

Expert wary

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from the central bank," he told The Daily Star.

The Padma bridge, he mentioned, is an important-intensive project with about 75 percent of the total project cost going in imports of goods and services. It will require about \$2.2 billion worth of imports.

Borrowing from the capital market may worsen the current market situation and outlook. This type of financing would increase the government borrowing rate as well as lead to tightening of the money market, observed Ahsan.

The scope for funding by the insurance companies is limited, although their association has shown interest in the project.

The insurers have already invested in stockmarket and government securities and there cannot be much idle resources left in that industry, said the top analyst of the PRIB.

The government, said Ahsan, could issue sovereign bond to supplement external and domestic financing.

Issuance of sovereign bond will minimise balance of payment pressures, but the repayment cost for this portion of the financing package will be much higher than the funds from bilateral and multilateral sources, he maintained.

He warned that delays in the implementation of the project might lead to cost escalation, making the project more expensive in future.

He, however, mentioned that a project like Padma bridge might not be viable if the financing comes at a high cost and offers very limited payback period.

The World Bank's IDA loan, which is said to be one of the cheapest credits in the world, carries 0.75 percent per annum service charges, a decade-long grace period, and a repayment period of 40 years.

"The World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Japan International Cooperation Agency had formed a world-class consortium for the project -- a thing any new arrangement might lack," he noted.

"As a result, reputable and capable companies might not be interested to bid for the project. They might be doubtful about regular payment. Or they, for example, might think that if the Chinese government finances the project, the Chinese companies would get preference; so why should we be bidding?"

He thought the co-financiers would not be interested to provide loans as the WB has left.

A top official of a co-financier had already told The Daily Star that they would not be interested in financing the project if the WB does not, as the corruption allegation would still remain unresolved.

Though many within the government insist that the country is capable of building the bridge on its own, Ahsan said the Bangladesh government does not have the expertise in supervising such a large scale project.

Teenager shot in head at US school

AFP, Washington

A 14-year-old male student was shot in the head Thursday at a school in Atlanta, Georgia, according to US media, with the victim reportedly being treated in hospital.

Fox News reported that the victim was hospitalized after being shot at Price Middle School, which was placed on lockdown, as was a neighbouring high school.

It was initially reported that a teacher at the school had also been shot, but Fox later said that the youth was the lone shooting victim.

The television network reported that the teacher had suffered "minor cuts and bruises" and was being treated at the scene, but offered no other details on the cause of his injuries.

Early reports said there were two suspects. Fox reported that authorities said one suspect, tentatively identified as a male student, had been taken into custody.

Bangladesh

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has been a growing tendency of protectionism against the backdrop of the current financial crisis, the WTO DG thinks quite the contrary.

According to him, there has been less protectionism than expected because of the size of the economic and social shock.

He, however, agrees there were slippages in some countries but, "Protectionism is one dog that did not bark during this crisis."

The WTO introduced monitoring process in 2008 and the organisation has so far proved to be "the bulwark against protectionism".

On scaling down of multilateralism in the wake of the stalemate in Doha Round and the crisis that multilateralism may be in, Lamy thinks multilateralism, be that in trade, investment, exchange rates or disarmament, is in a "worse shape than it was in the '90s".

The main reason for this, he says, is the old matrix prevalent in multilateralism -- that is the western matrix. Although there has been a geo-political move from the West to the rest, this matrix has not been able to reflect the new geo-political balance.

Another reason for the lack of progress in multilateralism is that governments have been rated lower than before and they were also weaker. He also said governments were more interested in short-term issues like winning the next election.

Asked about the fate of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in case the Doha Round is not completed, the WTO director general said with the exception of the US, duty-free and quota-free access has increased over the last 10 years.

He added that emerging countries like China and India now provided 97% duty-free and quota-free access to the LDCs. These countries have taken these measures on their own accord.

Market accessibility for some LDCs has also increased, he noted, saying Bangladesh now exported ten times more garments to Europe than to the US.

"The problem is that the US Congress does not want to vote in favour of this measure as it clearly wants a price for this and that too from the emerging countries."

On the movement of

natural persons as outlined in GATS mode 4 and the impediments in getting it off the soil, Lamy says there have been quite a few changes in the way issues are resolved in the WTO now. Issues which can be resolved without difficulties are selected and these are concluded as "early harvest".

The GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) is a treaty of the WTO that entered into force in January 1995. The treaty was created to extend the multilateral trading system to service sector.

"The GATS mode 4 would benefit specialists and Bangladesh also needs to specialise in certain services. Specific market access to LDCs in some areas would be given preferences and these countries would have to negotiate a priority list," says Pascal Lamy.

Expressing optimism about the outcome of the next ministerial round of talks at the end of this year, he added they had now done away with the "nothing agreed until everything agreed" dictum. They have now taken the "let's move the train wagon by wagon" approach.

With this new approach, he is confident, some matters could be resolved before the end of the year.

On a personal note, Lamy, whose second term as WTO DG ends on 31 August this year, says it is too early to say what legacy he would be leaving behind. But he firmly believes that overall, the WTO is now stronger than ever before and has reasonably "weathered" many obstacles.

The organisation has moved quite aggressively, he said, adding that lots of things had changed for the better.

Finally, commenting on his first-ever visit to the port city, he said Chittagong was the lifeline for trades in Bangladesh.

"It is improving, it is becoming larger, but at the same time it needs vast improvement in areas like logistics, transport connection and customs operation. The important thing is to have the capacity and capability to unload cargo from larger ships quicker."

He added that given the new pattern of trade, where there is big competition worldwide, the ports that have the best logistics and quicker facilities in clearing cargo get more traffic and more trade.

PM pulls

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The inaugural function began with the national anthem, recitation of the verses from religious books of different religions and Ekushey song.

A one-minute silence was observed in memory of the martyrs of the Language Movement.

Praising the role of Bangla Academy in promoting Bangla language, literature and culture, Hasina said since its inception in 1955, the academy has been making relentless efforts for intellectual development of Bengali people.

The government has taken initiatives to prepare a legal framework for strengthening the activities of Bangla Academy, she said, adding that a committee would also be formed to formulate a Jatiya Grantha Niti.

Ekushey, she said, is a source of inspiration for Bengali people. It's a tale of valour and sacrifice of the nation to establish its right to speak in mother tongue.

The spirit of the Language Movement had inspired Bangabandhu to go for the freedom movement, the premier told her audience.

Hasina said after independence, Bangabandhu had taken Bangla to international stage by delivering his speech in Bangla at the UN. He also inspired Bangla Academy to arrange first Jatiya Sahitya Sammelan in 1974.

Laying importance on cultivation of Bengali literature in all spheres of society, she said the spirit of Bengali national should be promoted to resist all evil forces.

The premier appreciated the efforts of Bangla Academy

for organising the book fair, saying "The fair has created an opportunity for us to get involved with the contemporary literature and knowledge."

For new writers, the fair is a centre of fostering their creativity and talents, she told her audience.

Hasina also mentioned that the government would actively consider the proposal for shifting the venue of Ekushey Book Fair to a wider space near Shikha Chirantan at Suhrawardy Uddyan.

Cultural Affairs Minister Abul Kalam Azad attended the function as special guest while Director General of Bangla Academy Shamsuzzaman Khan gave the welcome address.

President of Bangla Academy and Prof Emeritus Dr Anisuzzaman chaired the function.

Salman Khan faces homicide trial

AFP, Mumbai

A court in Mumbai has ruled that Bollywood star Salman Khan will be tried for culpable homicide over a 2002 hit-and-run case which could land him behind bars for 10 years, his lawyer said yesterday.

Khan is alleged to have rammed his Toyota Land Cruiser vehicle onto a pavement and over five sleeping homeless people in suburban Mumbai, killing one and injuring four others.

The project

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September: The Bank says loan will be revived if Abul goes.

Oct 21: The government rejects graft allegations and refuses to remove Abul.

Dec 5: Abul is shifted to the ICT ministry, but the WB demands his removal from the cabinet.

2012

June: Fresh talks begin; the WB attaches four conditions, including removal of Abul and PM's adviser Mashiur Rahman.

July 29: The WB cancels the loan as the talks fail.

July 2: The finance minister urges the lender to withdraw the cancellation.

July 23: Abul resigns; other donors pledge the government with help in negotiations with the WB.

Sept 3: An ACC investigation committee quizzes Syed Abul Hossain at the commission office.

Sept 19: The government sends Mashiur's leave letter to the WB.

Sept 20: The WB returns to the project.

Oct 5: The WB announces to form a three-member panel to review the ACC investigation into the corruption allegation.

Oct 14: The WB external panel arrives in Dhaka on a two-day visit.

Dec 1: The external team arrives in Dhaka for a second time.

Dec 4: The ACC team submits its draft report that included names of Abul Hossain, former state minister for foreign affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury and businessman Nixon Chowdhury, who is also brother of ruling Awami League Whip Noor-E-Alam Chowdhury.

Dec 9: The ACC inquiry team submits its final report recommending filing of case against seven persons, excluding the trio as no hard evidence was found against them.

Dec 17: The ACC lodges a case against seven persons, excluding Abul Hossain and Abul Hasan.

2013

Jan 9: The WB review panel expresses dissatisfaction for not including Abul Hossain, saying the former minister was personally involved in the corruption conspiracy.

Jan 17: The government urges the Bank to make its decision within January about financing the project.

Jan 23: Prime minister reiterates finance minister's deadline, saying if the WB does not decide within January 31, the government would fund the project itself.

Jan 30: Finance minister says he sought WB president's appointment in February.

Jan 30: Bank President Jim Yong Kim says there will be no funds until certain conditions are met.

Jan 31: The government withdraws from WB loan.

7 arrested

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"After interrogating them, we will find out the real culprits and show them as arrested," said Azad, also the investigation officer of the case filed in connection with the incident.

Railway sources said two railway staffs were killed after some criminals threw them out of a running train on Dhaka-Chittagong route in 2008.

In another incident in March 12, 2008, five robbers hacked Md Samsul Haque, attendant of a Dhaka-bound mail train from Chittagong, to death and dumped his body in the toilet of a carriage.

The murder was committed before the train reached the Akhaura railway junction in Brahmanbaria.

JC Mandal, a guard of Turna Nishitha Express, was killed by some muggers near the junction, four months before the killing of the train attendant.

No to WB funds

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renewed World Bank financing for the Padma bridge, and it encourages the Anti-Corruption Commission to complete a full and fair investigation of the corruption allegations."

The government said it believed the WB's reconsideration was positive for Bangladesh and it attested what the government had been saying from the outset.

"The government has all along been saying that it is seriously considering the World Bank's allegation of corruption. But due to lack of evidence, it was not possible to file an FIR until June 2012."

Later in November, the statement continued, when the bank provided additional evidence, the Anti-Corruption Commission filed an FIR against some persons. In the FIR, the ACC also said it had taken measures to investigate several other accused.

The government believes this step is appropriate and, on the basis of that, the World Bank should have started implementation of the project.

"Besides, it was found that the government's project implementation schedule does not fit with that of the World Bank. As per the World Bank schedule, the project implementation is uncertain," the statement added.

"To fulfil its election pledge, the government decides it will start the project without the World Bank assistance. If necessary, there will only be a road bridge to reduce the project cost."

This decision was conveyed also to other development partners. Calling for their continued support, the government also decided to invite them to discuss on the project implementation schedule and steps.

The move came hours before WB President Jim Yong meets the external panel, formed to assess the ACC probe into the graft allegations.

Apparently, the government wanted to make sure that the WB did not have the chance to cancel the loan for the second time.

On January 9, the external panel, headed by Lewis Ocampo, expressed its displeasure at the case filed by the ACC in December for the graft conspiracy.

The panel was particularly unhappy over exclusion of Syed Abul Hossain, ex-minister for communications, from the list of accused.

It said Abul Hossain was personally involved in the corruption conspiracy to award the construction supervisor's job to Canadian company SNC Lavalin.

The fate of the project depended on the panel's report.

The three-member external panel has meanwhile reached Washington, DC, to hold a meeting with the WB president last night (Bangladesh time).

Bridge minus rail?

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utilised if Padma bridge had rail lines, he said.

"Cargo from Mongla and Benapole ports could easily reach Dhaka on trains using the bridge," he said, adding that the rail bridge over the Padma river was essential since rail communication via Bangabandhu Multipurpose Bridge over the Jamuna was handicapped by load and speed limitations.

Rahmatullah said Bangladesh could not entertain an Indian proposal to move cargo via Bangabandhu bridge due to the limitations.

"We can benefit from Padma rail bridge," he told The Daily Star.

He said the volume of cargo traffic in this region would rise in future and Bangladesh would not be able to cope with it due to inadequate rail connectivity.

Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury, an expert, said there would be an impact but not huge. "Padma bridge with rail connection will be huge if it is linked with the planned Trans Asian Railway in future," he told The Daily Star.

Ellen Goldstein, immediate past WB Bangladesh country director, was expected to be there.

Sources said the panel would present at the meeting its opinion about the case. Now that the government has rescinded its request, the WB has no action to take.

The finance minister on January 17 urged the World Bank to take a decision within the month. On January 23, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reiterated the same.

On Wednesday, Jim Yong Kim during a discussion on anti-graft issues in Washington said the lender would not finance the project unless certain conditions were met and Bangladesh gave an assurance that a complete and fair probe was underway.

Muith the same day told journalists that he was seeking Jim Yong's appointment in February. The WB chief's remark was still unknown in Dhaka.

The next day, as the WB president's comments were reported in the media, the government scrapped its request for funding.

In yesterday's statement, the government said, "The finance minister would speak on this matter in parliament on Sunday [tomorrow] or Monday."

Earlier in the day, the finance minister told the BSS that a fresh plan on the project funding would be unveiled in the parliament tomorrow.

Ministry sources say Muith wrote a two-page letter to the WB boss.

The Economic Relations Division sent similar letters to other co-financiers -- the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) -- with separate cover letters explaining why the government sought to withdraw from the request.

In the letter to the WB, the government praised the four-decade development partnership with the Washington-based lender. It expressed gratitude for the latter's consent to fund the project.

"But the government wants to speed up the Padma bridge project implementation," a source said, citing from the letter.

"The government wanted the WB to delink investigation from procurement process. Since it was not done, the government has requested withdrawal of the WB financing."

In the letters to the co-financiers, the government sought continuation of their financial commitment for the bridge project, said a finance ministry official.

Out of the \$2.9 billion required to build this 6.15 kilometre bridge along with rail, the WB had committed \$1.2b and the ADB and Jica nearly one billion dollars.

While the government expects the ADB and Jica to keep the commitment for this one billion, a finance ministry

official said now that the loan from the lead financier WB was cancelled, the agreement with the co-financiers would automatically become ineffective.

Therefore, if the government wanted to retain these co-financiers, it would have to sign a new agreement, which would take at least a year.

Already, ADB has pulled out of the project.

In reviving the cancelled World Bank loan last year, Finance Minister Muhith, PM's Adviser Gowher Rizvi and LGRD Minister Syed Ashraf played strong role while many opposed the revival.

Contacted, ACC Chairman Ghulam Rahman yesterday said the ACC investigation into the graft would continue in spite of the latest development.

"We have lodged the FIR [first information report] after completing an enquiry into the allegation," he said. "We will continue investigation in the case in a transparent manner."

The ACC will follow its rules and regulation, he said over the phone, adding that they would complete the case investigation and take subsequent legal steps.

After a year-long enquiry into the allegation over Padma bridge project, the Anti-Corruption Commission on December 17 last year filed the case against seven people for conspiring to commit bribery.

The accused include former secretary of the Bridges Division Mosharrif Hossain Bhuiyan, but the anti-graft body did not include in the case former communications minister Syed Abul Hossain and former state minister for foreign affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury.

2,400 Jamaat

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12:00noon yesterday while seven injured activists were undergoing treatment at Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College and Hospital under police guard.

At least three people were killed in Bogra during Thursday's clashes between Jamaat-Shibir men and law enforcers.

Jamaat claimed the victims, Abu Ruhani, 22, Mizanur Rahman, 30, and Abdullah, 21, were its activists.

The party and its student body Islami Chhatra Shibir on Thursday called for a dawn-to-dusk hartal in the district today protesting the killings.

Hospital sources said 15 people, critically injured in the clashes, were brought there. Of them, eight were released after primary treatment till 10:00am yesterday.

Mizanur Rahman, town publicity secretary of Shibir, told The Daily Star the dead had been sent to their families for burial.

bridge first, keeping the option for rail," he said, adding that they could easily develop the concept design prepared by Japan in 2004 without the rail option.

"It will take four months to modify the design," he added.

ALTERNATIVE FUNDING  
The government has several options to arrange the fund for Padma bridge. Apart from mobilising internal resources, the government may ask different donors and countries for money.

The government may use the \$300 million budget support of Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the \$200 million Indian grant for the construction of the Padma bridge.

There is also scope for cutting cost of projects in the Annual Development Programme and diverting the money to the bridge project.

Finance Minister AMA Muith said China had offered to finance and build the bridge during his visit to the country last year.

Malaysia had formally submitted a proposal to finance the bridge construction but the government may not accept it as the construction cost in that proposal would be high.

Man kills

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that on reaching home around noon, Rina started screaming. Hearing her screams, she and other neighbours rushed to their home and found the body of Bazlur hanging from the ceiling, she said.

They also found Barnali on the bed with bruises on her throat, face and neck, she said, adding that they immediately rushed her to a local clinic where doctors declared her dead.

Bazlur's relatives, cousins and neighbours said Bazlur was struggling to make ends meet over the last two years as he was not getting much work. Recently, he could not even pay the tuition fee for his elder daughter, who was in class-VIII at Civil Aviation High School in the capital.

Their landlord had hiked the rent of the tin-built house to Tk 4,200 from Tk 3,800, which made things for Bazlur even worse.

Rina, between the fits she was having after losing her husband and daughter yesterday, said over the last one and a half months, Bazlur often told her that the miserable existence was becoming unbearable for him and that he "wanted to leave the world".

Barnali, to comfort Bazlur, used to tell her father to take her with him when he left the world, Rina said.

Relatives and neighbours said he borrowed money from colleagues but still could not pay rent for the last two months. They said Bazlur was proud and he never took financial help from relatives.

Asadul Hossain Tuku, president of Dhaka Customs Agents' Employees Union, said, "We knew Bazlur, assistant publicity secretary of the union, was going through hard times but we never knew it was so bad."

Officer-in-Charge Lokman Hekim of Dakhin Khan Police Station said Rina filed two cases with the station, one for the killing of Barnali and the other was for the unnatural death of Bazlur.

Rape victim

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Sayed Abu Taleb, duty doctor at the surgery unit of the hospital said the girl had suffered 40 per cent burns on her body. He advised the family to take her to the burn unit at Dhaka Medical College Hospital but they could not afford to do so.

Victim's father said her daughter was apprehended on her way to an outdoor toilet at around 8:00 pm on January 20.

"Lebu Miah, son of neighbour Sabal Miah, was waiting for her in the dark and forcibly dragged her to a nearby field and raped her," he said.

"I was not at home that night and my wife -- step-mother of the victim -- was also away at her father's house. Lebu made use of our absence," he added.

Ekabbor said his daughter did not reveal the attack to anyone until two days later when she attempted to take her own life.

He said Lebu had not only raped his daughter but also threatened to kill her if she disclosed the matter to anyone.

Meanwhile, two police sub-inspectors visited the victim at Rangpur Medical College Hospital and later her home on January 22 to investigate the matter.

Officer-in-charge of Pirergachha police station Bazlur Rashid told this correspondent that police are still looking for Lebu Miah who remains absconding since the girl was brought to the hospital.

The victim's brother lodged a case with Pirgachha police station on Jan 22 accusing Lebu Miah of the assault.

He said not only had the police failed to arrest Lebu Miah in these 10 days but that Mia's family has been threatening to kill him unless he withdraws the case.

Her body was taken to the hospital morgue for autopsy before being handed over to the family.