

Govt to amend Money Laundering Act 2002

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Steps would be taken to amend the Money Laundering Prevention Act 2002 in the next parliament session, said Finance Minister AMAMuhith yesterday. Very little progress has been achieved so far as regards bringing back the laundered money as only one money laundering case could be filed against the opposition leader Khaleda Zia's youngest son Arafat Rahman Koko, said the minister while talking to the journalists after a meeting with revenue officials at Chittagong Circuit House yesterday. Muhith said it's because the disclosure rules render accessing necessary information to prove laundering very difficult. Filing several more cases in connection with money laundering, however, is under process, disclosed the minister who also thought the amount of laundered money would be higher than what could be detected so far. The minister expressed satisfaction over the collected revenues, which surpassed the target and said the gov-

ernment was trying to increase revenue earnings further to facilitate development activities. Putting emphasis on increasing manpower in the revenue sector, the minister said recruitment of personnel for customs, VAT and income tax departments is being processed following procedures and maintaining transparency, which might take some time. The minister also said they would rethink the issue of re-designating superintendent of preventive services and customs appraisers as revenue officers and assistant customs officers as it occasioned discontent among the latter. Earlier, in the meeting with the revenue officers, the minister discussed thoroughly various problems and limitations faced as well as the ways and means to overcome those. The revenue officers presented before the minister the scenarios of revenue collection and highlighted the need for increasing manpower and speeding up the process of bringing together the export and import divi-

sions of Chittagong Customs House under the envisaged reforms. Revenue collections by the Customs House, Customs Excise and VAT and Bond Commissionerate crossed the targets set for the last financial year, they reiterated. Chittagong Customs House collected revenue of Tk 16,803 crore against the target of Tk 16,695 crore, Customs Excise and VAT in Chittagong collected Tk 2,932 crore against targeted revenue of Tk 2,750 while Bond Commissionerate earned Tk 288 crore against the targeted amount of Tk 279 crore, the elaborations said. During the period, increased imports also helped Chittagong Port Authority to earn around Tk 1,000 crore, which was around Tk 100 crore more than what had been bagged in the previous fiscal year, sources said. The three circles of income-tax department in Chittagong together collected Tk 2,682 crore comprising around 20 percent of Tk 16,560 crore which was the total income-tax collected in 2009-2010 fiscal year, said concerned sources.



Dr Mashiur Rahman, prime minister's economic affairs advisor, speaks at a seminar on harmonisation of financial reporting and audit practices: Bangladesh perspective, organised by ACCA Bangladesh at The Westin Hotel in Dhaka recently.

Clouds clear over coal imports

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet.

The stalemate over imported coal from the Indian state of Meghalaya has ended, as imports cleared through the Charagaon land customs station in Sunamganj Friday, according to customs officials. Twenty-five truckloads of coal weighing about 200 tonnes were brought into Bangladesh at the Charagaon-Barchhara border, the first to cross in a month. The coal will be welcomed by local brick factory workers. Other land customs stations such as Tamabil are expected to resume in a week. The government decided to allow coal imports from Meghalaya for a year at a meeting held at the commerce ministry on July 5. Officials from the National Board of Revenue, Department of Environment, FBCCI and five representatives from the Coal Importers Group in Sylhet joined

the meeting. To press for resumption of import activities immediately, the coal importers sat at a meeting with Indian exporters at a hotel in Sylhet Thursday night. Emdad Hossain, president of the Coal Importers Group, said: "The commerce ministry's notification in this regard reached Sylhet three days ago. We hope import through Tamabil international checkpoint will resume by the first week of August." He added that the Indian side also assured them of taking steps to resume coal shipments immediately through other land customs stations. Over 40,000 labourers lost their jobs as coal imports from Meghalaya and Assam were blocked by the land customs stations of Sylhet and Mymensingh on July 1. A five-member team from the Sylhet Coal Importers Group led by its president Emdad Hossain met the finance minister, commerce minister and

others in Dhaka weeks ago and appealed for lifting the government ban for another year. About seven lakh tonnes of coal are imported a year through the four land customs stations in Sylhet region, one in Mymensingh and the other in Rangpur, while the government earns about Tk 150 crore in revenue from the coal imports. The importers have to face similar political roadblocks every July and January, as the government extends the export time for six months only. In 2001, the government banned imports of highly-polluting low-quality coal from Meghalaya and Assam. Coal companies in Meghalaya increased exports to Bangladesh when the local coal price rises. The price of Meghalayan coal is \$50 a tonne now while Barapukuria coal is \$100. Coal importers claim that Meghalaya coal is more suitable for burning bricks.



Pop singer Atif Aslam, third from right, poses after inaugurating Verbanella, a continental restaurant, at Gulshan in Dhaka on Thursday.

CBC boss due today



Managing Director of Commercial Bank of Ceylon AL Gooneratne is scheduled to arrive in Dhaka today on an official visit, the bank said in a statement yesterday. During the visit, Gooneratne will be attending an annual get-together of customers in Bangladesh and meet regulatory authorities. He will also be presiding over the opening of the bank's newly refurbished Chittagong Branch and the relocated Gulshan Booth in the capital.

New operations and tech boss for Citi



Citibank NA Bangladesh has appointed Anuranjan Kumar as its new country head for operations and technology, effective from today. Anuranjan, a postgraduate in finance and control from the University of Delhi, brings 17 years of work experience in banking from Citi India. In Bangladesh, he replaces Masum Billah who has been transferred to Citi London.

China invests \$40b in Iran oil, gas

AFP, Tehran

Iran's main economic partner China has invested around 40 billion dollars in the Islamic republic's oil and gas sector, a senior Iranian official said on Saturday. Deputy Oil Minister Hossein Noqrehkar Shirazi also said that Tehran's oil exports to China fell by 30 percent in the first six months of 2010 compared with the corresponding period last year. "The volume (of Chinese investment) in upstream projects is 29 billion dollars," Noqrehkar Shirazi told Mehr news agency, adding that Beijing had signed contracts worth another 10 billion dollars in petrochemicals, refineries and oil and gas pipeline projects. He said China has also put forward proposals to participate in building seven new refineries in Iran. Iran, OPEC's second largest oil exporter, has a dilapidated refining sector, forcing it to import petroleum products such as gasoline to meet domestic needs. Noqrehkar Shirazi said that Chinese imports of Iranian oil fell in the first half of the year. "Although Iran is still among top 10 oil exporters to China, it is the only country which in the first six months of 2010 has seen its exports to China falling," he said.

"The volume of oil exports to China in the first six months of this year decreased to less than 9.02 million tonnes or 66.12 million barrels. This shows a 30 percent decrease" over the first half of 2009, he added. In recent years, China has filled the gaps in Iran's energy sector left by Western firms forced out by international sanctions. In 2009, China became Iran's premier trading partner, with bilateral trade worth 21.2 billion dollars against 14.4 billion dollars three years earlier. Commercial ties between the two countries were almost non-existent 15 years ago, amounting to just 400 million dollars. According to official data, Western sanctions opened the way for Chinese companies, which last year directly supplied Iran with 13 percent (7.9 billion dollars) of its imports. Iranian estimates also suggest that an equivalent amount was imported indirectly through the United Arab Emirates in 2009. China backed the fourth set of UN sanctions against Iran over its contested nuclear programme, but Beijing has consistently urged the world powers to resolve the crisis diplomatically. On Friday, it also opposed the latest unilateral sanctions on Iran imposed by the European Union.

US House approves spill reform bill

REUTERS, Washington

The House of Representatives on Friday approved the toughest reforms ever to offshore energy drilling practices, as Democrats narrowly pushed through an election-year response to BP's massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Passing the bill as the House leaves for its six-week recess gives lawmakers the opportunity to return home boasting they reined in Big Oil and held BP responsible for the worst offshore oil disaster in US history. The vote was 209-193 on the bill supported by President Barack Obama. But first, Gulf Coast Democrats won an amendment ending the federal moratorium on deepwater drilling for oil companies that met new safety requirements. The Obama administration's moratorium would end in November. By the time the full Congress completes action on this offshore drilling bill -- and it is uncertain that it will -- it could be November or later. A similar offshore drilling bill is pending in the Senate, without the House's new provision to end the drilling moratorium. But it was unlikely that measure would pass before that chamber begins its summer recess on August 6. House Republicans warned the bill would slash U.S. oil and gas production in the Gulf of Mexico, a major supplier of domestic energy, and cut high-paying drilling jobs. "The Obama moratorium on deepwater drilling has already costs thousands of jobs and this bill will eliminate even more American energy jobs, making it harder and



Local residents gather on the beach to commemorate 100 days of the BP oil spill on Thursday in Grand Isle, Louisiana. Eleven lives were lost and three to five million barrels of oil have spilled into the Gulf of Mexico since the BP Deepwater Horizon exploded on April 20, 2010.

more expensive to produce both energy on and offshore," said Republican Representative Pete Sessions. "It will drive American companies out of the Gulf," said Republican Representative Kevin Brady. "This is a choice between American energy workers and foreign oil." Democrats said the bill would make offshore drilling safer for workers, while also protecting the environment and Gulf Coast business from future oil spills like the one caused by BP that damaged wetlands and hurt the region's fishing and tourism industries. "This legislation is about safety, about establishing new safety stan-

dards, safety for the workers on the rigs," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. "If you want to apologize for Big Oil, go right ahead, but the American people are not on your side on this one," Democratic Representative Jim McGovern told his Republican colleagues during a long day of debate. Before passing the bill, the House also approved an amendment to help smaller oil companies compete for Gulf of Mexico drilling projects under the proposed reforms. The amendment would let them pool their resources in demonstrating they have the financial resources to deal with potential oil spills.

The House vote on the bill was close, as several Democrats representing districts with strong oil industry interests joined Republicans in opposition. Representative Gene Green, from the oil industry-dominated city of Houston, was one of those Democrats. "There are a lot of things in there that have nothing to do with safety" of offshore drilling operations, Green told reporters. A sticking point in the Senate is opposition from Republicans and some moderate Democrats to removing all liability limits oil companies would face for economic damages stemming from the BP disaster and any future spills.



Rafiqul Islam, director of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), is seen with the participants at the certificate-giving ceremony of a training course on rules and procedures of value added tax and income tax, organised by the chamber's training institute, in the capital on Thursday.

Indian bank net up 17pc

REUTERS, Mumbai

ICICI Bank, India's No. 2 lender, posted a 17 percent rise in quarterly net profit, meeting forecasts, on strong corporate and retail loan demand in a rapidly growing economy. Indian banks including bigger rival State Bank of India are seeing an improvement in asset quality as consumer loan defaults slow in an economy forecast to grow about 8.5 percent in the current year ending next March.



AHM Nurul Islam, secretary of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), and Mamunur Rashid Chowdhury, managing director of Vision Entertainment, exchange documents after signing a deal in the capital recently. DCCI and Vision will co-organise the "DCCI Business Dialogue," a 52-episode television show.