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# Banking sector's health weakens

ADB says bad loans, poor governance among key reasons

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The financial health of the banking sector is weakening due to rising non-performing loans, a lack of corporate governance and increasing capital shortfall, according to an Asian Development Bank report released yesterday.

The Manila-based multilateral lender has also expressed concerns about low profitability, operational inefficiency and ineffective legal framework in the banking sector.

Soon Chan Hong, senior economist at the ADB resident mission, presented the report styled "Asian Development Outlook 2019" at his Agargaon office yesterday.

"The economic growth of Bangladesh is largely depending on financing provided by banks. If banks face problems, the economy gets affected," he told The Daily Star.

Non-performing loans (NPLs) surged to Tk 93,911 crore last year from Tk 50,156 crore four years ago, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

Weak governance in the banking sector is responsible for the high ratio of expenditure to income, soaring operating expenses and appointments of inefficient people in the management, said Chan Hong.

The ratio of NPLs steadily decreased to 6.1 percent in 2011 from 41.10 percent in 1999, but the bad debts soared in recent years, he said.

A central bank initiative to tighten the loan classification policy in 2012 could not play an effective role in reducing defaulted loans, mentioned the senior economist.

The NPL ratio at the state-run commercial banks (SCBs) in 2012 was about five times that of the private commercial

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Exhausted under the scorching sun, jute mill worker Bilkis Ara wipes away her tears as she lies down on the road and rests her head on a piece of bamboo at Notun Rasta intersection in Khulna yesterday morning. She, along with several hundred others, has been demonstrating since Tuesday to press home a set of demands, including payment of arrears.

PHOTO: DIPANKAR ROY

# Workers carry on strike at Khulna, Ctg jute mills

Block roads over arrears, other demands

STAR REPORT

Workers of different state-owned jute mills yesterday were on their second consecutive day of work abstention in Chattogram and Khulna to press home their nine-point demand, including payment of their arrears.

They also blocked roads and railways at different points as part of their 72-hour strike that began around 6:00am on Tuesday. The blockade, from 8:00am to 12 noon, caused travellers to suffer.

Their other demands include implementing the National Wage Scale-2015, paying gratuities and insurance claims of retired and deceased workers, reinstating the workers who lost jobs during previous workers' demonstrations, regularising the jobs of temporary workers and authorising the mills authorities to

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# Choppers may be used to smuggle yaba

Home ministry holds meeting with private operators

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan has asked private helicopter operators "to be more cautious" after receiving information that choppers were being used for smuggling yaba pills.

He called eight such operators at his secretariat office yesterday and held a meeting with them.

The minister, however, told The Daily Star, "We are not certain that yaba is being smuggled through the helicopters. But we have received such information."

"We called them to express our concern," he added.

According to a home ministry official, a nine-

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# IMPORTED GOODS Samples tampered for dodging tax

Say several customs officials at Chattogram Customs House, blame lax monitoring

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, Chattogram

Lack of due diligence by the customs authorities in Chattogram has resulted in samples of imported goods allegedly being tampered with before testing to dodge taxes.

The alleged tampering is taking place while collecting, sealing, and transporting samples to laboratories and taxation sections, which is leading to loss in revenues. No data on the amount is available.

Chattogram Customs House (CCH) mandates that samples of more than 1,000 chemicals and classified goods, out of a total of 4,881 goods that are imported, must be sent to labs to check for false declarations and prevent entry of prohibited goods into the country.

Samples of the rest must be sent to the CCH officials assigned for assessment. In the case of heavy and fragile goods, CCH officials must be provided with pictures of the goods for inspection.

Accusations, however, run rampant that samples are changed on the way.

Officials have long engaged the representatives of importers and outsiders (working without any appointment at CCH) in the task, due to inadequate manpower.

The representatives and outsiders, who collect and carry the samples to the laboratory and receive the lab reports in absence of the official responsible for taxation, change the samples en route, said CCH officials.

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# IRREGULARITIES Two Biman high officials made OSD

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two high officials of Biman Bangladesh Airlines were made officers on special duty (OSD) yesterday on charges of embezzling money and abusing their authority.

The two officials are Shafiqul Islam, deputy general manager (commercial), and Ashrafal Alam, acting director (marketing and sales).

Shakil Meraj, Biman's general manager (public relations), said the board of Biman yesterday issued a notification in this regard.

Biman Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer AM Masaddique Ahmed will look after the two departments until further notice, Meraj added.

According to sources in civil aviation ministry, Shafiqul earlier played the role of Biman's country manager in its London station for four years. During that time, he reportedly embezzled around Tk 16 crore.

Although Shafiqul told the Biman authorities that he distributed around

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# World's deepest pool to open in Poland



CNN ONLINE

How low can you go? When the world's deepest pool opens in Poland later this year, complete with underwater caves and overhangs, you'll be able to go as low as 45 meters (148 feet).

An ideal training spot for professional scuba divers, the Deepspot pool will hold 8,000 cubic meters of water -- 27 times the volume of an average 25 meter pool.

The pool is currently under construction in the town of Mszczonow, less than 30 miles from Warsaw. About 1,100 tonnes of steel are being used to reinforce its structure, which includes a simulated "blue hole" plunging down to its deepest point.

Designers say it will suit both beginners and more experienced divers, but those who don't want to get wet can also enjoy the facilities, thanks to an

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# SUBARNACHAR Prime accused of gang rape surrenders

Medical tests confirm rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

The prime accused in the gang rape incident in Noakhali's Subarnachar upazila surrendered before a court yesterday.

Abul Kalam alias Bechu Majhi, 40, surrendered before the Cognisance Court of Judge Nobonita Guha and sought bail yesterday morning, three days

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PRAYER TIMING APRIL 4

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha  
AZAN 4-40 12-45 4-45 6-21 7-45  
JAMAAT 5-15 1-15 5-00 6-24 8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

# CU forms body to investigate Amdadul's 'abduction'

CU CORRESPONDENT

Chittagong University has formed a three-member probe body to investigate the "abduction" of a zoology teacher aspirant before his viva voce exam.

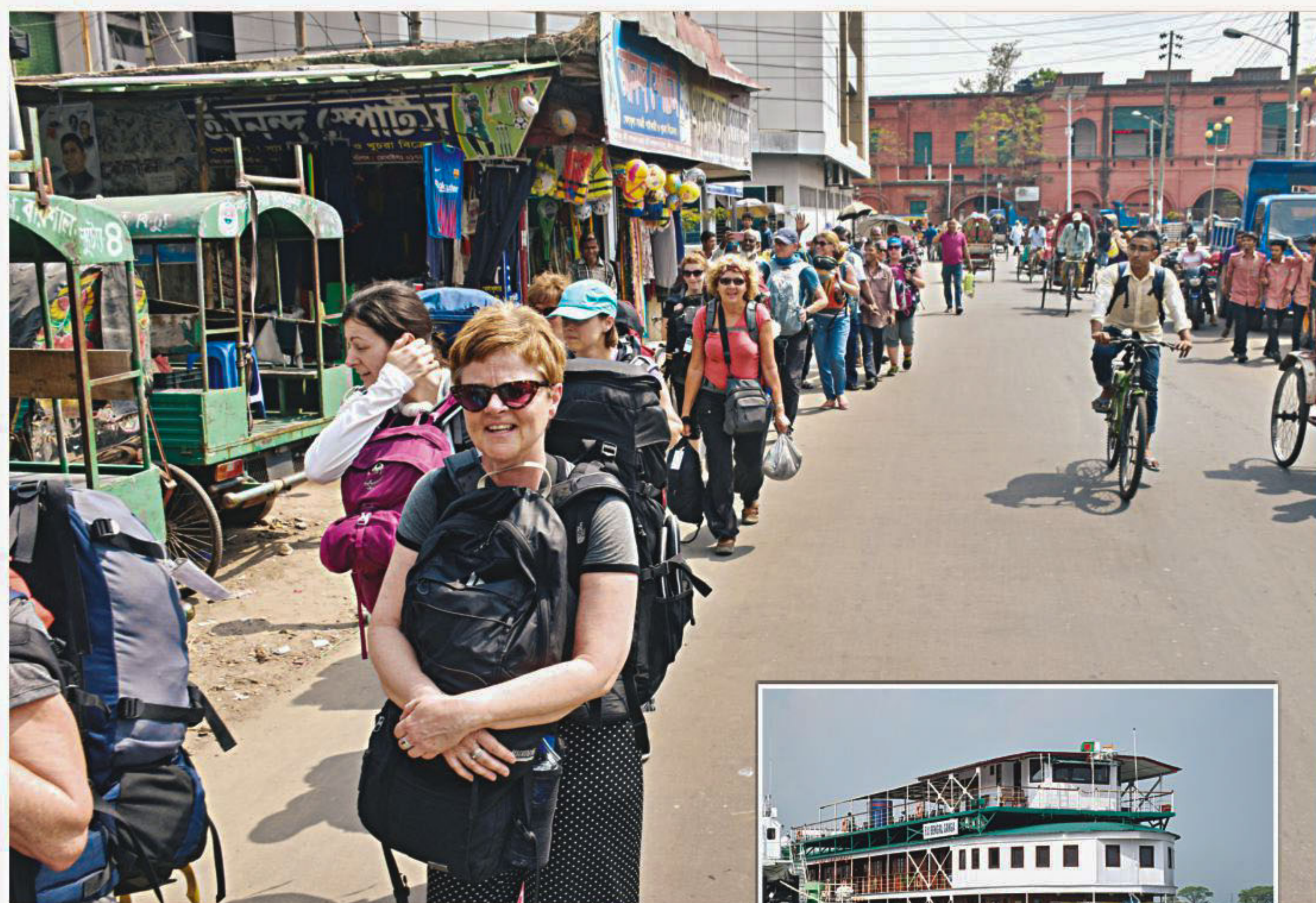
The committee was asked to submit its report within a short time, Assistant Professor Helal Uddin, the head of the probe body, said yesterday.

He said he would sit on Sunday with the other members of the committee and try to submit the report within a week.

Assistant Proctor Pranab Mitra Chowdhury and Assistant Proctor Mizanur Rahman were made member secretary and member respectively of the probe body.

Mid Amdadul Haque, who received a prime minister's gold medal for his academic achievements, was barred by some activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League on March 27 when he came to the university to

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Tourists reach Barishal city on cruise ship RV Bengal Ganga, inset, which arrived from Kolkata yesterday afternoon. The pictures were taken near the launch terminal of the city.

PHOTO: TITU DAS



# LOK SABHA POLLS CAMPAIGN Modi criticises TMC, Congress

Labels them as Pak 'sympathisers', calls Mamata 'speed breaker' in West Bengal's development



PTI, Kolkata

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday accused the Congress and the TMC of being sympathisers of Pakistan who wanted to "break the morale" of India's security forces and make them "helpless" in the fight against terror.

Kicking off his campaign for the Lok Sabha election in West Bengal with rallies in Siliguri and Kolkata, Modi also trained his guns on TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, calling her the "speed breaker" in the path of the state's development who wanted poverty to stay so her "politics of poverty" can flourish.

Attacking the Congress, the prime minister said the

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