

IMF

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As per the IMF projection, the bank borrowing could be Tk 10,000 crore more than the target set in the budget due to rapid growth in the expenditure and the government's failure to get foreign aid.

In the first five months of the current fiscal year, the government has borrowed Tk 1,000 crore more than the budget target, mostly from Bangladesh Bank.

In the first week of this month, the bank borrowing decreased slightly after more than Tk 3,000 crore was deposited to the government exchequer from the telecommunications sector, a central bank official said.

But, the finance ministry official said, the relief was temporary and the borrowing would increase further following additional demands made by various ministries.

According to the ministry sources, if the trend of high expenditure continues, the budget deficit might cross six percent of the GDP.

The ministry official said the IMF might put condition that the deficit in no way crosses five percent.

In the talks, the IMF made it clear that subsidies in power and energy sector must be slashed.

It also suggested establishing a monitoring framework for Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation, Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation and Power Development Board to cut misuse of budgetary fund.

Although taka is being devalued against dollar day by day, the IMF prescribed more liberalisation of exchange rate market. The organisation recommended more measures to control credit growth to contain high inflation.

The IMF might impose a set of targets for lowering money supply by June, the ministry official said.

The government has taken an initiative to approve setting up more banks. But the IMF might impose a condition for not allowing any new bank before amending the bank company act.

The amendment was going to be a major condition for getting IMF loan this time, the official added. And, a timeframe might be fixed for enacting new VAT and income tax laws.

Oil spill

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Mannan Cherag, a Banglar Alobatman who also saw the slick, said he often notices oil spills there but yesterday's was the longest.

Visiting the spot by engine boats, The Daily Star correspondents found the strip.

Boatmen, fishermen and people travelling between Sandwip and Chittagong said they often see oil spills, for what they blame the ship-breaking industry.

There are over 50 ship-breaking yards next to the coast and more than 100 vessels are beached there for dismantling.

Nurul Absar Chowdhury, former chairman of Amanullah Union Parishad in Sandwip and now a Chittagong resident, regularly travels to his village home in the island through the route.

"I usually get on engine boat at Kumira ghat and there is a ship-breaking yard nearby," he said.

He often notices black oil-like substance floating in the sea and suspects the ship-breaking yards to be its source.

Hefazatur Rahman, president of Bangladesh Ship Breakers' Association, brushed aside the suggestion that scrap ships caused oil spill in the sea.

"Oil might have leaked from tankers that travel to different parts of the country from the Chittagong port, he said.

"A spill of such magnitude could originate only from oil tankers. But we haven't brought any oil tanker recently. The last time we brought ships was one and a half months ago. Those were scrap vessels, not oil tankers."

He said they had heard about the slick and sent a team to the area. "But our team hasn't spotted anything yet."

Contacted, Zafar Alam, an Environment department director based in the port city, said they had inspected the area in the afternoon and noticed no major spill.

They saw a 100-metre layer of oil floating between Kadam Rasul and Kumira, he said, but did not identify its source, he said.

Politics gathering

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government system to overcome national polls.

The country braces for a political storm if the government goes ahead with unilateral appointment of the new EC. The scenario also brings to mind the bitter memories of political deadlocks the country suffered in the past over EC controversies.

"Our party high command has already clarified our position -- the next election commission must be acceptable to all. Otherwise, we will not accept it," MK Anwar, a member of opposition BNP's national standing committee, told The Daily Star on Monday.

He said the appointments must be made in consultation with all political parties. "We want a solution through discussion. But if the government moves to unilaterally make the appointments, we will wage a movement against it," said Anwar, also a former minister.

In recent public remarks some ruling Awami League leaders said the government will consult with political parties to constitute the new EC after expiry of tenure of the current commission.

But in the wake of growing hostilities between the ruling and the opposition camps, the hope for a political consensus over formation of the new EC is fading fast.

The controversy might also make uncertain the holding of elections to just-bifurcated Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) for an indefinite period.

The current EC on Monday announced that it will not hold the polls to DCC due to time constraint. According to the recent changes brought to the Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009, polls to two city corporations -- DCC North and DCC South -- must be held within 90 days since the law came into effect, a deadline that ends on February 29.

But the present EC is not getting the stipulated 90 days because the tenure of CEC ATM Shamsul Huda and Election Commissioner Sohul Hussein expire on February 4. Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hossain, the other election commissioner, will retire on February 14.

So, the government will have to take steps for constitution of the new EC in February. LGRD Minister also ruling AL General Secretary Syed Ashraf Islam yesterday said the new EC will hold DCC polls within the next 180 days.

But if the new EC fails to have the opposition parties' support, it will be difficult for it to hold polls to the divided DCC. And even if it moves for the polls, the political situation might worsen and the new EC might become controversial before the next parliamentary polls slated for the end of 2013 or early 2014, observed political analysts speaking on condition of anonymity.

PROPOSED LAW
The incumbent EC drafted proposals for enacting the law under article-118 of the constitution. On the formation of EC, article-118 (1) of the constitution says, "... the appointment of the CEC and other election commissioners (if any) shall, subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf, be made by the President."

But the law has not been formulated since the constitution was framed in 1972. In absence of the law, successive governments appointed people of their choices as CECs and other election commissioners triggering political controversy.

The proposed law titled "Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioner (appointment procedure) Act, 2011" says a five-member search committee would be formed with the outgoing CEC as its convener to prepare a list of people for appointment to the EC.

A judge, nominated by the chief justice; the chairman of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC); chief of the Public Service Commission (PSC); and the comptroller and auditor general would be members of the search committee.

The search committee would recommend three names for each position.

The 15-member Business Advisory Committee (BAC) of the parliament, led by the speaker, would then finalise the list after scrutiny, and the president would appoint the CEC and other election commissioners from the list.

The EC believes, with the proposals made into law, political consensus on appointments can be achieved as the prime minister, leader of the opposition in parliament, and senior leaders of the ruling and opposition parties are members of BAC.

"We have sent the proposals to the past caretaker government in 2008 to turn those into a law. But the interim government did not pay heed to it," Election Commissioner Sohul Hussein told The Daily Star on Monday.

He said the EC sent the proposals to all registered political parties including the ruling AL in last May seeking their opinions. "We will again send it to the government end of December," Sohul said.

WHAT GOVT SAID
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a press conference at her official residence on May 31 this year said the EC will be made independent and strengthened enough to hold elections without any influence.

To strengthen the EC, appointments will be made in line with recommendations by an all-party search committee, she said.

Later on various occasions, the premier in and outside the parliament announced that her government will further strengthen the EC to hold free and fair parliamentary polls.

On June 21 last year Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad, who is also in charge of the EC Secretariat regarding parliamentary business, told the House that the government plans to enact a law or a policy for recruitment of election commissioners.

After a year on June 29 this year the information minister reiterated that the government will take steps to enact the law. This time he also informed the House that the EC already drafted a proposal.

On both occasions the information minister's remarks came as scripted answers to MPs' queries on the issue.

LGRD Minister Syed Ashraf Islam on September 28 this year at a press conference said AL agrees with the EC's proposal for appointing election commissioners through a search committee.

"A proposal in this regard will be placed in the next parliament session," said Ashraf.

But the proposal was not placed in that session of the parliament which was prorogued on November 30.

And it is uncertain whether the government will come up with the bill in the next session scheduled to begin in January.

V-Day parade

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Conventionally, the prime minister witnesses the Victory Day parade as a guest.

Contingents of the army, navy and police will stage the parade with a spectacular fly over by the air force jets.

State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Capt (ret'd) AB Tajul Islam said, "The president is very much eager to attend the parade programme but the government has advised him to take rest due to his responsibilities for the honourable president."

Talking to a group of journalists at his secretariat office yesterday, Tajul said the president has also been advised on health grounds not to join the Martyred Intellectuals' Day programme at the intellectuals' memorial at Mirpur in the capital today.

The prime minister will pay homage to the martyred intellectuals on behalf of the president.

The state minister, who met the head of state at the Bangabhaban recently, said the president along with the prime minister will however pay tributes to the country's war heroes at the National Memorial at Savar on the Victory Day.

Cops refuse

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attempted to file a case yesterday but the police refused to accept it.

Police had arrested Sumon on June 15 after a case was filed against him on June 6 with Dhanmondi Police Station in connection with torturing his then wife Dhaka University teacher Rumana Manzur. He was later transferred to the prison cell at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) from Dhaka Central Jail.

Yesterday evening, Sumon's father Sayeed Ahmed Kabir, younger brother Faruk Sayeed Shaon along with two relatives and a lawyer went to file the case with Shahbagh Police Station. After police refused to accept the case, they told reporters there that they would file the case with a Dhaka court today.

Rezaul Karim, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, said the unnatural death case, which was filed by the jail authorities in this connection is still under investigation. He said police cannot accept another case before this case is disposed of.

Rezaul said a murder case can be received if the autopsy report found anything suspicious. But police are yet to receive the report from the forensic lab and they did not find anything suspicious at the scene, he said.

Sumon's torture of Rumana, also a postgraduate student at University of British Columbia in Canada, left her completely blind.

BDR leaflets

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Earlier in his deposition, Mahbubur had told the court that three members of the Bangladesh Rifles (now Border Guard Bangladesh) held a meeting on February 22 after the rebel border guards had distributed leaflets.

Maj Mahbubur said he, Lt Col Shamsul Alam, then commanding officer (CO) of 44 Rifle Battalion, Maj Shahnewaz, CO of then Rifles Security Unit, held the meeting.

"Maj Shahnewaz informed the meeting of 44 Rifle Battalion's involvement in the leaflet distribution and that security in Pilkhana, the BDR headquarters, had been beefed up due to the BDR Week programmes and arrival of the prime minister," the witness had said.

The content of the leaflets includes call for not to be controlled by military, discontent over operation Daal-Bhat, an initiative by the slain BDR director general, and grievances over deprivation from facilities and money and Ijtema duty, said Mahbubur in his deposition.

Asked whether the meeting formed any surveillance team after the distribution of leaflets, Mahbubur said he did not know anything about that.

In his suggestion the defence counsel said, "You did not take any steps as you wanted the mutiny." The witness, however, refuted the suggestion.

The temporary court at the Alia Madrassa in the capital's Bakshibazar conducted its proceedings yesterday from 9:50am to 4:40pm. The court will sit again today and cook Saidul Islam and Lance Nayek Enamul Haq are supposed to give their deposition.

Media asked

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courtroom during the cross examination of the prosecution witness despite objection.

"But the defence lawyer did not mention that the tribunal rejected the plea referring to the ICT rule that allows the investigation officer to remain in the courtroom during the cross examination," Justice Nizamul Huq, chairman of the three-member tribunal, said on the matter.

"Both the media and the defence counsel gave wrong signal to people about the fairness of the tribunal," he added.

"We are duty-bound to ensure even-handed justice. Allahar Oaste (for God's sake), please refrain from publishing and airing distorted news about the ongoing trial proceedings," the ICT chairman urged the media.

Canada ditches Kyoto Protocol

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Earth's fragile climate system have instead increased sharply.

Saying the targets agreed by a previous Liberal administration were unattainable, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government last year unveiled its own measures aimed at curbing emissions, in line with US efforts.

Pulling out of Kyoto now allows Canada to avoid paying penalties of up to CAN\$14 billion (US\$13.6 billion) for missing its targets.

The landmark pact reached in 1997 is the only global treaty that sets down targeted curbs in global emissions.

But those curbs apply only to rich countries, excluding the United States, which has refused to ratify the accord.

"Kyoto is not the path forward for a global solution to climate change," Kent said. "If anything, it's an impediment."

"We believe that a new agreement with legally binding commitments for all major emitters that allows us as a country to continue to generate jobs and economic growth represents the path forward."

Kent also cited major impacts on Canada's economy that will be avoided by withdrawing from the treaty.

"Under Kyoto, Canada is facing radical and irresponsible choices if we're to avoid punishing multi-billion-dollar payments," Kent said, noting that Canada produces barely two percent of global emissions.

"To meet the targets under Kyoto for 2012 would be the equivalent of either removing every car, truck, ATV, tractor, ambulance, police car, and vehicle of every kind from Canadian roads or closing down the entire farming and agricultural sector and cutting heat to every home, office, hospital, factory, and building in Canada."

For Kyoto supporters, the anticipated Canadian pull-out was expected to be a symbolic blow and badly damage a UN climate process already weakened by divisions.

Environmentalists quickly blasted Kent for his comments, adds Reuters. "It's a national disgrace. Prime Minister Harper just spat in the faces of people around the world for whom climate change is increasingly a life and death issue," said Graham Saul of Climate Action Network Canada.

Yesterday, China said Canada's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol was "regrettable" and went against international attempts to tackle climate change.

China is the world's larg-

est carbon emitter, but has always insisted that as a developing country it should be exempt from binding obligations on emissions.

Last week at the UN climate conference in Durban, South Africa, Kent had already said that Kyoto was "in the past" for Canada.

"It is an agreement that covers fewer than 30 percent of global emissions, by some estimates 15 percent or less," the Canadian minister said.

The conference on Sunday approved a roadmap towards an accord that for the first time will bring all major greenhouse-gas emitters under a single legal roof.

If approved as scheduled in 2015, the pact will be operational from 2020 and become the prime weapon in the fight against climate change.

But environmentalists have called it porous. Kent said that in the meantime, Canada would continue to try to reduce its emissions under a domestic plan that calls for a 20 percent cut from 2006 levels by 2020, or as critics point out, a mere three percent from 1990 levels.

The latest data last year showed that Canadian carbon emissions were currently up more than 35 percent from 1990.

Rights violation

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The UPR system was introduced to review human rights condition of all the UN-member countries in 2007. Bangladesh accepted 40 recommendations on improving human rights conditions and made commitment during the universal periodic review in 2009.

There has been some progress made, but many of the commitments Bangladesh made are yet to be fulfilled, Sultana Kamal, executive director of Ain O Salish Kendra, told the press conference at Dhaka Reporter's Unity.

Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), said the recent constitutional amendment denying the indigenous identity of the hills people, was tantamount to human rights violation.

There has been some progress in strengthening democratic institutions but the proposed Anti-Corruption Commission law, if passed, will curb the commission's power, he added.

DCC polls

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management in the city's Agarga area.

The law will have to be amended to extend the time frame.

According to recent changes brought to the Local Government (City Corporation) Act, 2009, polls to the two city corporations must be held within 90 days.

But the EC on Monday decided not to hold the polls by February due to time constraints as their tenure will expire early that month.

The LGRD minister, though, expressed dissatisfaction over the EC's decision.

Suu Kyi's party

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in the new parliament.

The announcement in state media follows a series of reformist moves by a new military-backed government dominated by former generals, who are now reaching out to political opponents and the West.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) was stripped of its status as a legal political party by the junta last year after it chose to boycott a rare election, saying the rules were unfair.

A brief announcement in the official New Light of Myanmar newspaper yesterday said that the country's election commission had approved the NLD's application to re-register as a political party.

The country has surprised even its critics over the past year -- releasing democracy champion Suu Kyi from years of house arrest, holding dialogue with the opposition and freeing some political prisoners.

In one of a number of dramatic developments, Suu Kyi has said she will take part in by-elections expected early next year, although no date has been set.

On Monday, her party said it had chosen the image of a fighting peacock gazing at a white star as its new symbol, replacing its trademark bamboo hat, which was used by a breakaway group that participated in the 2010 election.

Suu Kyi's party won a 1990 poll but was never allowed by the generals to take power.

It refused to participate in the November 2010 vote -- the first in two decades -- mainly because of rules that would have forced it to expel imprisoned members.

Suu Kyi, who has spent most of the past two decades in detention, was under house arrest at the time and was released just days after the polls.

An amendment to a law on political parties has since removed the contentious clause that said prisoners could not be party members, as well as a condition that all parties must agree to "preserve" a controversial 2008 constitution.

An NLD spokesman said Suu Kyi was likely to travel to the capital Naypyidaw herself to complete the party registration process.

Kabir Chowdhury

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succumbed to a cardiac arrest yesterday.

The reputed academic, considered as a voice of conscience during many national crises, was 89.

Prof Chowdhury breathed his last sometime between 3:30am and 6:00am in his sleep at his Naya Paltan residence in the capital, family members said.

He left behind his wife, three daughters, grandchildren and a host of relatives, well wishers and admirers to mourn his death.

As soon as news of his demise went out, grief-stricken relatives, friends, intellectuals, cultural personalities, journalists, publishers, leading politicians, ministers and lawmakers rushed to his house.

For many, it was difficult to believe that the legendary writer, who had gone beyond the scholarly arena to identify himself with a number of defining movements in this country, was no more.

A number of eminent citizens were heard saying that have lost "a guardian, a guide."

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paid rich tributes to Prof Chowdhury by placing a wreath beside his body at Gazi Bhaban. In a very sombre mood, Hasina stayed for around five minutes besides his body and also prayed for his eternal peace. Hasina also talked to his wife, daughters, and family members.

In line with his last wishes, Prof Chowdhury was laid to eternal rest at Mirpur Intellectuals' Graveyard after Magrib prayers.

Winner of numerous awards, Kabir Chowdhury had expressed the desire that his body not be taken to a public place such as the Central Shaheed Minar, said his daughter Shaheen M Kabir.

Prof Chowdhury's body was kept on the fourth floor of Gazi Bhaban at Naya Paltan. He lived on the seventh floor of the building.

His namaz-e-janaza was held at Dhaka University Central Mosque after Asr prayer. He was accorded a guard of honour as a mark of respect by a police contingent with trumpets playing a dirge after the janaza.

Many social, political, educational and government bodies paid their last respect to him.

Born in 1923 in Brahmanbaria, Kabir Chowdhury studied English Literature at Dhaka University in the early 1940s and joined the university as a teacher in 1974.

He wrote around 250 books. For his contribution to education, literature and social movements, he secured

many prestigious awards in and outside the country.

Prof Chowdhury played a leading role in many movements in the country, especially in the anti-communal movement, movement to establish democracy, and significantly in the movement to ensure the trial of those who had committed crimes against humanity and war crimes during the War of Liberation of Bangladesh in 1971.

"He was always very much vocal against communal and fundamental forces. He was never afraid to raise his voice of protest against injustice...no matter who was doing the injustice," said journalist Shahriar Kabir, a close ally of Prof Chowdhury in the movement for the trial of war criminals.

Dhaka University Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique said, "Whenever this country nation fell into a crisis, he [Prof Chowdhury] showed the path to an overcoming offit."

Prof Chowdhury, it may be mentioned, had returned home on Saturday after a successful pacemaker replacement at city's Birdem Hospital.

"He was fine when he went to bed on Monday night," said Shaheen Kabir, a professor of English at Jahangirnagar University.

"He woke up from sleep once around 3:00am [Tuesday] and had some water and also went to the washroom by himself. But, he did not respond when he was called at around 6:00am," said theatre activist Ramendu Majumder, who is Prof Chowdhury's brother-in-law.

Some compare Kabir Chowdhury's demise as dignified as his personality.

"He led a dignified life and left us in a dignified manner," Ramendu noted.

Eminent cultural activist and freedom fighter Nasir Uddin Yusuf Bachhu described Prof Chowdhury as an individual who had crossed the arena of academic excellence to play a significant role in a wider national sphere.

"I am sure that we will not find such a person among us in the near future," he added.

At his residence following his funeral, many expressed the belief that it was a must to ensure the trial of the war criminals of 1971 as a way of demonstrating ultimate respect to Prof Chowdhury's soul.

Both Awami League General Secretary Syed Ashraf Islam and Law Minister Shafique Ahmed promised to complete the trial of war criminals to make Prof Chowdhury's dream come true.

HIS LAST WISHES
Family members said Kabir