

Muhith worried over plunder in banking sector

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday told parliament that he himself is concerned over the plundering of money from the banking sector.

He, however, assured lawmakers that no actual culprit would go unpunished.

During passing of the next fiscal year's budget, Jatiya Party lawmakers opposed the allocation given to the Bank and Financial Institutions Division. They said scams like Hall-Mark Group, Bismillah Group and BASIC Bank are involved in anomalies of crores of taka.

The lawmakers said the government is giving money from the public exchequer to meet the capital deficit of the banks caused by the plundering of money.

Muhith thanked the JP lawmakers for their concern about the plundering

and said that the government has taken steps so that no such misappropriations will take place in future.

He said, "Yes, we take responsibility for the money embezzlement as it may belong to the poor or rich section in the society and they face difficulties."

The minister said the state cannot cause sufferings for them. For this reason, the state has taken responsibility of the plundered money and will do so in future.

Muhith also said all the scams are being investigated and on the basis of the findings, cases are being filed.

He also mentioned that cases were lodged in connection with BASIC Bank scam and those responsible in the scam are being arrested.

He said, "You [lawmakers] can rest assured that action will be taken against those found guilty in the cases which are under investigation of the ACC [Anti-Corruption Commission]."



Eid shopping

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As most of the e-commerce sites are based on Facebook, advertisements for products on the popular social networking site have also gone up in recent times.

Mostly youths and job holders have set in motion the online shopping culture in the country.

For Sadia Sharmin, a mid-level executive of a Dhaka-based corporate firm, troublesome Eid shopping has now become a matter of minutes.

As in the last two years, she did most of her Eid shopping through e-commerce, much ahead of the festival.

This time, she bought *salwar-kameez* and a sari for herself, dresses for her kids and also *salwar-kameez* for her maid.

"I prefer this platform for shopping because it saves me the trouble of getting stuck in tailbacks for hours and haggling with sellers over price," she said.

She, however, admitted that she missed the excitement of Eid shopping at malls and markets.

"It is quite exciting to shop at markets or malls but I have time constraint," said Sadia, who receives most of the purchased goods at her office in Tejgaon.

Not only shoppers across the country, non-resident Bangladeshis are also doing Eid shopping for their loved ones back home through online stores of the country's leading brands.

Humayun Kabir, a non-resident Bangladeshi in Italy, has already done Eid shopping for his family by placing orders on Aarong, a leading lifestyle retailer in the country.

He bought saris for his mother, panjabi for his father and fashionable dresses for his younger brother and sister. Much to his delight, Aarong has already sent the items to his hometown of Gopalganj.

"E-commerce platform gives us the opportunity to do shopping even from Europe for my family members in Bangladesh," Kabir told The Daily Star over the phone from Bolzano in northern Italy.

Aarong and several other reputed brands said half of their orders came from non-resident Bangladeshis, and this is the specialty of this year's Eid shopping on the e-commerce platform.

"I am quite surprised to see that more than 50 percent of our online orders have been placed from abroad ahead of this year's Eid," said Mohammad

Abdur Rouf, chief operating officer of Aarong.

Sabera Anwar, chief executive officer of Panache Events that sells high-end dresses, said more than 30 percent of their buyers are non-resident Bangladeshis.

Of the rest, most are from Dhaka, she added.

Rouf said their total online sales more than doubled ahead of this Eid compared to last year's. "It means people are becoming habituated to online purchase. We hope it will increase further next year."

Aarong is offering promotional packages such as air tickets to Myanmar for its top online buyer.

Like Aarong, several other companies are making promotional offers, including cash-back, to boost sales.

Multinational companies are also making foray into the local e-commerce market to grab a fair share of the pie and strengthen their presence in Bangladesh.

Global footwear brand Bata initiated its e-commerce sales through online marketplaces *ajkerdeal.com* and *daraz.com.bd* last year. Some local and foreign companies have also rolled out their online stores in the last two months.

Despite offering hassle-free and time-saving shopping experience, e-commerce is not completely unproblematic. At times, shoppers complain about the quality of products purchased online.

Fahmida Alauddin, a student at a university in Dhanmondi, has mixed experience about online shopping.

Recently, she bought a pair of sunglasses for Tk 800 from an online store, which delivered the products a day after she placed the order. The products were fine, she said.

Later, she bought *salwar-kameez* from another e-shop but their colour faded after she washed them.

Fahim of the BASIS said the industry was still fighting fraudulence, and it would take time to achieve full confidence of customers.

Fahim, also the CEO of renowned online shop *ajkerdeal.com*, said his company gives customers the chance to change their purchased products if those are defective.

"To avoid fake products, customers should buy from credible e-shops."

Online stores have to improve the quality of their products and services to become an alternative to bricks-and-mortar stores, he added.

Suicide blasts

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green police cadet buses had sustained damage, as well as a military Humvee vehicle assigned to escort them.

Twisted metal and glass shards littered the scene as security personnel gathered around the wreckage.

President Ghani said the attack demonstrated the Taliban's weakness on the battlefield, a statement from his office said.

"This cruel and complete disregard for human life during the holy month of Ramadan is abhorrent," the US embassy in Kabul added.

RESURGENT TALIBAN

The resurgent Taliban have been fighting against the Western-backed Kabul government since they were ousted from power by a US-led invasion in late 2001.

They have been gaining ground across the country but the Islamic State group are also making inroads into Afghanistan, particularly in the east, where they are challenging the Taliban on their own turf.

On June 20, 14 Nepali security guards

were killed in an attack on their bus that prompted Kathmandu to ban its nationals from working in the war-ravaged country.

Eleven others were killed in a string of bombings across Afghanistan on the same day.

The US and Nato combat mission in Afghanistan ended in December 2014. US forces have been in an advisory role since then, while carrying out counterterrorism missions against IS and remnants of al-Qaeda.

US forces had only been authorised to hit Taliban targets for defensive reasons, or to protect Afghan soldiers.

But the recent changes mean US troops can now work more closely with local fighters in striking the Taliban, who have demanded the departure of all foreign forces.

The Taliban regularly attack police as part of their campaign, and a recent AFP investigation found that the insurgents are exploiting child sex slaves employed by security forces to deploy deadly insider attacks.

16 POINTS ON 4 HIGHWAYS VULNERABLE TO GRIDLOCK DURING EID HOLIDAYS



SOURCE: RHD

People start leaving city

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launch passengers.

They estimated that over 45 lakh people would take buses while about five lakh trains and around 10 lakh launches. However, Bangladesh Passengers Welfare Association put the number of homebound people at 75 lakh.

Talking to this newspaper at Mohakhali Inter-District Bus Terminal last evening, Senior Officer SM Rakib Forazy of Investment Corporation of Bangladesh said: "I'm leaving tonight [last night] as there is no office before Sunday [July 10]. I want to take full advantage of the extended holiday."

Like him, thousands of people took buses, trains and launches for home last night. The city's most educational institutions are already on Ramadan and Eid vacation, meaning a good number of students have already left the capital.

WORRIES REMAIN

People's trips home would not be smooth due to various hazards. Tailbacks at city exits would cause sufferings to passengers as vehicles might get stuck at Tongi, Jatrabari, Gabtoli and near the Buriganga bridges.

The Chittagong-bound passengers might have to negotiate traffic jams at Kanchpur, Sonargaon, Signboard, Madanpur and Sanarpar intersections after crossing Jatrabari.

The narrow Jatrabari-Matuail-Kazla road would be another exit route for travellers to Chittagong and Sylhet.

Based on previous experience, the road transport and bridges ministry has identified 16 points where there might be tailbacks. Some 1,000 members of Rover Scout will work there as volunteers to assist police in managing traffic.

The Nabinagar-Chandra and Joydebpur-Chandra roads might see the worst traffic congestions this year also. The ministry would pay special attention to the roads to ease traffic.

Sabuj Uddin Khan, superintendent engineer (Dhaka circle) of RHD, said vehicles from Savar area would be diverted to an alternative lane to avoid rush at Chandra intersection.

"We temporarily widened a three-kilometre stretch of Dhaka-Tangail road from Chandra intersection to help coming from Savar and Joydebpur," he told The Daily Star.

He said 80 rover scouts will start working with police tomorrow in the area to help them enforce traffic rules.

Around 35,000 vehicles would use the Chandra-Elenga road everyday on way to 26 northern and southern districts daily during Eid holidays. The two-lane road sees a huge traffic movement.

The vehicles would run smoothly after crossing the Bangabandhu Bridge. Trips toward Rangpur,

Dinajpur, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Panchagarh and Thakurgaon are expected to be hassle-free.

Crossing Abdullahpur and Tongi on the outskirts of the capital might be difficult like it had been for years. People heading for Mymensingh, Sherpur, Netrakona and Jamalpur might have to bear the brunt of extra traffic on the road stretching from Tongi bridge to Joydebpur intersection.

There might be tailbacks near Aminbazar Bridge and Savar Bazar on way to southern districts. Smooth trips for passengers would largely depend on Paturia-Daulatdia ferry and launch services.

Previously, people bound for Jessore, Khulna, Satkhira and Meherpur had to wait at Paturia for hours due to shortage of ferries. After reaching Daulatdia, their journeys would become smooth.

There might be no trouble in crossing Mawa-Kawrakandi route this year.

A large number of unfit and run-down vehicles start plying highways during Eid holidays, taking an advantage of a transport crisis. Many of the vehicles break down on highways, causing long tailbacks, said transport operators and police.

The situation takes a turn for worse when a vehicle breaks down on two-lane roads as a tow truck finds it difficult to reach the spot and a gridlock is created in the meantime.

The corals of St Martin's in peril

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ocean bed, but provide habitats to more than one quarter of the marine wildlife globally. There are at least 68 species of corals around Saint Martin's Island, making its marine area a unique biodiversity hot spot in Bangladesh.

Reacting to the findings of the surveys, experts and different government authorities on the island blamed man-made causes for the poor ecological condition of the island.

Officials at the Department of Environment (DoE) said they did not conduct any survey like the ones done by SOS, but their observations do match with SOS's findings.

They identified at least three man-made reasons behind the decline of the biodiversity of the island -- water vessel-based pollution, destructive fishing, and poverty of the local community.

Experts blamed the government as well as its different agencies, including the DoE, for the declining environmental condition of the island. They said the government declared the island as Ecologically Critical Area (ECA) in 1999, but did not take any major initiative under the declaration.

They also suggested bringing the island under Marine Protected Area (MPA) immediately to save coral reefs that serve the ecosystem, tourism, fisheries and protect the shoreline as well as serve food to around 30 percent aquatic creatures.

Both the DoE and the SOS blamed unplanned tourism and pollution caused by vessels for the current situation. At least five to seven ships travel with 5,000 tourists every day, except for the monsoon season, to and from the island, according to the two organisations.

"Every coral has algae on its upper part and it serves food and energy to the coral. When propellers of ships lift sediments or mud from seabed and cover the upper part of coral at least half to one inch, algae fail to get sunlight and die, which eventually causes the death of the coral," said Alifa Bintha Haque, director of research of SOS and also a teacher of zoology department at Dhaka University.

Founder of SOS Mohammad Arju said the government acknowledged the island as an ECA, but was yet to take any efforts to recover or restore its habitats and biodiversity.

The marine conservationist said the SOS got associated with the IUCN in 2014 and submitted a report to the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation's Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project.

"The formal report is yet to be published, but based on our studies, we suggest policy changes to facilitate a Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA) around the island," he said.

DoE Assistant Director Sardar Shariful Islam, who is posted at Cox's Bazar, said he has no specific data that would corroborate the SOS's claim of 67 percent corals being bleached. He, however, opined that the condition of corals is worse than any time before.

The last "Dive Against Debris" survey in March by the SOS also found that 90.31 percent of marine debris on the island are plastic materials littered by tourists and locals.

Experts and DoE officials blamed the local administration for not keeping any fund to clean such wastes. They suggested restrictions on the movement of ships and tourists in the adjoining areas of the island.

"The stressors which are causing

the loss of rich biodiversity of the island are mainly local. Subsurface leaching of sewerage tanks of the hotels, unplanned and excess collection of algae, collection of living and dead corals, hard rocks and shells and dumping of solid and semi-solid waste materials are the main challenges to be addressed," said Abdullah Harun Chowdhury, professor of Environmental Science discipline at Khulna University.

Experts also said destructive fishing in the adjoining areas is putting the lives of turtles, sharks and dolphins in danger.

They suggested the government make it mandatory for the restaurant and hotel owners to recruit 20 percent of the local people at their hotels, which will help reduce poverty of the locals and prevent them from selling corals.

Kamal Uddin Ahmed, secretary to the environment ministry, spoke of a new project, which among other things, would arrange funds for cleaning waste on the island.

Quietly, Otobi

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PDB, but leave us with the junk machinery at best. It's a hopeless case," said the PDB source.

Locals said a large number of plant machinery was taken to an unknown location on trucks.

Sheikh Nasir Uddin, officer-in-charge of Abhaynagar Police Station, said the power plant owners removed the machinery.

Sources said the plant went into production on August 25, 2011, but it could never meet the production target.

No-one could be reached to comment on behalf of the power plant.

ILLEGAL VOIP BUSINESS

2,531 active SIMs seized in Mymensingh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police seized illegal VoIP (voice over internet protocol) equipment, including 2,531 active SIMs, and arrested three people in this connection from a house in Mymensingh town on Wednesday night.

The arrestees are Humayun Kabir, 27, and Johirul Islam, 23, of Jamalpur's Madarganj upazila, and Ruhul Amin, 22, of Tangail's Ghatail upazila.

Kabir is a student of Social Welfare department at Government Ananda Mohan College. Johirul and Ruhul are degree students, police said.

A few months ago, Kabir employed Johirul and Ruhul as computer operators at monthly salary of Tk 5,000 each, police said.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team, led by Sub-inspector Khandaker Shaker Ahmed, raided the house in Shankipara area around 10:30pm and arrested the three, said Kamrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station.

Police recovered VoIP equipment, including five receivers and 2,531 active SIMs, a fingerprint scanner for biometric SIM re-registration, 12 national identity cards, a television set and two computers from the house.

But police could not immediately say how Kabir managed the VoIP equipment and the fingerprint scanner.

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Halt campaign against vitamin A-enriched rice

Over 100 Nobel laureates ask Greenpeace

REAZ AHMAD

Over a hundred Nobel laureates in a joint letter urged all concerned to refrain from campaigning against the Golden Rice -- the first vitamin A-enriched rice in the world.

"We call upon Greenpeace to cease and desist in its campaign against Golden Rice specifically, and crops and foods improved through biotechnology in general," reads the letter, addressed to the leaders of the United Nations, governments around the world and Greenpeace -- an environmental group against the development of genetically modified (GM) or engineered foods.

The global scientific fraternity came rallying behind the Golden Rice at a time when scientists in Bangladesh as well as scientists in at least three other countries are at an advanced stage of developing the world's first vitamin A-enriched rice, popularly known as the Golden Rice for its yellowish colour.

"We call upon governments of the world ... to do everything in their power to oppose Greenpeace's actions and accelerate the access of farmers to all the tools of modern biology, especially seeds improved through biotechnology," reads the letter.

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CRIMINAL CASES

HC pulls for security of witnesses

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court has asked the government to explain in four weeks as to why it should not be directed to take effective measures for ensuring security and protection to all witnesses in all criminal cases in the country.

The HC bench of Justice Gobinda Chandra Tagore and Justice Justice Bishmadedv Chakraborty gave the ruling yesterday, following a writ petition filed by Komol Kumar Nath, a prosecution witness in a Yaba tablet recovery case in Chittagong.

Chittagong Kotwali Police filed the case on March 24, 2011, after 1,175 contraband Yaba tablets were seized from the possession of one Ashok Biswas.

Last year in August, Komol appeared as a prosecution witness before a Chittagong court against Ashok, said Chowdhury Shamsul Arifin, Komol's lawyer, while talking to The Daily Star.

Ever since the filing of the case Ashok had been threatening his client, Komol, and the threats intensified after his client stood before the court last year as a witness against Ashok, the lawyer added.

On June 28 this year, Komol filed the petition with the HC, seeking directives to the government so that it ensures security for himself and his family members as well as for all witnesses in all criminal cases.

Earlier, on February 15 this year, Komol submitted an application to the

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