

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Remittance down for 2yrs in a row

World Bank predicts a growth this year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Remittances to developing countries fell for a second consecutive year in 2016, a trend not seen in the last three decades, said the World Bank's Migration and Development Brief.

The latest edition of the note was released yesterday at the Bank's Spring Meetings in Washington.

It estimated that officially recorded remittances to developing countries amounted to \$429b in 2016, a decline of 2.4 percent over \$440b in 2015.

Global remittances, including flows to high-income countries, contracted by 1.2 percent to \$575b last year from \$582b in the previous year.

Remittances to major receiving countries, including Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Egypt, dropped last year by 11.1, 10 and 9.5 percent, respectively.

India, while retaining its top spot as the world's largest remittance recipient, led the decline with remittance inflows decreasing by 8.9 percent. Nepal also saw a contraction of 6.7 percent.

In many countries, including Bangladesh, remittances are one of the largest sources of foreign exchange. It is the largest source of foreign exchange in Bangladesh after exports and the figure was over seven times higher than the foreign direct investment worth \$2b in 2015-16.

Last year, the exceptions among major remittance recipients were Mexico and the Philippines, who saw an increase in inflows by an estimated 8.8 and 4.9 percent, respectively. Also, Pakistan saw a modest growth of 2.8 percent last year.

The WB said low oil prices and weak economic growth and fiscal tightening in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and the Russian Federation were taking a toll on remittance flows to South Asia and Central Asia. Besides, weak growth in Europe reduced flows to North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The decline in remittances, when valued in US dollars, was made worse by a weaker euro, British pound and Russian ruble against the US currency.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5



Covered vans are parked occupying a portion of Dhaka-Chittagong eight-lane highway at Sanarpar in Narayanganj's Siddhirganj yesterday. The Narayanganj district administration conducted a drive against such illegal parking about a month back. But the vehicles are back again.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Early outbreak rings alarm

FROM PAGE 1

2000 and 2015, less than one percent was reported in those four months. However, the percentage rose to over six percent last year.

Epidemiologists believe early rain could be a reason behind this early dengue cases. The Aedes prefers to breed in clean, stagnant water in containers following rain near households, roadsides ditches and other places.

Earlier, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) recorded 19 cases of chikungunya during the last week of 2016 and the first week of this year.

Dengue and chikungunya have no specific treatment. The treatment is focused on relieving the symptoms, says the World Health Organization (WHO).

Dengue, which causes flu-like illness, can be fatal at times. Chikungunya, on the other hand, is not fatal, but causes fever and severe joint pain, muscle pain, headache, nausea, fatigue and rash. The joint pain may be prolonged to weeks, says WHO.

Prevention and control of dengue depends on effective mosquito control measures, it adds.

IEDCR Director Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora said early rain could be a factor in the breeding of Aedes mosquitoes, but there are other factors too. For example, she said,

DENGUE SYMPTOMS	PROTECTION	IF INFECTED
<p>High fever with at least two of the following: Headaches, pain behind eyes, nausea, vomiting, swollen glands, joint or muscle pains, rash</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use mosquito repellents Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants Use mosquito nets See a doctor immediately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rest and drink plenty of fluids Paracetamol can be taken Sleep under a treated net

SOURCE: WHO

there was no rain during the chikungunya outbreak last winter.

An investigation by the IEDCR and DGHS found that the sources of Aedes mosquitoes were drums filled with water in slum-like settlements in Kathalagan and Kalabagan areas in the capital. That caused the chikungunya outbreak, said Sanya Tahmina, director (communicable disease) of DGHS.

"The water drums were not covered. Mosquitoes bred there and spread chikungunya," she said.

A survey by DGHS last year found at least one in five homes in the Dhaka South City Corporation had stagnant water in containers with mosquito larvae or pupae.

The survey found mosquito larvae or pupae mostly in plastic barrels, buckets, clay pots, used or abandoned tires, tubes and water tanks.

Prof Saif Ulla Munshi of virology at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University said it was important for the authorities to gear

up mosquito control programme. The programme includes destroying the larva and pupae before the monsoon begins.

"If larva is destroyed, mosquito population would not go up. Otherwise, early spread of Aedes means higher number of dengue cases," he told The Daily Star.

On the other hand, people in general need to make sure that any flower vases, buckets or other pots in and around their houses did not have stagnant water, Prof Munshi said.

Contacted, DSCC Chief Health Officer (CHO) Brig Gen Sheikh Salahuddin said they were aware of the dengue situation and had regularly been spraying medicines to destroy Aedes larva and pupae.

The DNCC is also working with the same plan. CHO Brig Gen SMM Saleh Bhuiyan of DNCC said they were implementing mosquito control programme comprehensively as well amid rising trend of dengue.

S Korea, China

FROM PAGE 16

North Korea's additional high-strength provocations, to maximize pressure on the North, and to ensure China's constructive role in resolving the North Korea nuclear issue".

South Korea and the United States have also been conducting annual joint military exercises, which the North routinely criticises as a prelude to invasion.

"It is a situation where a lot of exercise equipment is amassed in North Korea and also a lot of strategic assets are situated on the Korean peninsula because of the South Korea-US military drills," Lee told a briefing.

"We are closely watching the situation and will not be letting our guards down," Lee said.

US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said yesterday North Korea's rhetoric was provocative but he had learned not to trust it.

The United Nations Security Council on Thursday condemned North Korea's latest missile test and said the council was prepared to consider further sanctions on Pyongyang.

North Korea has been under UN sanctions aimed at impeding the development of its nuclear and missile programs since 2006. The 15-member council has strengthened sanctions following each of North Korea's five nuclear tests.

UNUSUAL MOVES

Trump told a news conference "some very unusual moves have been made over the last two or three hours", and

that he was confident Chinese President Xi Jinping would "try very hard" to pressure North Korea over its nuclear and missile programmes.

Trump gave no indication of what the moves might be. None of the US officials who told Reuters about the heightened level of activity by Chinese bombers suggested alarm or signalled that they knew the precise reason for such activity.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang referred questions about the air force to the Defence Ministry, which has yet to publicly comment.

Asked about Trump's comment about Xi trying hard, Lu said Xi and Trump had had a full and deep discussion about North Korea when they met this month.

An official Chinese newspaper said there was optimism about persuading the North to end its pursuit of a nuclear programme without the use of force, "now that even the once tough-talking Donald Trump is onboard for a peaceful solution".

"Beijing has demonstrated due enthusiasm for Washington's newfound interest in a diplomatic solution and willingness to work more closely with it," the state-run China Daily said in an editorial.

In Russia's Far East, some media have cited residents as saying they have seen military hardware being moved towards North Korea but Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said deployment of Russian troops inside Russia were not a public matter.

No compromise

FROM PAGE 1

The government has a plan to cut oil prices to boost economic growth but it is subject to the prime minister's approval, he said.

"I have told them [IMF officials] that we will continue to provide subsidies in the energy sector because we want to bring the whole country under electricity coverage by 2018. It [subsidy] will continue for quite some time but I cannot say exactly for how long," he said.

"At the moment, we wish to reduce the oil prices a bit. We have informed the prime minister of our proposal. The prices will be decreased once we have her approval.

"Our economists propose cutting the oil prices to boost the economy... I agree with them. This is why we have sought the prime minister's permission," he said.

Muhih also pointed out that the IMF is quite pleased with the economic situation in Bangladesh.

On April 16, the Centre for Policy Dialogue said the proposed uniform VAT rate of 15 percent is on the high side when compared to neighbouring low and middle-income countries.

The global median rate for VAT is 15 percent, but in South and East Asia and among the low and middle-income countries in general, the median appears to be 12 percent, it said.

If a uniform VAT rate is to be implemented from July 1, it is recommended that the rate be gradually reduced to 12 percent over a medium term, the CPD said.

The think-tank warned that the cost of production in almost all sectors might go up in the coming months as a result of the new VAT.

On Thursday, Muhih had a meeting with Annette Dixon, World Bank vice president for South Asia Region, at the global lender's headquarters in Washington DC.

Following the meeting, he said the WB pledged to extend \$6 billion credit to Bangladesh in the next three years. The money would be provided in three instalments (\$2 billion each) in every fiscal year till 2020.

Muhih mentioned that the WB was ready to lend support to Bangladesh in dealing with the refugee issue.

"I told them that we may need their support, as we are trying to settle them [Rohingyas] in a new place... We can use that resource there. They [the WB] have opened a new window so that the countries which have refugees can get allocations," he said referring to the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

The minister further said the WB expressed willingness to provide assistance also in the country's banking sector, but he turned down the offer.

"We will have a banking commission in the next budget. It's our internal step. They said they are also willing to help us with the commission... Right now, we don't intend to take any help from anyone," he said.

The Bangladesh delegation headed by Muhih includes Bangladesh Bank Governor Fazle Kabir, Finance Secretary Hedayetullah Al Mamoon, Economic Relations Division Secretary Kazi Shofiqul Azam, and Alternate Executive Director at the WB Muhammad Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan.

Seven held for 'planning subversive activities'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Seven people were arrested by the Detective Branch of police early yesterday and the night before from different places in Dumuria upazila of Khulna in connection with a case filed against them for "planning subversive activities" in 2015.

Akkach Ali, officer-in-charge of DB, Khulna, told The Daily Star that on information, police raided places in the upazila to arrest the seven after a case was filed against them with Phultala Police Station.

Contacted, Subash Chandra Roy, officer-in-charge of Dumuria Police Station, said the arrestees are Abdur Rahim Sheikh of Angordoha, Shamsur Rahman Gazi and Abdul Karim Dheikh of Khornia, Rawshan

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Minnie Mouse

FROM PAGE 16

Pizhi says that her son has heart disease and has been on medication for a long time meaning that he cannot work.

She says before the accident, the daughter-in-law did odd jobs to help keep the family afloat. Now that she is sick, the family does not have another source of income.

In order to allow her daughter-in-law to get better treatment, Pizhi borrowed the costume from a friend's son.

As the heat in Jinan has increased, the pensioner has found it increasingly hard to keep up with the work.

She can squat down and talk to the children however she needs constant breaks as it becomes too much.

The legend will sing no more

FROM PAGE 1

identity -- a singer, music director, lyricist, instrumentalist and an artist of war-time radio station Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra.

Yesterday was a sad day for the people of Bangladesh, especially the listeners of Bangla music, as they learnt that the man will not be heard playing any more.

He will no longer sing *Amay Deko Na, Ferano Jabe Na* [Don't call me back, you can't make me return].

Lucky Akhand, one of the most gifted singer-composers the nation has ever produced, won't indeed return. He breathed his last at Mitford Hospital in the capital around 6:00pm, his close aide Ershadul Haque Tinku, told The Daily Star. He was 61.

Diagnosed with grade-IV lung cancer back in 2015, he was hospitalised in Bangladesh on September 8, 2015 and later taken to Bangkok for better treatment.

He came back in March last year and since then, he had been taking treatment at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University quite regularly.

As his condition improved, the freedom fighter-artist was taken to his Armanitola residence from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University two weeks ago.

He got financial help from the prime minister's fund. Many people came forward and extended their support. There were some fundraising concerts held in various places including Dhaka University.

Lucky was hugely popular in the 1980s, when he was at the peak of his career as a singer, composer, lyricist and music director. His first album got released in 1984.

His songs like *Agey Jodi Jantam, Amay Dekona, Jekhanei Simanto*



Happy and Lucky, both now in the great beyond from where there is no coming back.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Tomar, Kobita Porar Prohor Esehche and many more are considered milestones in modern Bangla music.

Pitted against lung cancer at an advanced stage, he still exuded an air of undying passion for music. Undaunted by the scale of the battle ahead, he told The Daily Star in September 2015, "I'm working on some new music. Let me come back from Thailand. I'll surprise you all."

Born in 1955 in Old Dhaka, the music prodigy became a listed composer of HMV Pakistan at the age of 14 and a musician of HMV India at 16.

In 1971, he joined Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, a radio station that throughout the Liberation War remained dedicated to keeping up the morale of the freedom fighters through patriotic songs and programmes.

He later became the director (music) of national radio network Bangladesh Betar.

Two jewels in one family -- Lucky and his brother Happy Akhand -- are undoubtedly among the few musicians who shaped the post-war music scene of Bangladesh. Happy's *Abar Elo je Sondhya* and Lucky's *Ei Neel*