

Mixed job

FROM PAGE 1
OMS (open market sale) rice prices by Tk 2 and yet it finds no taker. A part of the de-escalation of food prices could be attributed to the continuous global food price slump since September last year -- because in a globalised world Bangladesh alone could not keep its prices low while the rest of the world consumed pricey rice. But the story has also substances beyond that -- it is that of conscious policy decisions of the present government, and that of the caretaker one. In its last days, the caretaker government had been able to replenish its depleted stock and the AL government maintained it. In addition, the AL government has promised to keep importing rice in future. These gave the right signal to the private sector and plugged speculative behaviour. The private sector started offloading their stocks as they also sensed a good boro harvest. The new government's commitment to feed the people cheap food, also gave a positive signal to the market.

Next comes the boro story. The country is now poised for a bumper boro production, and the government's -- especially Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury and Food Minister Dr Razzaque's -- energetic and committed involvement in market monitoring, making inputs reach the farmers, and strengthening of the distribution channel -- is the key to this food success. The decision to rationalise fertilizer prices according to the international market that saw a reduction in key fertilizer prices by a half, helped farmers use a balanced nutrient. As Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya puts it, "The confluence of global situation, policy initiatives, institutional engagement, and personal involvement of the two ministers made the food story for Bangladesh today."

The AL government can today score high because it has ensured a comfortable food security for the country, as reports predict food will be a real concern for the world soon, despite the present boom.

Beyond the food sector, the government faced the reality of the ongoing global recession in its first 100 days, and is likely to see the same global atmosphere for another year. The country's export growth has slowed, remittance from workers working abroad slimmed, and domestic demand shrunk. The worst sufferer is likely to be the service sector.

It is a difficult time for the world economy, even the heavy weights are groaning and moaning under the pain of unemployment and astounding sag. The new government however seemed a bit slow to understand the reality, despite the businesses' repeated calls for attention. Finally it has formed a taskforce to chalk out measures to counter the recession impact. A bailout package is likely to be announced in a week or so. Meantime, the government has capped the lending rates of the banks at 13 percent and allowed rescheduling of loans by the export sector without down payments. But as the inflation keeps falling, this 13 percent still shows an increase in real interest rate, and a real concern here is that the market forces are not acting as they should have been.

But by any standard, these could be dubbed as slow responses. And inadequate too. While the rest of the world chalked out its stimulus package much earlier, the AL-led government just faced the

Ctg arms haul

FROM PAGE 16
Commander Khorshid -- were being interrogated till filling of this report last evening.

Investigators let the other three go after recording their statements since they were on leave to sit for a departmental test for promotion at that time, said sources.

CID Chittagong Division Special Police Super (SSP) Mohammad Muslim confirmed the appearance of the six navy personnel before the investigators.

The CID served the notice to those who were on duty on the Karnaphuli River and the Bay of Bengal during the offloading of the 10-truckload of firearms and ammunition at Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited Jetty in the early hours of April 02, 2009, he said.

As the CID investigators, through the home ministry, sought a list of the then coast guards, the Coast Guard Chittagong Zone provided it, said sources.

The CID was interrogating the then Coast Guard men as the main accused in the case, Hafizur Rahman, in a confessional statement on March 02, 2009 implicated them in helping two engine boats with the deadly consignment berth at CUFJ Jetty.

problem at home with some reluctance, basking in the theory that Bangladesh's economy would remain unscathed by some miracle (one assumption is that its economy is narrowly dependent on exports while the East Asian economy, barring Malaysia's, is highly export focused.). Indications are there that no subsidy will be made available to the industry or export sectors. Rather 'non-subsidy' packages will be offered. It is not much understandable, as the fiscal space that the government has does not allow it to provide tax incentives (already the tax-GDP ratio has declined over the last year). Other kinds of competitiveness enhancing initiatives like improvement in power situation, port and infrastructure development, and speeding up the bureaucracy are unlikely to be achieved soon. So in absence of any comprehensive short-term action, sustainable competitiveness development initiatives are also not on the horizon. The result could be perilous.

However, the recent decision to have a bigger annual development programme goes in line with the stimulus package followed by the US and many other countries that want higher expenditure on maintenance and infrastructure development. The major challenge will however be in targeting and implementation. There is no reason to believe that the government's implementation capacity has developed overnight. The domestic demand that is to be created through enhanced spending has to be properly served by a domestic industry (this does not go against the free trade theory, and supports Barak Obama's made-in-USA policy as there are a few imports that could meet the grassroots demands). But any new policy decision to support small and medium enterprises is yet to come.

However, the government, specially the finance minister, AMA Muhiith, deserves some special thanks for his handling of the IMF help offer. IMF does not offer easy cash to anybody, and its stringent policies have actually caused woes for many countries rather than bringing benefits. Despite its recent easing of lending terms for emergency actions, any offer by the international financial institute deserves a thorough study. A comfortable foreign exchange reserve and a still surplus current account balance probably strengthened Mr Muhiith's hands in showing a general reluctance to subscribe to IMF loans.

As said in the beginning, a 100-day period, messed up by a carnage, is not much time to set the ball rolling for the economy. But the next 100 days definitely should be a turning point. (This article was written before yesterday's development regarding announcement of bailout package for the recession-hit exporters)

JMB men held

FROM PAGE 1
Madrasa teacher Faruk had sheltered JMB leader Minhajul Islam, who has been handed down death sentence in the August 17 blast case in Naogaon, say the police, adding Minhajul got a job at Shikarpur Hafezia Madrasa on Faruk's recommendation.

Shahadat and Karim were engaged in luring youths to JMB and jihad against the country by distributing books among them. They both were also engaged in collecting funds for JMB, the police inform.

Soon after the arrests, a number of Jamaat leaders including Sadar Jamaat Ameer Abdur Rahman and Naogaon municipal Jamaat nayebe-ameer Aynul Haque rushed to Naogaon Sadar police station.

As the Jamaat leaders requested the police for the arrestees' release in presence of the Naogaon SP, they were kept confined for three hours and later released with the undertaking that they won't do so in future.

The local Jamaat leaders denied the arrestees' link with JMB and said their arrest is "conspiracy" against the party and Islam.

Jamaat leader Abdur Rahman said local Awami League leaders threatened them with such fate if they didn't stop politics just a day before the arrest.

"Faruk and Shahadat are active Jamaat workers. They used to hold regular meetings and maintain report cards. They were falsely blamed as JMB activists," said Aynul Haque.

Replying to a question, Haque said they have yet to find any JMB activists inside their party.

"We are sure of the three arrestees that they have no relations with JMB."

Robbers kill

FROM PAGE 16
Diseases Hospital in Dhaka. The injured passengers were letgo after first aid.

The onslaught took place when the launch passed Mukhtarpur Bridge in Munshiganj Sadar Upazila. Later, near Kalagachhia in Bandar upazila of Narayanganj some more 15 to 20 robbers got aboard, said the passengers.

Robbers charged on the passengers indiscriminately with sharp weapons and plundered valuables from around 50 passengers. As Mozammel tried to restrain the robbers, they hacked him to death, witnesses said.

Mozammel's body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Ansar Commander Abed Ali filed a robbery case with the Narayanganj Police Station. The launch finally reached its destination Muradnagar yesterday morning.

HSC exams

FROM PAGE 1
The highest number of candidates 1,53,398 will appear under Dhaka Board, 75,629 under Rajshahi, 41,644 under Comilla, 74,489 under Jessore, 41,754 under Chittagong, 30,159 under Barisal, 18,349 under Sylhet and 59,411 under Dinajpur Education Board.

Some 59,354 students will sit for Alim exams under Bangladesh Madrasa Board, and 64,121 for the Business Management exams under Bangladesh Technical Education Board.

Besides, some 170 candidates will sit for the HSC at five centres abroad included under Dhaka Board. The centres are in Jeddah, Riyadh, Tripoli, Doha and Abu Dhabi.

Ahead of the examination, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) imposed restriction on access within 200 yards of the examination centres to ensure peaceful atmosphere.

The restrictions will remain effective till May 28, said a DMP release.

Earlier on Monday, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said necessary steps had been taken to hold the exams in a copy-free and peaceful atmosphere.

Zero tolerance will be shown to any incident involving copying during the exams, he added.

140 more

FROM PAGE 16
workers returned homes from Malaysia while 48 from Maldives despite having their legal documents.

The cheated workers alleged that at least 65 of them returned home after facing various jail terms.

While talking to journalists at the airport, the cheated workers alleged that neither the Embassy in Malaysia nor the recruiting agencies helped them in this regard.

Yusuf Ali of Nawabganj said "I was supposed to provide with a job in a confectionery shop, but they recruited me as a construction worker," he said and added that they sent him to the country with a tourist visa instead of the work permit.

Meanwhile, among the bodies, 16 bodies, four of a family, were received here Tuesday while five others yesterday.

Four bodies of the family were identified as Paritosh Kumer of Chouhata in Sakthira district, his wife Tandrisa Ari Das and their two and four years old two children.

Among others, Sanjid Ahmed and Nurul Islam died in Malaysia while Al-Amin, Sirajul Islal, Gazi Miah, Arshed Ali, Syeed Ahmed, Majibar Rahman in Saudi Arabia, Mohammad Alam, Kabil Sheikh, Nazmul Huq, Sirajul Raj, Hlibul Miah and Aminul Huq in Dubai, Ahmedulah in Kuwait, Sadeq Miah in Abu Dhabi and Muhasin in Qatar.

Some died of cardiac arrest while others were killed in accidents.

Bailout package

FROM PAGE 1
The central bank recently told the commercial banks that they would not be allowed to charge interest higher than 13 percent.

In a related development, the World Bank (WB) last week cautioned the government about the demands for bailout. This might not benefit the poor, the WB said.

And the government does not have adequate fiscal space to finance large bailout packages, it noted.

Police rescue

FROM PAGE 1
said at the briefing at Shahbagh Police Station.

He also said police handed over 26 cellphone sets, out of 36, to the owners after police recovered those from the muggers.

All arrestees were sent to jail hajat after they were produced before a Dhaka court yesterday, police said.

India goes to polls

FROM PAGE 16
Congress hit back by pointing out that the previous BJP-led government had released some dreaded terrorists in exchange for the safe release of 154 passengers on board an Indian Airlines that was hijacked from Kathmandu to Kandahar in December 1999.

The polling in the first phase in eastern Uttar Pradesh will determine the shape of things to come in the politically key state, which sends the highest number of 80 parliamentarians, as the pattern is expected to leave its mark on the next three phases in the state.

Elections are also being simultaneously in Andhra Pradesh in the south and Orissa state in the east. In Orissa, the polls will be a litmus test for Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik whose party Biju Janata Dal parted ways with BJP after 11 years of alliance and switched over to a band of centrist and Left parties.

More than half of Andhra Pradesh ruled by Congress will go to the poll in the first phase which will decided 154 of the total of 294 assembly seats.

Agencies add: Thousands of troops fanned out across parts of India on Wednesday, a day ahead of elections to determine who will lead the country as the global economic slump threatens to undo two decades of growth.

Thursday's voting is the first of five phases that will span a month. Some 714 million people more than twice the population of the United States are eligible to cast ballots.

Opinion polls indicate that neither the ruling Congress party nor the main opposition, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, will win enough seats in the 543-seat lower house of Parliament to rule on its own.

Whoever gets the most votes will likely have to cobble together a coalition out of dozens of smaller parties, many focused on single, regional issues.

Thousands of police and paramilitary troops were deployed Wednesday across the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, which will vote for both national and state-level representatives.

"We have taken every necessary measure to ensure peaceful, free and fair elections. Now you go out and vote," state Director General of Police A.K. Mohanty said in the state capital, Hyderabad.

Thousands of troops were called in to patrol the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, which has the most seats in the national Parliament. Sixteen of its 80 seats are up for grabs on Thursday, said Brij Lal, a senior police official.

In the eastern state of Bihar, heavily armed Maoist rebels attacked a paramilitary camp set up for the elections, wounding one soldier, senior police official Vikas Vaibhav said.

The district where the attack took place is 87 miles (140 kilometers) southwest of the state capital, Patna. It goes to the polls Thursday.

Some voting districts in both Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are also strongholds of Maoist rebels who often target police and government officials, accusing them of colluding with landlords and rich farmers to exploit the poor.

With more than 1.2 billion

Hasina warns

FROM PAGE 1
at her official residence Jamuna in the city on Tuesday. "Those who instigate violence in educational institutions won't be spared and tough actions will be taken against them," BCL Joint Secretary Iqbal Mahmud Bablu told The Daily Star quoting Hasina.

"But those who work positively will be rewarded," said the PM as quoted by Bablu. BCL president Ripon said, "The PM asked us to play the key role in ensuring a congenial atmosphere on all campuses."

Hasina issued the warning two weeks after she had quit as the BCL's organizational chief. Hasina took the decision at a presidium meeting of AL on March 31 following a series of clashes between BCL men on different campuses.

Meanwhile, Rab arrested two BCL central leaders--Ashrafur Rahman and Sohail Rana Mithu from a city residence on April 12 on charge of creating unrest on the Dhaka University campus.

Meanwhile, RAB has prepared a list of some top BCL leaders including Golam Sarwar Kabir, Khairul Hasan Jewel of FH Hall, Utpal Saha of Jagannath Hall, Sumon of SM Hall, Shahidul, Ashraf and Sumon of Jahurul Hauque Hall, Salman of Ziaur Rahman Hall and Siddique Najmul Alam of Surya Sen hall for instigating violence in the educational institutions mainly on the Dhaka university campus, sources said.

citizens, India normally holds staggered elections for logistic and security reasons.

Results from the massive elections, which will use more than 1.3 million electronic voting machines in 828,804 polling stations, are expected May 16.

Both major parties are already weakened going into the polls.

Congress, which is ending a five-year stint in power, has seen its main achievement India's spectacular economic growth, which has averaged more than 8 percent in recent years hit by the global economic crisis.

It also has faced severe criticism for the bungled handling of the Mumbai terror attack in November, when 10 gunmen rampaged through the city for three days, killing 164 people.

The BJP also is in disarray. Its leadership is aging and fragmented, its anti-terror line was criticized as too harsh in the wake of the Mumbai attacks, and it has been blamed for stoking tensions between India's Hindu majority and large Muslim minority.

The two main parties also have seen their support eroded by regional parties focused on local issues or on particular castes in the country's complex Hindu social system.

(More news on Page 7)

DCC polls

FROM PAGE 16
"If the assembly sits in June and then passes the city-corporation laws, the EC will have to hold the DCC polls in October-November as there will be rainwater during August and September in the country," Sakhawati added.

He said the commission has been waiting for getting the city-corporation laws to hold the DCC polls.

The commissioner also observed that the EC must be further strengthened by giving it constitutional powers as well as increasing the manpower and the infrastructure across upzila levels to ensure a matured democratic process in the country.

2 held

FROM PAGE 16
of Banashri in Rampura area were also held in this connection.

Zahir from Rab-3 custody told The Daily Star that one Alamgir Hossain took him to his fake note-making business establishment in Badda area from his workplace Hotel Mitali in the city's Chankharupul area about six months back.

"I used to buy one fake note of 100-taka denomination against Tk 30 when I was an agent of Alamgir," he said adding "I started producing counterfeit notes employing two operators--Sadekul and Jewel--at the rented house since April 1."

One Zahir from Tejgaon area used to supply the packets of special sheets used for printing the forged notes, he said.

The sheets contain water print of Royal Bengal Tiger, the seal of Bangladesh Bank and other components of a real note, he said adding, he used to buy each bundle contains 500 sheets against Tk 15,000.

Each sheet is used for producing four fake notes of Tk 100-denomination while he used to sell one forged note of Tk 100 against Tk 20, he said.

Another arrestee Sadekul said they used to produce fake Indian notes of 500-rupee denomination for buying Phensidyl from bordering areas of Chapainawabganj district.

MPs to be declared

FROM PAGE 1
The UP chairmen at the meeting also threatened to launch a tough movement to realise their demand for scrapping the Upazila Parishad Act 2009 and ensure the democratic rights of UP representatives.

They feared that taking advantage of the act's provisions, lawmakers might misuse their power and indulge in corruption.

This act will create obstacles for local administrations to conducting development works freely, they added.

Harun-or-Rashid Hawlader, coordinator of Upazila Chairmen's Association, said they have nothing to do with the 'so-called' forum.

"Most of the chairmen and vice-chairmen are not aware of such a meeting. I think, it's nothing but an initiative to create a rift between the representatives of upazila parishad."

A total of 450 UP chairmen and 900 vice-chairmen were elected in the January 22 elections this year.

The parliament on April 6 unanimously passed the Upazila Parishad Bill 2009 that ensured the lawmakers' administrative authority over the most crucial tier of local government system.

Hazari

FROM PAGE 1
minutes using a megaphone on the court premises.

"I got bail in five cases but did not get in one due to a conspiracy. The judge in whose court I sought bail was on leave and he did not attend the court," Hazari said adding, "It is a conspiracy. The conspirators are not sitting idle. A befitting reply would be given to these conspiracies."

He urged the party leaders and workers to keep patience and said a reception for him would be held this month in which the conspirators would be unmasked.

Court sources said following an order from the High Court, Hazari prayed for bail before the courts in six cases at about 11:00 am.

At first he got bail from District and Sessions Judge Syed Aminul Islam's court in indoor stadium demolishing case and then he got bail from Additional District and Session Judge Sufia Begum's court in Sujar murder case.

Senior Judicial Magistrate Rezaul Karim Chowdhury granted him bail in two criminal cases at about 12:00 noon but rejected bail in the money laundering case.

In this case, plaintiff ACC official Abdul Haque said Jynal Hazari in collaboration with bank officials drew Tk 30,648,000 illegally through six cheques on August 15, 2002. But there were Tk 30,066,240 in his account. He took an overdraft facility from the bank.

Later, he got bail from Chief Judicial Magistrate Syed Jahed Mansur's court till May 12 in journalist Tipu Sultan torture case.

Of the total 21 cases, filed against Hazari, split verdict was given in five cases, which are now awaiting verdict of the third judge. In last week, he was acquitted in seven cases, including five murder cases.

Internal conflict

FROM PAGE 16
committees. Even some of them are provoking party workers to insult reformist leaders.

Admitting the problems, party standing committee member Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman said, they (corrupt and convicts) want to serve their own interests by 'keeping the party hostage'.

"It will be tough for a good man to continue in politics unless the situation improves. We are waiting to see good people in BNP," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

When asked, a senior BNP leader said, "Their (convicts) pressure will have no impact as the party had to pay much for their activities. But it is also true that reformists threw the party into uncertainty during the state of emergency."

He went on, "Considering all the matters, the standing committee (of BNP) will announce the names of convener and joint conveners of district units as soon as possible."

Earlier last month, the standing committee had decided to form district convening committees by April 7 but failed to do so.

According to the party plan, these committees, before holding district unit councils, will organise councils at upazila and union levels.

Before holding union level councils, a drive will be launched at village level to enrol new members of the party.

Expressway

FROM PAGE 16
set up a ring road around the Dhaka city as another step to ease the traffic jam.

The premier observed that the major crisis people are facing at present is lack of electricity and water.

Hasina informed the reporters that the government is contemplating opting for regional cooperation to solve the current electricity problem. "We have talked to the Bhutan government and got positive response to get hydroelectric power."

Asked about installation of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, she said process is underway to set up the plant.

PM expressed dissatisfaction over unplanned load shedding of electricity and directed the authorities concerned to formulate a routine of load shedding informing people about the time of load shedding in the particular areas.

The PM also laid emphasis on exploring alternative sources of electricity.

Asked about her government's plan to attain food security, she said the country's current food stock is sufficient and efforts would go on to ensure full food security of the people.

About the current global economic recession, the PM said the government has already formed a taskforce in this regard.

The premier also expressed her deep sympathies for the victims of the February 25-26 Pilkhana carnage.

PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad and Deputy Press Secretary Mahbubul Hoque Shakil were present.

Jamaat campaigning

FROM PAGE 16
Abdul Malek, officer-in-charge (OC) of Pallabi Police Station, told The Daily Star that Mobarak admitted that he is a local Jamaat leader and distributed leaflets and booklets.

"Mobarak, arrested under section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPc), was produced before the court," Malek said.

Our court correspondent adds: The Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate's Court placed Mobarak on a two-day remand after Alamgir Hossain of Pallabi Police Station, also the investigation officer, sought his five-day remand.

Sources said Jamaat has assigned its several hundred activists to distribute leaflets and booklets in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

The booklet titled 'Allegations of war crimes against Jamaat and its leaders are false and motivated' has been published by Chairman of Jamaat's publication department Maulana Abu Taher Muhammad Masum.

It reads, "Although the head of the post-independence Bangladesh government, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, had settled the issue of war crimes with cancellation of the Collaborators Act, the issue has been raised after 38 years of the country's independence for political gains."

None of the Jamaat leaders had been involved in any killings, rape, looting, arson or any other crimes during the liberation war. Those who

Home wants

FROM PAGE 1
2008 through promulgation of an ordinance.

State Minister for Home Affairs Tanjim Ahmed Sohail Taj said the government would assign an investigative agency within the next week as part of the process for trying war criminals.

The government will also appoint prosecutors and set up a war crimes tribunal, Taj told reporters at the parliament building after the meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on home ministry.

Committee Chief Maj Gen (ret'd) MA Salam said they made recommendations to the government for increasing accommodation, training and other facilities for members of police.

Fighting resumes

FROM PAGE 16
The army said in a statement that two soldiers had been killed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) during the ceasefire. The attacks were launched from the government-designated "no-fire zone," the army said.

"Belittling the 48-hour humanitarian pause declared by His Excellency the President... LTTE snipers in the 'no-fire zone' fired and killed one more soldier on Tuesday morning," the army said.

It said another soldier was killed by Tiger snipers on the first day of the ceasefire while many more were wounded. Military officials said troops did not retaliate during the ceasefire period.

The pro-rebel Tamilnet website said both sides launched attacks as the suspension of hostilities ended at midnight and that at least 180 civilians were killed by military rockets and artillery fire on Wednesday morning.

Army spokesman Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara denied army shelling and said troops had not launched any new operations.

Battlefield casualty claims are impossible to verify as reporters are not allowed to travel freely in the conflict zone and there no independent monitors in the area.

The LTTE, which once controlled around a third of the island, are now boxed into a narrow strip of coastal jungle in the northeast where they are vastly outnumbered.

Sri Lanka's army chief Lieutenant General Sarath Fonseka, in an address to troops in Colombo on Wednesday, said the Tigers were facing the "most humiliating defeat" since they were formed in 1972.

"The country would be blessed with a peaceful society in the near future," he said, adding that the Tigers had lost more than 18,000 fighters over a period of about three years.

International rights groups urged the Commonwealth to pressure both the Sri Lankan government and the Tigers to end the humanitarian crisis caused by heavy fighting.

In a letter to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, the London-based Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and the New York-based Human Rights Watch appealed for civilians to be allowed to escape to safety.