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REGAINING GSP Work on action plan goes slow

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh's work towards getting the suspension of GSP benefits in the US market lifted in December has been rather slow, raising questions whether it could at all be done in the next four months.

The suspension comes into effect on September 3.

The suspension of the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) privilege for Bangladesh was decided on June 27, following at least two major industrial disasters. The country was given two months before the suspension came into effect.

From September 3, the United States Trade Representative would monitor Bangladesh's progress and review in December whether the GSP privilege could be given back to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh had been working on an action plan, prescribed by the Obama administration, to regain the GSP status in the review.

Ensuring workers safety, their full freedom to join unions, and labour and EPZ laws reform, a database of factories, and withdrawal of a few cases against workers are among the major things Bangladesh has to get done to get the GSP status back.

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Part of the crowd at an Awami League rally in the historic Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday. Prime Minister and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, inset, waves to the crowd.

PHOTO: BSS

POOR PROGRESS IN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PROJECT WB may divert fund

PINAKI ROY

The World Bank (WB) may divert fund for a forest department project on wildlife conservation as about 90 percent of the \$36 million loan remains idle even though half the four-year project period has elapsed.

Officials concerned said lack of a permanent director and conservation ideas was the reason behind the poor progress of the project styled "Strengthening regional cooperation for wildlife protection".

Upon reviewing the project, the WB has recently given the forest department six months to come up with proposals on conservation related

pilot schemes.

"We have agreed to the six-month period to see some real progress. Otherwise, we will have to revise the programme," said Sumith Pilapitiya, a member of the WB review committee.

The government signed the \$36 million (Tk 236 crore) loan agreement in June 2011 under a WB regional cooperation programme where Nepal and Bhutan are already a party and India is likely to join.

The purpose of the project is to increase regional cooperation in wildlife conservation and to control cross-border illegal wildlife trade.

Using the fund, Bangladesh was supposed to update its present status

of wildlife, curb illegal wildlife trading, reduce human-animal conflicts, control habitat destruction, build capacity of wildlife officials and support livelihood of the local people.

Implementation of some pilot projects for 34 protected forest areas was also one of the major components of the project.

"The programme was designed expecting field officers would propose methods of conservation. But we did not get many such proposals. The field officials mostly approached with different infrastructure construction ideas which we had to send back," said a project official.

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TOKI MURDER Ivy accuses Shamim Osman, his nephew

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayananj

City Mayor Selina Hayat Ivy yesterday demanded death sentence for former Awami League lawmaker Shamim Osman and his nephew Azmeri Osman in the Toki murder case.

She was speaking at a *Noubondhon* (boat chain programme) in the Shitalakkhya marking six months of the murder of

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Major gold haul 18kg smuggled gold bars seized at Shahjalal airport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs officials seized 155 gold bars, weighing around 18 kilograms, from the capital's Shahjalal International Airport yesterday morning.

According to the officials, the gold bars worth about Tk 6 crore.

Acting on a tip off, the officials around 9:30am had searched a bus on the airport tarmac and found the gold bars in a black bag kept on a spare tyre attached to the bus door, said Ayesha Akhter, an assistant commissioner of customs.

She said the bus was carrying United Airways' passengers coming from Mascot.

Customs officials seized the bus and arrested its driver Md Falan Fakir for interro-

gation. However, none of the passengers have been detained.

A case in connection with the recovery has been lodged with the Armed Police Battalion.

"This is the first time we seized gold from a bus used by passengers from Mascot. Earlier, customs had recovered gold from flights coming from Dubai, Hong Kong and Singapore," said Mostafizur Rahman, deputy director of customs intelligence.

He said, "A special team was formed to beef up monitoring over gold smuggling last month, after the biggest gold haul at the airport."

Mahfuzur Rahman, executive officer of ground service of United Airways, said, "The

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People can do nothing but watch as the mighty Kirtonkhola devours a shop at Charkawa Bus Station in Barisal yesterday. The river erosion took at least 50 structures, two homes and 48 shops, in just one day.

PHOTO: STAR

Little headway in Milky murder investigation Planners still at large

RAFIUL ISLAM

A month has passed since Jubo League leader Milky's murder, which was captured on a closed-circuit camera placed at a shopping mall in the capital's Gulshan.

Law enforcers were yet to arrest the four alleged planners, who stand accused in the first information report (FIR) of the murder case.

They are Zahidul Islam Tipu, joint secretary of Motijheel Thana unit of Awami League, Shakhawat Hossain Chanchal, organising secretary of Jubo League (North), Wahidul Alam Arif, general secretary of Jubo League (South), and Chanchal's associate Sohel.

Riazul Haque Khan Milky, organising secretary of the Dhaka city (south) unit of Jubo League, was shot dead by his party men at 1:07am on July 30.

After one month of the killing, Milky's family members expressed their dissatisfaction with the progress made so far in the case.

"We only know Tipu and Arif are the main planners. They

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EX-SP MURDER Probe on to identify killers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Apart from a family feud over land, police are now focusing their probe on whether criminals behind bars were involved in the murder of former police official Fazlul Karim Khan.

The lawmen, however, are yet to detain any of the suspected killers of Fazlul, retired additional SP of the Criminal Investigation Department. Unidentified assailants shot him dead at his West Rampura residence on Thursday.


No case was filed in

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PRAYER TIMING August 31		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4:30	5:05
Zohr	12:45	1:15
Asr	4:45	5:00
Maghrib	6:33	6:36
Esha	8:00	8:30


Source: Islamic Foundation

The Daily Star

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ONLINE POLL

Do you think it was justified for BNP to term 'nothing but a drama' the attorney general's handing over of the cheque for a portion of money that was laundered by Arafat Rahman Koko?



Yes (55%)
No (45%)

TOTAL VOTES: 226

TODAY'S POLL

Do you agree with the prime minister that when BNP assumes office, they resort to corruption?

PLEASE CAST YOUR VOTE AT www.thedailystar.net

Wal-Mart ready to lend \$50m

Factory owners of Bangladesh to get the fund for improving building conditions

REUTERS, Chicago

Wal-Mart Stores Inc told investors on Thursday that it could provide up to \$50 million in low-interest loans or other types of payments to Bangladesh factory owners for building improvements.

The money is part of the more than \$100 million in loans and access to capital that a group of North American companies including Wal-Mart and Gap Inc pledged in July.

The Bangladesh central bank would need

to approve any foreign currency loan. Details about lending rates also need to be finalised.

A massive push for improved factory conditions in Bangladesh comes after 1,129 workers were killed in the collapse of a garment plant in April and another 112 people perished in a factory fire there in November.

In July, North American companies including Wal-Mart created the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety.

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Life on earth began on red planet?

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Evidence is mounting that life on Earth may have started on Mars.

A leading scientist has claimed that one particular element believed to be crucial to the origin of life would only have been available on the surface of the red planet.

Prof Steven Benner, a geochemist, has argued that the "seeds" of life probably arrived on Earth in meteorites blasted off Mars by

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Sunrise over the Gale crater on Mars. Was this where life began?

PHOTO: THE GUARDIAN