G20 seeks to banish 'currency war'

AFP, *Moscow*

Finance ministers from G20 states yesterday gathered in Moscow for their first meeting in the Russian capital aimed at reassuring markets that the world's economic powers would not slug it out in "currency wars" to boost national growth.

The troubles of the debt-ridden eurozone will for the first time in several international meetings not be centre stage, with the main concern expected to be Japan's controversial plan for "monetary easing" that weakens the yen.

World economic policymakers need to find ways to boost growth without using instruments that could cause market turbulence or wreck international financial coordination.

The main challenge for the G20 is to "bring the world economy out of stagnation and uncertainty, and move on a firm path towards growth," President Vladimir Putin told the ministers as they met.

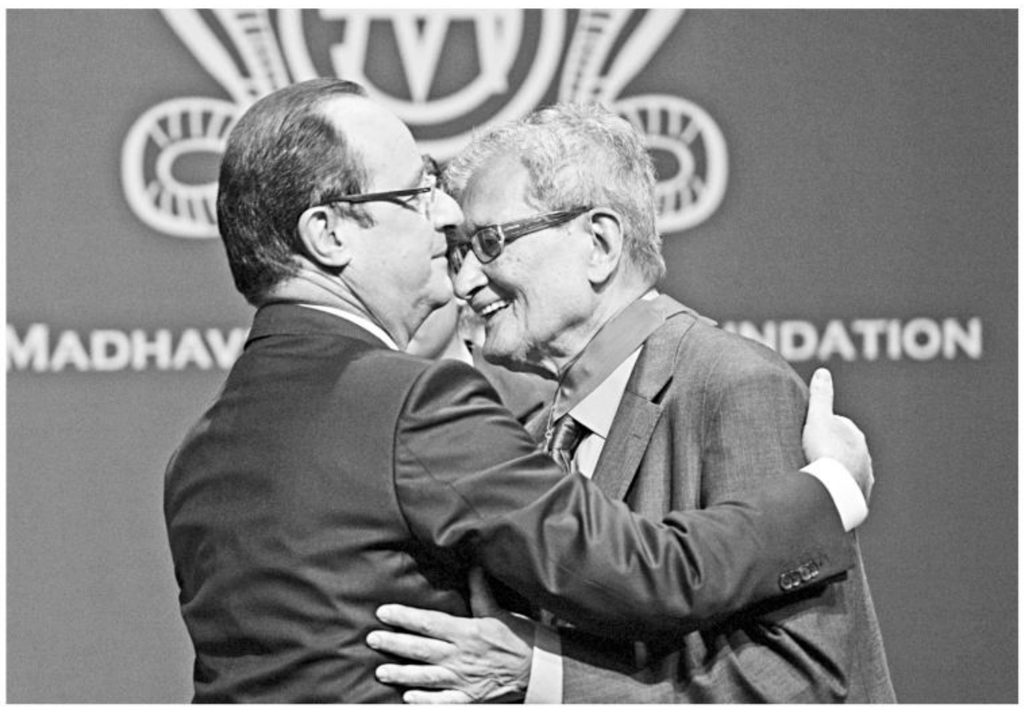
But EU Economic Affairs Commissioner Olli Rehn indicated that taking that path might not be easy: "The short-term outlook for the euro area is improving, although forecasts indicate the economy will only gather momentum slowly over the course of this year," he said.

The two-day G20 meeting, being hosted by Russia for the first time as it holds the presidency of the world's leading economies, is a prime chance for Moscow to present itself as a reliable global economic player.

Russia has set the task during its presidency -- which will culminate in the G20 summit from September 5-6 in Saint Petersburg -- of launching a "new cycle of growth" through investment, transparency and regulation.

The Secretary General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Angel Gurria denied that a currency war was in progress, saying everyone wanted Japan to rid itself of the curse of deflation.

"There is no currency war. We are further today away from a currency war than we were two years ago or three years ago," he said in Moscow.



France's President Francois Hollande, *left*, hugs Nobel Prize award winner Indian, Amartya Sen, after giving him France's highest civilian award, the Legion of Honour, at the Nehru Institute in New Delhi yesterday. French President Francois Hollande is in India for a two-day visit.

PHOTO: AFP

Mass dissatisfaction

FROM PAGE 1

Dhaka. They want Mollah and others on trial to face the death penalty. He was convicted by the International Crimes Tribunal, a local court set up by the government of Sheikh Hasina to prosecute men, largely from an Islamic opposition party, accused of murder, torture, rape and other wartime atrocities. When, somewhat unexpectedly, Mollah was spared a death sentence, he was seen flicking supporters a V-for-victory sign. That smug gesture may have helped to provoke the outrage. Shahbagh has given its name to the protests, though some now dub it "new generation roundabout", hinting at broad aspirations for political change. Families attend, with toddlers sporting bandannas bearing slogans that call for the death penalty. Television coverage helps to draw the crowds. The sight of young, otherwise progressive Bangladeshis seeking capital punishment, through music, street theatre, chants and recitals, is both moving and unsettling. Almost no one pays heed to known flaws in the trial.

Both the ruling Awami League and, belatedly, the main opposition BNP have fallen in with the protests. Senior politicians from the ruling party have attempted to co-opt the demonstrations, but their efforts to speak to the crowd were firmly rebuffed. Still, the League could get a boost. Sheikh Hasina honoured her promise to hold war-crimes trials. In parliament this week she also spoke up for the death penalty, saying that even impartial judges must listen to public opinion. Next, the parliament is expected today to amend the act behind the war-crimes court so that the government can appeal against verdicts. Mollah's reprieve may be short-lived.

Matters are trickier for the BNP, which dallied for eight days before joining the protesters. It had more to lose, in particular a useful electoral alliance with the biggest Islamist party, the Jamaat-e-Islami, whose leaders comprise most of those on trial. In the end, so many BNP supporters went off to join the Shahbagh protests that the party had no choice. Protesters say that their movement is a narrow one against political Islam: in favour of secular government, they want Jamaat banned. A rampage by Jamaat's violent youth wing has done nothing to damp down such calls. The government, which has already brought back an explicitly secular constitution from 1972, may soon feel ready to move.

Yet, as with any big protests, further political demands may emerge. The protests could become a plea for broad change. Few like a political system dominated by a long, bitter fight between a pair of self-serving dynasties, those of Sheikh Hasina and the BNP's Khaleda Zia, and their stave-wielding followers. If that duopoly were broken up, many at Shahbagh would celebrate.

Section 144 clamped on Dhaka

FROM PAGE 1

February 11 and 12 as Flag Days. On these two days, they sold flags and posters as a way of raising funds for an increasingly widening movement. Such activities led to panic in the government, which went into swift action. Hamidul Haq Chowdhury, owner of the Pakistan Observer newspaper (Chowdhury would in 1971 collaborate with the Yahya Khan military regime against the Bangladesh liberation war), and Abdus Salam, editor of the newspaper, were thrown into jail. The government offered a bizarre explanation for the arrests: the Observer, it alleged, had committed blasphemy by making a derogatory reference to Hazrat Osman, the third caliph of Islam. The newspaper was banned and despite the management tendering an apology, the authorities remained unmoved.

On February 20, through imposing Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, the government announced a ban on gatherings of five or more persons as well as on possession of objects that might cause bodily harm to people. The move led to second thoughts about the next day's programme among some students, who were of the view that Section 144 should not be violated. Indeed, twenty of the twenty four members of the All-Party State Language Committee of Action voted to call off the strike scheduled for February 21. The remaining four did not agree with the majority.

The action committee's decision to back down in the face of Section 144 met with a negative response from the larger body of general students of Dhaka University. The situation reached a stage where the action committee felt it necessary to place the entire matter of the strike and Section 144 before the students for a final decision.

On the eve of February 21, it was tension which gripped not only the university campus but the entire city of Dhaka as well. The moment of reckoning was fast approaching.

Desperate, dangerous

FROM PAGE 1

"These tactics sometimes help avert arrest as those activists are unknown to locals and law enforcers," a top police official said, requesting to remain unidentified.

Also speaking anonymously, a top leader of Jamaat from Chittagong division admitted this without giving any details.

Sources say Jamaat is also planning to engage its low-profile leaders and think-tank of less known like-minded organisations to get hold of an important intersection under the banner of olama-mashaek organisations.

Several Jamaat leaders themselves have told this paper that the party has never before faced such a political crisis since 1979, when it re-entered politics Bangladesh.

After the war crimes trial started in 2010, nine of its top leaders were detained on war crimes charges. Six of them are facing trial and cases against the three others are under investigation.

The latest blow came on February 5, when a group of online activists took to the streets rejecting the verdict against Quader Mollah, an assistant secretary general of the party, who was given a life sentence.

Protesters want death sentence for Mollah and all other war criminals, and a ban on Jamaat-Shibir politics.

In the changed situation, Jamaat-Shibir on Wednesday moved to seize the city's Paltan intersection, south gate of Baitul Mukarram, Dainik Bangla intersection or Motijheel Shapla Chattar. But police foiled the move.

"We are determined to stage the same type of demonstration again until our demands are met," said a divisional-level Jamaat leader.

The party demand includes scrapping of the two tribunals formed to try the war criminals, and releasing all the Jamaat leaders detained on war crimes charges.

Since the start of its violent attacks on law enforcers in November 2012, Jamaat and Shibir have been applying various strategies to carry out attacks and vandalism across the country.

In some cases, it was a hit-and-run strategy. In other cases, Jamaat-Shibir men chanted "Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu," a slogan used by the Awami League, before attacking police, detectives say, adding: "This is just to create confusion."

The party is also patronising anti-Ahmadiyya organisations including Tehrik-e-Khatme Nabuwwat to wage anti-Ahmadiyya movement afresh.

Jamaat is also patronising anti-Ahmadiyya elements to bring so-called Islamic leaders from Pakistan and India to wage a hate campaign in different discussions in Bangladesh.

In a surprising move, the newly formed Islamist party Tehrik-e-Khatme Nabuwwat on January 3 held a rally against Ahmadiyyas, a Muslim minority community, in the capital.

Well-placed sources say Jamaat was patronising Tehrik-e-Khatme Nabuwwat to create unrest in the country in the name of an anti-Ahmadiyya movement and keep the administration busy.

Under the banner of Khatme Nabuwwat Preservation Committee, a meeting was held in Gazipur on February 3 demanding that Ahmadiyyas be declared non-Muslim. Three anti-Ahmadiyya Islamic scholars, including Hanif Jalandari from Pakistan, spoke at the meeting.

Earlier in 2010, Jamaat and its associate organisations adopted a strategy of using Bangabandhu's name to continue with their activities among the children of different districts.

In doing so, Jamaat on March 18, 2010, opened a stall under the banner of Shishu Kantha Sangsad at a children's fair at Rajshahi Shishu Academy marking the 90th birth anniversary of Bangabandhu and the National Children's Day.

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Date of Submission of Application: Form **February 20 to March 05, 2013.** Application in prescribed form must be submitted to the Office of the Dean.

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Admission Test: March 22, 2013 (Friday) at 11.00 A.M. - 12:30 PM.

For details please contact the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Business studies, University of Dhaka. Telephone # 8613295, 9661920-73/4360.

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কাস্টমস, এক্সাইজ ও ভ্যাট কমিশনারেট, ঢাকা (পশ্চিম), ঢাকা
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