PM seeks IMF

FROM PAGE 16

Gono Bhaban.

Hasina said the present government assumed power to improve the economic fate of the country as well as its people.

She said her government is committed to raise the economic condition of the country and working hard to achieve the objective.

In this regard, she mentioned that when her government came to power, the inflation rate was above double digit, but it is now much lower.

Press Secretary to the PM Abul Kalam Azad briefed the reporters after the meeting.

The premier said the GDP growth target for the last fiscal was 5.5 percent, but the government was able to exceed the target.

She also mentioned that the present government has been able to mobilise more revenue and expressed her firm commitment to continue the uptrend in revenue collection in the future.

Hasina said her government has been putting equal importance on public and private sectors for the welfare of the country. But she admitted that electricity and gas crisis is the main hurdle to boosting the economic activities of the country significantly.

The government is working with utmost sincerity to improve the power and gas situation of the country, she said, adding that the present government is not to be blamed for the sorry plight in the two sectors.

"During the five years of BNP-Jamaat rule and two years of caretaker government, no initiative was taken to resolve the power and gas problems."

The PM informed the IMF director that on Monday her government approved the draft 'Power and Energy Quick Supply (special provision) Bill 2010' so that the government could take quick decision on power and energy production and supply as the existing laws are not effective enough to quickly formulate and implement development projects for increasing production and supply of electricity.

The government has taken up various projects including installation of power plants on rental, quick rental and also on captive power basis.

Besides, various projects have been taken up for repairing the existing power plants, increasing use of renewable energy and saving of energy.

The proposed bill has 14 clauses under which the government will depend on digital systems including use of e-mail and websites to end all official process to install new power plants on urgent basis. It will remain effective for the next two years.

Hasina also said that her government is working round the clock to develop the railways and waterways, construct the Padma Bridge, deep seaport, establish strong regional cooperation, improve healthcare and ensure food security.

Recalling her initiative to improve the private sector in the country during her previous tenure, she said that at that time she opened up insurance and telecommunication sectors to the private sector and the people are now deriving the benefits.

Anoop Singh praised the premier for her pragmatic and strong leadership.

He said the foreign direct investment policy of the country is very good and attractive. He mentioned that the foreign investors are encouraged by this policy and the FDI is increasing day by day in the country.

The IMF official assured to extend all out cooperation to Bangladesh for the economic uplift of the country.

He said Bangladesh had done a very good job in the last two years during the global economic meltdown and managed to escape the great disaster of the crisis, which is very rare.

Finance Secretary Dr Mohammad Tareq and PM's Special Assistant Abdus Sobhan Golap, among others, were present during the meeting.

Two families

FROM PAGE 16

succumbed to his injuries at Khwaja Yunus Ali Medical College and Hospital in Sirajganj.

The accident occurred around 11:30am in Dhawal area when the Bogra-bound truck from Dhaka ploughed through the Dhaka-bound car from the northern district, Hatikumrul Highway Police Station Officer-in-Charge Dino Bandhu Das said.

Police seized the truck while its driver managed to flee the scene.

One arrested

FROM PAGE 16

at a press conference at DB Headquarters in the capital.

Maruf sent the e-mail on August 25 in guise of a Jamaat Sura member to the ministry using his client Mohammad Monir's e-mail address.

Maruf sent the e-mail threatening to blow up the KPIs and to make attack on police and the ministry officials in a bid to implicate Monir in a legal tangle so that Monir cannot realise the money paid to him [Maruf] for sending Monir to Dubai in 2007, the commissioner said.

Shahidul said Maruf had taken Tk 1.30 lakh from Monir, the owner of Rabeya Fisheries Limited, but did not send him abroad. He also did not return the money to Monir.

"We traced four sent messages from the e-mail address which said if the war criminals of 1971 are tried, they (criminals) will have no passages to retreat but carry out attack on law enforces and KPIs" he said.

The DMP commissioner, however, said they are yet to ascertain the identity of Maruf.

KILLING OF IBRAHIM

Referring to the killing of Jubo League leader Ibrahim Ahmed, the commissioner said, the case was not filed against lawmaker Nurunnabi Chowdhury Shaon as he did not violate any provision of the Arms Act.

He said they would send letters to arms licencing authority to seize Shaon's pistol as he failed to keep his licenced pistol properly.

While asked regarding State Minister for Law Qamrul Isalm's recent comment on arms case against lawmaker Shaon, the DMP commissioner said he does not know what the Law Minister commented.

Ibrahim was shot dead in the Sangsad Bhaban area on August 13 by the bullet released from Shaon's pistol.

Stalking victim

FROM PAGE 1

Sadar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Shah Jahan Khan quoted locals saying Sumon, a student of Satkhira Government College, had been stalking the girl on her way to school for the last four months.

Yesterday Chameli went to Zia Hall of Satkhira Government College and took poison around 4:00pm. However, it is still unknown why she went there.

Local people and students took her to sadar hospital where she died around 5:30pm. Soon after the incident, Sumon went into hiding.

Our Chapainawabganj correspondent reports: Hannan Ali, 45, was a guard of Roads and Highway Department district office.

Sadar Police Station OC Ahsanul Haque and locals said Israil Hossain, 24, of Masjid Para; Saiful Islam, 28, owner of a salon near the RHD office; Anarul Islam, 45, of Rehaichar Moholla had been stalking Fatema Akhtar Brishti, a student of class X of Kamal Uddin Girls' High School here for the last three months.

Brishti and her mother Mahmuda Khatun alleged they were stalked by Israil, Saiful and Anarul around 2:30pm yesterday, as the two were returning home after bathing in a river.

As Mahmuda protested, they assaulted her.

The stalkers also assaulted Mohammad Ali, father of Brishti and a peon of the Roads and Highway when they came to protest.

Hannan stepped in to help Mohammad Ali's family and took them to his office.

Around 3:00pm, the three stalkers took Hannan to Saiful's salon. They beat him to death and fled the area.

On information, police recovered the body and sent it to sadar hospital morgue for autopsy.

Hard times

FROM PAGE 16

abuses on their return which led the embassy to decide to transfer them to other jobs.

Meanwhile, on September 6 two alleged Bangladeshi brokers Harun and Rabiul Islam promised them jobs and lured them to an underground chamber in Garian, some 100km away from Tripoli early yesterday, Mahbub, a worker told The Daily Star.

The two initially appeared sympathetic, but when they were brought to Garian their attitudes aroused suspicion among the workers, he said.

Mahbub said he had heard of cases when brokers confine workers to extort money from them. They decided to leave immediately and returned to Tripoli along with the two alleged brokers and handed them over to the embassy.

Harun however, denied being a broker saying that he worked for a Chinese construction firm and had taken the workers to Garian to provide them with jobs in two foreign firms.

"They misunderstood our intentions as we temporarily kept them in the underground room," he said.

First Secretary of Bangladesh Embassy Ahsan Kibria Siddiqui asked the workers not to move anywhere till they are formally transferred.

Kibria said he had spoken to Mahbub yesterday, and was aware of the difficulties the workers are going through.

"I will try to find jobs for them when the offices reopen after the Eid vacation," he said.

When our correspondent asked Mahbub how they planned to survive until they got new jobs, he said they were depending on help from friends.

"We won't be celebrating Eid as our future looks very bleak. Please pray for us so that we get jobs," said a worker.

When Kibria was verifying the validity of the allegations surrounding Harun and Rabiul he refused to comment without checking, and added that, he had never heard of brokers confining workers in underground rooms for extortion.

There were some Bangladeshi brokers in Libya who used to supply workers to various firms for money, but the Libyan government deported them for carrying out such illegal activities, Kibria said.

Banks asked

FROM PAGE 1

Governor Atiur Rahman where the later was requested to take the initiative.

Earlier, many teachers pleaded directly to the education minister for a way to set their salaries and bonuses.

A few lakh of teachers of non-government educational institutions are yet to get their salaries and bonuses even though cheques of salaries and bonuses were sent to Sonali Bank, Agrani Bank, Janata Bank and Rupali Bank on August 26 and August 29, said the education ministry.

The order was sent to managing directors of the commercial banks.

Anthrax

FROM PAGE 1

Of the 76 cases, 66 are from Kisamot Harati village under sadar upazila and 10 from Kaliganj upazila, reports our Lalmonirhat correspondent.

A medical team has already collected the specimen of blood and skin from the affected people and sent those to the capital for diagnosis, said Dr Jahangir Alam, civil surgeon of the district.

Authorities of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) confirmed 337 human cases of anthrax on Monday.

Though anthrax is not new in the country, this year a significant number of people at different districts are affected with the infection.

"Especially, before the Eid festival a large number of cattle are transported from different areas without proper screening. Perhaps, new cattle from different districts and even from India were affected with the disease, which later spread among the people due to direct contact," said Dr Abdul Baki, director of animal health of the livestock department.

A total of 19 cows and 43 goats were reported to have died of anthrax over the last few months, he said.

But no case of human death from the disease has been reported till now, as treatment for anthrax is available in the country, he added.

Eid shoppers

FROM PAGE 1

many others who were waiting for their private vehicles to come and pick them up.

It's the scene of rush shoppers who browse shop to shop from morning till midnight as Eid-ul-Fitr, the largest religious festival of the Muslims, approaches nearer.

"Movement at late night is easier. You will have a cool atmosphere at night compared with the daytime's," said the over 60-year-old woman who came at the mall 15 minutes to 11:00pm on Saturday.

"I prefer shopping at late night because I can come after finishing prayers and other tasks," she added.

The shopping spree that began since mid-August is gradually reaching its peak in the city and elsewhere in the country. The shoppers, who cannot manage enough time in the day, hit the counters of retail outlets after mid night at a growing number to buy gifts for near and dear ones.

Such a shopping bonanza began in late August after the government withdrew its restriction on shopping hours from 10:00am to 8:00pm, clearing ways for shoppers to browse retail to retail for almost unlimited hours.

The ease of restriction has offered a scope for businesspersons, office goers and people of different professions to go shopping with family members at late hours of the evening after finishing the day's work.

Store operators say the majority of shoppers who come late night are well-off people who love to drive cars from malls to markets to choose festival wearing.

One of the main factors for late night shopping is the desire to avoid long tailback that cripples movement and forces people to waste valuable time sitting idle for hours on the road from morning till early hours of evening.

Other factors are the expectations to avoid crowd at malls and markets during the day hours. Desire to have a cool air at night also encourages many to start visiting retails at late hours, shoppers say.

"Shopping at late hours is more convenient than at busy daytime. We can move and choose easily due to fewer crowds," commented Kazi Emran who along with his spouse started from home at 9:30pm.

"We started for shopping also at late night after the government has cleared ways for keeping shops open for unlimited hours," said the about 30-year man who bought a pair of footwear.

"You will also face less traffic," he added.

However, getting a road free from tailback at late night still remains a far cry for many. Some shoppers say they had to take pains for staying hours on the road to reach the malls and markets.

"We started at 8:00pm hoping to have less traffic. But it took us two hours to arrive here," said Manzur-ur Rahman in anger.

Rahman and his spouse Sabina Rahman came to Bashundhara Shopping Mall from Dhanmondi. As they lost two hours on the road, they failed to buy all items they had planned.

"It's meaningless. We spent three to four hours and bought just a T-shirt," he said as he was approaching their car.

Retailers say the extended shopping hours have allowed them record high sales as customers who come late hours really mean buying rather than hanging around like window shoppers.

"Those who come at late hours are original customers and you will find a few of them window shopping," said Mir Nizam Uddin Ahmed, chairman of Zaara Fashions Mall Ltd, which sells imported gents and ladies wear near Gulshan Circle-1.

"Customers feel comfort at late hour shopping," he said, adding, "If they can choose in relaxed mood, they feel happy instead of feeling cheated because of rush shopping amid crowd at day."

He informed that about half of the day's total sale at his store occurs in three hours between 8:00pm and 11:00pm. Zaara Fashions logged nearly Tk 500,000 in average sale per day prior to the end of last month.

Md Helal Uddin, president of an association of retailers, Dhaka Mahanagar Dokan Malik Samity, said upscale consumers usually browse stores at late hours.

"We feel comfortable to handle customers at late night. They do not bargain too much. If they like an item, they just buy it helping us attend more clients," said Helal.

Store operators say turnout of late night shoppers has started rising after the beginning of September. To handle customers at hours even after midnight, some retailers have also motivated their sales staffs so that they do not get tired.

Rashidul Quddus, manger operations of a multi-brand clothing retailer, Infinity, said they are prepared to serve customers even after midnight.

"We handled customers until 2:00am on September 1. We have also motivated our staffs so that they remain ready to serve the clients for long hours without getting tired," he added.

PM opens

FROM PAGE 1

Shikalbaha CDA residential area ground at about 12:00noon before opening the 3rd Karnaphuli bridge around 1:15pm.

After taking rest for a while at Chittagong Circuit House, the prime minister would open two other projects -- Karnaphuli Gas Distribution Company Ltd and New Court Building -- in the afternoon.

Hasina, also the ruling Awami League chief, would hold a meeting with lawyers and local leaders of her party after the inauguration of the new court building.

The 3rd Karnaphuli bridge will benefit millions of people of Cox's Bazar, Bandarban and southern upazilas of Chittagong and boost economic activities of the area.

The state run 150-MW Peaking Power Plant, which has been set up at a cost of Tk 575 crore at Shikalbaha in Patiya, is expected to ease power crisis in the city to a great extent.

The four-storey new court building of 2,46,711 square feet area is designed to house 46 courts, ledger rooms, record rooms, Government Record Officer's (GRO) sections, two separate male and female court jails, police barrack and cafeteria.

Karnaphuli Gas Distribution Company Ltd started functioning as a separate gas distribution company in Chittagong since April this year.

Fresh row with WB

FROM PAGE 16

estimated 90 days."

But EGCB Managing Director in-charge Shanti Ram Roy on August 22 wrote to the ministry that the Public Procurement Act or the World Bank guideline has no directives for holding such "flash bidding".

The EGCB sought the ministry's decision on the next course of action.

The EGCB floated the tender in January 2009 and got offers from eight bidders on April 30 last year. The read-out price offers of these companies ranged between $180 million and $270 million.

From the beginning, an influential ruling-party man representing one of the bidders had been trying to influence the evaluation of the tender; thus unusually slowing down the bid process.

The WB in July last year informed the government of a decision that Siemens have been restrained from participating in the World Bank Group financed projects till December 31, 2010 as the bank was investigating an allegation of corruption against the company. In other words, the WB would not sponsor a power project that uses Siemens equipment.

Despite this condition, the EGCB late last year conditionally recommended Chinese company Sinohydro as the lowest competitive bidder. The company is using Siemens equipment. The project's Canadian consultant SNC Lavalin had recommended the CMEC for the project, which is also using Siemens equipment.

The WB did not approve any of these recommendations. To remove the stalemate, the power ministry in February held a meeting with the WB and EGCB. But at the meeting, the WB reiterated its position saying that after re-evaluation, if it was possible, the second lowest bidder who has not offered the machines of Siemens could be offered the job.

But the EGCB argued on in favour of Sinohydro. And the power ministry formally wrote to the WB to give a waiver to the Siemens-related condition.

As none of them worked, the EGCB tried to promote Indo-German joint venture Gammons-Sadelmi as the lowest responsive bidder. But the Gammons last year went bankrupt.

This attempt also failed to please the WB.

Wholesale

FROM PAGE 1

Some of them demanded disclosure of the grounds under which the 20 were granted clemency since the matter was sensitive and unusual.

Some of them had also expressed astonishment at the fact that 21 people were condemned for the killing of just one person, Jubo Dal leader Sabbir Ahmed Gama, in 2004. Gama was the nephew of former BNP deputy minister Ruhul Quddus Talukdar Dulu.

The president granted mercy to 20 convicts out of the 21 in the case. The home secretary said the president did not grant mercy to one since he is still running from the law.

When asked whether they found the 20 people innocent, the law minister said it was not a question of innocence or guilt it was a question of mercy, which the president can grant as per his constitutional power.

"The law ministry has not made the opinion on any political consideration. We have only placed our opinion to the president that he has absolute constitutional power to give clemency to convicts. The president could have refused to grant the mercy if he had wished," Shafique said.

Ruhul Quddus Talukdar Dulu, however, told The Daily Star that the clemency was given considering political affiliation of the convicts.

Shafique said the law ministry made the recommendations to the president as per requirements of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Replying to a question, he said there are many precedents of presidents granting death row inmates mercy.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam said the president has the right to do so. The attorney general, however, refused to comment further saying he does not have the related documents.

Renowned criminal law expert Anisul Huq said, "The president has absolute and exclusive constitutional power and discretion to grant mercy to any convict and he can do it." He, however, could not recall whether any president had ever granted 20 convicts mercy at one go.

Eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik said, "Apparently both the verdict and the presidential clemency seemed very unusual."

"This has inevitably led the perception of misuse or abuse of the presidential power to pardon," he said, adding, "This does not augur well for our state or its future."

Former caretaker government adviser and leading human rights activist Sultana Kamal said, "As both the court and the president are the highest places of our expectations, we want and expect true and impartial judgments from them."

"As citizens, we expect an explanation from the government about the grounds on which those 20 people were granted presidential clemency," she said.

Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikder ruled out the need for any explanation from the government.

Pardoned convicts Naldanga Awami League unit former secretary SM Firoz, his brother school teacher Fazlul Huq Shah, Anisur Rahman Ansar, Sentu, Faisal, Faruq, Rahidul, Shahjahan Ali, Badal Miah and Abdul Jalil were freed from Dhaka Central Jail while Muhammad Bablu, Zahirul Shah, Formajul Islam and Sohag were released from Rajshahi Central Jail early yesterday.

The six who were pardoned but not released are Sajjad Hossain, Abul Hossain, Ataur Rahman alias Mobarak, Ashraf alias Rana, Foyjul Haque and Fakar Uddin alias Potu Master.

A Speedy Trial Tribunal in 2006 awarded the 21, most of them Awami League adherents, capital punishment for gunning down Gama in Natore.

Of them 20 were granted presidential pardon Thursday and one condemned, Akhbar Ali, still remains absconding.

However, Asaduzzaman, son of released Anisur Rahman Ansar, claimed that the then deputy minister Dulu had influenced the trial process.

He said 13 members of his family were accused of murder even though they had left Natore a year before the incident. He said they had to leave Natore following oppression by local BNP men after the 2001 election.

Dulu, however, refuted the allegations.

High priority

FROM PAGE 1

literacy rate has come up to 53 percent, says a Ministry of Primary and Mass Education report.

Against this backdrop, the government is launching two mega projects Basic Literacy and Continuing Education (BLCE) project-1 and 2 at a cost of around Tk 3,000 crore to fulfil its election pledge of eradicating illiteracy. The Bureau of Non-Formal Education (BNFE) under the primary and mass education ministry will implement the projects.

BNFE sources said the projects aim at providing basic and life-skills based education to the people who never enrolled in or dropped out from primary schools.

The BLCE-1 would be implemented in 61 districts with Tk 2,912 crore while the BLCE-2 in three hilly districts at a cost of Tk 50 crore.

Educationists, however, are quite sceptical about achieving the target by 2014 through these projects. They cited the example of failure of a previous similar project Total Literacy Movement (TLM).

The TLM was introduced in 1996 by the then Awami League government, but the BNP government cancelled in 2003 bringing allegations of irregularities and mismanagement.

State Minister for primary and mass education Motahar Hossain, however, said TLM was a success as it had pushed up literacy rate to 63 in 2002. As the BNP government had shut it down, the literacy rate fell.

He yesterday said, "Lack of budgetary allocations and longstanding shortcomings in the education system are responsible for the low rate of literacy."

The sector has been receiving budgetary allocation of around 2.5 percent of the GDP whereas Nepal allocates around 16 percent in this sector, he said, adding that with this allocation it is tough to implement literacy programmes properly.

Despite such scepticism, the government believes that the two projects would be able to eradicate illiteracy if all the stakeholders cooperated.

Officials concerned said the projects would be implemented in three phases through some selected non-government organisations while the deputy district commissioners would monitor those.

Around 1.16 crore people between 15 to 25 years will be given basic literacy course while 1.45 lakh technical education, said the officials.

Rezaul Quader, director general of BNFE, said the projects would start from January next and the field level activities would begin from June 2011.

"The projects are now awaiting approval of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council," he said, adding that the government would primarily fund the projects although it is looking for donors.

Rasheda K Choudhury, former education adviser to a caretaker government, said all the plans to improve literacy rate were not taken considering the socio-economic reality and whatever plans have been adopted only broadened the discrimination in the education system.

"The issue of literacy will have to be taken up as part of the mainstream education as it is not possible to remove the problem with project-based approach," said Rasheda, also the executive director of Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE).

She observed that the government's activities regarding literacy became project based--which implies that the drive ends when the project life expires.

"The government needs to chalk out a long-term programme and implement it phase by phase," she said, adding that whatever steps the government takes have to be made public.

She said the central government would frame policy guideline, finance and monitor the programme but the local government bodies should deal with literacy.

Blood crisis

FROM PAGE 16

DMCH Blood Transfusion Centre sources said the hospital needs 150 to 200 bags of blood a day. Bandhan fills the major share of the requirement.

They also get a big quantity from DMC unit Sandhani. But every year during the last 10 days of Ramadan the supply of blood falls and most of the patients collect blood from professional donors. During this period no operation is conducted except the emergency ones.

Sakhawat Hossain Tanim, a Buet student and president of Bandhan central council, said they have five zones and 29 units based on universities and colleges.

During the last 10 days of Ramadan, most of the universities and colleges start their vacation and students leave their dormitories. Bandhan's ability to supply blood falls drastically, Tanim said.

Bandhan usually supply about 450 bags of blood to the capital. But in Ramadan, the number is reduced to less than 150.

A member of Sandhani DMC unit preferring anonymity said every year blood crisis persists towards the last 10 days of Ramadan.

He said they launch blood donation camps but don't see much success. Their donors, mainly students, are unwilling to donate blood as fasting makes them weak.

US expects to spend big in Afghanistan for years

AP, *Washington*

The US government's financial commitment to Afghanistan is likely to linger and reach into the billions long after it pulls combat troops from the country, newly disclosed spending estimates show.

The United States expects to spend about $6 billion a year training and supporting Afghan troops and police after it begins withdrawing its own combat troops in 2011.

The estimates of US spending through 2015, detailed in a Nato training mission document, are an acknowledgment that Afghanistan will remain largely dependent on the United States for its security.

That reality could become problematic for the Obama administration as it continues to seek money for Afghanistan from Congress in a time of increasingly tight budgets.

In Brussels, a Nato official said Monday that alliance commander Gen David Petraeus had asked for 2,000 more soldiers, with nearly half to be trainers for the rapidly expanding Afghan security forces. The Nato official requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak on the subject.

The training mission document outlines large-scale infrastructure projects, including a military hospital and military and police academies, aimed at "establishing enduring institutions" and "creating irreversible momentum."

Julia to stay

FROM PAGE 16

two weeks of uncertainty left by national elections that ended on a knife-edge.

Australia's first female prime minister promised her government will be stable over the next three years, although the defection of a single lawmaker would bring down her administration.

"Labor is prepared to deliver stable, effective and secure government for the next three years," she told reporters.

Labor gained the ability to form a government for a second term after two independent lawmakers Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott joined her coalition more than two weeks after elections failed to deliver a clear winner for the first time since 1940.

Tuesday's decision by Windsor and Oakeshott gives Julia's party control of 76 seats in the 150-seat House or Representatives.

She announced she offered Oakeshott a Cabinet post, which he had yet to accept. Windsor had said he did not want such a job in the government. Julia also said she would keep her promise to make her predecessor, Kevin Rudd, a senior Cabinet minister.

Party power-brokers dumped Rudd for Julia in an internal mutiny in June in a bid to improve Labor's standing in opinion polls.

Rudd loyalists were suspected to be behind a series of damaging leaks to the media against Julia during her election campaign. Labor lost 11 seats in the election, many of them in Rudd's home state of Queensland.