its own efforts, has pressed its European allies in the run-up

### IMF growth forecasts

	GDP in percent	
	2009	2010
World	-0.5 to -1.0	1.5 to 2.5
Industrialised countries	-3.0 to -3.5	0.0 to 0.5
United States	-2.6	0.2
Japan	-5.8	-0.2
Euro zone	-3.2	0.1
Developing countries	1.5 to 2.5	3.5 to 4.5

Source: IMF

200309 AFP

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Dust of the street and of roadside construction work and exhaust fume from age-old vehicles make it hard for Dhaka city dwellers to breathe. The photo was taken on Tongi Diversion Road in the capital.

PHOTO: STAR

## City's air quality back to square one

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

Dhaka's air quality has almost returned to its notorious levels as a rise in vehicle numbers, brick kilns, and building constructions wiped out improvements made by the phasing out of two-stroke vehicles in 2003.

According to the government's Air Quality Management Project (AQMP), now defunct, the annual average of particulate matters (PM) have risen significantly despite a massive dip in pollution levels in 2004 after the ban on two-stroke vehicles in 2003.

AQMP statistics reveal that PM-2.5 (fine particles) levels were nearly halved when they dropped from 266 micrograms per cubic metre (mcg) in 2003 to 147 mcg in 2004. By 2008, PM-2.5 levels rose to 191.83 mcg.

PM-10 (solid particles) levels had also

improved dropping from 330 mcg in 2003 to 238 in 2004 but it went up to 291 mcg in 2008.

World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends PM-2.5 levels are kept below 20 mcg to prevent ill health and 70 mcg as an interim target for highly polluted cities.

Prolonged exposure to high PM levels contributes to the risk of developing cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, as well as of lung cancer, according to the WHO.

Former AQMP director Nasiruddin said a significant rise in diesel-run buses, trucks and other vehicles along with other gaseous pollutants such as carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen and sulphur (NOx and SOx) has led to the increasing PM levels.

AQMP collected the highest, second highest and lowest 24-hour concentration of three days

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## Probe ahead of by-polls reflects govt ill-motives

Delwar on charges against Sircar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Just ahead of parliamentary by-elections the formation of a committee to investigate corruption allegations against former speaker Jamiruddin Sircar was 'wrong and illogical', said BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain yesterday.

"Hasty formation of the probe committee reflects the government's ill motives," he told reporters at his Armanitola residence.

He said the government formed the probe body to influence the by-polls, otherwise they could have formed it after the election.

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## Long tailback at Paturia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ferry service on Paturia-Daulatdia route remained suspended for about three hours yesterday morning because of dense fog.

Long tailbacks developed on both sides of the channel following suspension of ferry service on the route from 6:15am to 9:00am.

"Ferry service resumed at 9:00am and the situation will

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## Obama urges Iranians to end decades of animosity

Tehran welcomes olive branch, asks Washington to repair 'past mistakes'

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama launched an historic direct appeal to the Iranian people yesterday, urging an end to decades of animosity and offering "honest" engagement with the Islamic Republic.

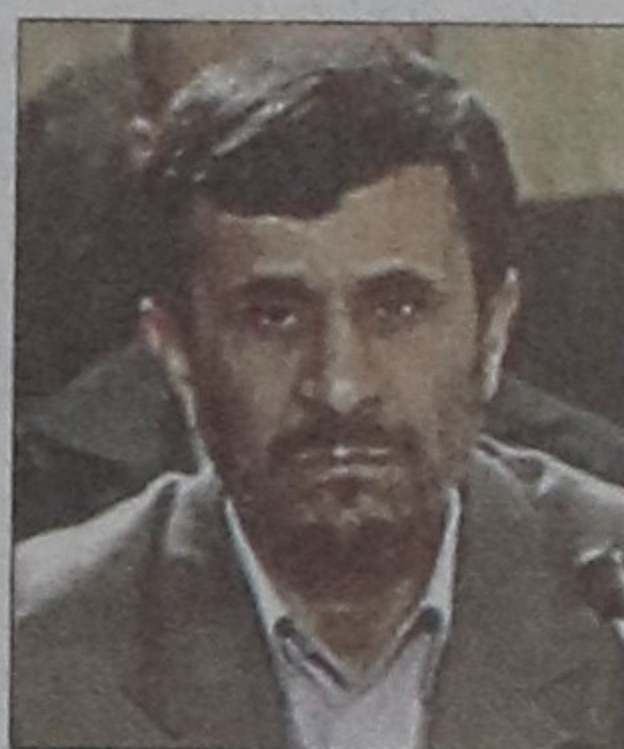
A top adviser to Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad welcomed Obama's olive branch, but urged Washington to recognise and repair "past mistakes."

Obama said in a video message marking the Iranian New Year, Nowruz, that his administration "is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us, and to pursuing constructive ties among the United States, Iran and the international community."

In a new decisive break with his predecessor, President George W Bush, Obama called the celebrations a time of "new beginnings."



Barack Obama



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

He said he wanted a new era of "engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect."

Obama said he wanted "constructive ties" with Iran, which could take its "rightful place" in the world if it renounced terror and embraced peace.

"For nearly three decades relations between our nations have been strained," he said. "But at this holiday we are reminded of the common

humanity that binds us together."

The two nations have had no diplomatic ties since 1980, following Iran's Islamic revolution and the taking of US diplomats as hostages for more than a year.

Bush lumped Iran in his "Axis of Evil" with North Korea and Saddam Hussein's Iraq, then led international accusations that Iran is seeking to build a nuclear bomb. Iranian

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## Most stranded Bangladeshis get entry to Malaysia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Malaysia has taken in most of the 532 Bangladeshi workers who were stranded in Kuala Lumpur International Airport for around 12 days since the cancellation of 55,000 work visas.

On Thursday, employers and outsourcing companies received around 300 workers from the immigration section, said sources close to recruitment business.

Earlier last week, 184 were allowed entry. They arrived in the KL airport on March 8 and 9.

"The immigration authorities are also allowing in those returning from vacation," said a Bangladeshi businessman in Malaysia.

Following the Malaysian government's cancellation of 55,000 work visas to Bangladeshis, the immigration barred all workers including those who had been coming back to work after vacation at home.

In response, the Bangladesh

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## FBI smells conspiracy in BDR carnage

More time needed for fair probe: Faruk

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The visiting Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) team has said the carnage at Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) headquarters last month was a "conspiracy".

The FBI agents made the observation after comparing the BDR incident with mutinies staged by military and paramilitary forces in other countries, said officials of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) after a meeting with the team yesterday.

The CID sources, however, declined to elaborate on the matter.

At the meeting the FBI team has also assured the local investigators of giving all kinds of assistance in finding out foreign links to the February 25-26 BDR massacre in which 73 people, including 56 army officers and their relatives, were killed.

The FBI agents said Bangladeshi investigators seriously lack modern equipment in probing such a grave incident but appreciated their skills.

"It is not possible to carry out fair probe with the existing equipment. But we are ready to provide you with all kinds of technical supports

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People of Manda in the city's Bashabo area bring out a procession yesterday to protest against the poor supply of water in the area.

PHOTO: STAR

## UN warns of global row over water

Dhaka at Istanbul meet calls for integrated move in S Asia

AFP, BSS, Istanbul

From South Asia to the Middle East, from Australia to California, rivers and aquifers that cross boundaries have become potent sources of friction.

Farmers squabble with city dwellers over irrigation rights while countries in river basins complain about pollution or water theft from upstream, as their neighbours build dams to siphon off flow from the watershed, reports AFP.

"Conflicts about water can occur at all scales," the UN warned ahead of the World Water Forum (WWF), which winds up in Istanbul tomorrow.

Bangladesh Water Resources Minister Ramesh Chandra Sen told the Forum that the cooperation among co-riparian countries is a must for integrated management of water resources from common rivers in South Asia, reports BSS.

"We look forward for integrated water resources from the international rivers during monsoon and dry season," he said at a special session of the WWF.

"Local-level conflicts are commonplace in irrigation systems, where farmers vie for limited resources," it said in a massive document, the third World Water Development Report.

Conflicts also occur at the scale of large national river basins -- multistate Indian rivers such as the Cauvery and the Krishna -- or transnational river basins, such as the Jordan and the Nile.

"Water wars" for the time belong in the realm of conjecture.

In more than half a century, there have been only 37 cross-border disputes about water that have led to some form of violence, while some 200 treaties on water-sharing have been negotiated and signed.

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