

Deposit funds in domestic banks

Nepal asks for overseas nationals' help to build up forex reserves amid economic woes

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Nepal is asking citizens living abroad to deposit funds in domestic banks as part of efforts to ensure the financial system has enough liquidity and to preserve foreign exchange reserves, finance finister Janardan Sharma said yesterday.

Speaking to Reuters, he denied Nepal was facing an economic crisis despite the impact of soaring commodity prices as the tourist industry, a key source of revenues, struggles to recover after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nepal, wedged between China and India, this month imposed curbs on luxury goods imports to rein in capital outflows. Foreign exchange reserves fell over 18 percent to \$9.6 billion as of mid-March from mid-July - enough for around six months imports.

By depositing their savings in Nepal, overseas Nepal's situation could continue to "maintain their link as well as benefit from 6 to 7 percent interest" offered by Nepali banks, Sharma said.

Sharma said the economy did not face a crisis and Nepal's situation could not be compared with Sri Lanka. That South Asian country is facing its worst economic crisis in decades and anti-government protests.

In Nepal, remittances by overseas workers, which constitute nearly a quarter of the economy and are crucial for external payments, fell 3.0 percent to \$5.3 billion between mid-July to mid-March, compared with a 5% increase in the same period a year earlier.

Earnings from tourism, which fell sharply after the start of the pandemic in 2020, are slowly picking up, but remain well below pre-Covid levels.

Sharma said if 100,000 Nepali nationals living abroad deposited \$10,000 each in Nepali banks it could go a long way to help Nepal overcome the current liquidity constraints.

Nepal has also decided to accept \$659 million in aid from the United States and about \$150 million in soft loan from the World Bank, Sharma said.

"The money to be received from the United States over five years is a (non-refundable) grant," he said.

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As if blocking half the road space were not enough, illegally parked trucks and lorries take up almost the entire width of the footpath with their rear overhang in Tejgaon in the capital. Ironically, the sign on the wall reads that the truck drivers' association prohibits parking in the area.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Rab busts human trafficking syndicate

Four gang members arrested; they took Tk 30cr from 500 people; passports, forged visas, air tickets seized

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Rapid Action Battalion yesterday arrested four members of a human trafficking syndicate, including the ring leader, from the capital's Rampura and Hatirjheel area with 27 passports, 100 forged visas and 125 air tickets.

The syndicate's leader is Kamrul Ahmed, who has embezzled at least Tk 30 crore from about 500 people by promising to send them to the Middle East.

Ahmed has no licence for manpower export but he would target unemployed youth offering to send them to the Middle East for Tk 5-7 lakh.

He would provide them with fake visas and air tickets.

When the unassuming victims went to the airport with the fake documents, they were sent back by airport immigration.

But Ahmed never returned their money. To evade them, the 42-year-

old would change his office and home address often.

Rab started the investigation and intelligence surveillance following victims' complaints, said Arif Mohiuddin Ahmed, commander of Rab-3, while addressing a media

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briefing after the arrest of Ahmed, Khaled Masud Helal, 36, Tofayel Ahmed, 38, and Md Jamal, 42.

On April 12, the syndicate brought a woman from Moulvibazar promising to send her to Saudi Arabia to work as domestic help. The woman was locked up in a room in Ahmed's residence in the capital's Rampura

area. Arrestee Tofayel, who hails from the same village as the woman, raped her in the room. The woman then informed the incident to Rab over the phone.

A case was filed with Rampura police station regarding the incident under the woman and child repression act and the woman was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital's One-Stop Crisis Centre.

Ahmed's associate Jamal is an assistant manager of Mahbub International, whose licence was cancelled by the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training for involvement in human trafficking, the Rab-3 commander said.

Arrestee Khaled was in Saudi Arabia from 2001 to 2016. On his return to Bangladesh, he opened a restaurant, which folded after failing to turn in a profit. He then joined hands with Ahmed and started defrauding people.

10yrs gone, yet no trace

FROM PAGE 1
behind these grave human rights violations," said Tahsina Rushdir Luna, wife of former BNP lawmaker M Ilias Ali.

Ilias, then organising secretary of Sylhet division BNP, and his driver Ansar went missing from the capitals' Banani area on the night of April 17, 2012. Since then their families have been facing anxious wait for their return home.

It is very uncertain whether they will have any remedy from either the court or law enforcement agencies, as they (agencies) have informed the High Court through swearing affidavits that they did not pick up or detain the two.

Speaking to The Daily Star on Friday, Tahsina said, "I along with my family members and the people of Bangladesh believe that the government subjected my husband Ilias Ali to enforced disappearance. It is also an open secret that the disappearances

of my husband and those of the other BNP leaders were carried out by the law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh.

"Human rights organisations and international bodies along with countries like the UK, the USA have time and again requested the authorities to bring back the victims. We have tried our best and made our best efforts to reach the top individuals of the government but they have literally turned a blind eye to it this situation by blaming the victims themselves without ensuring justice in any of the disappearance cases."

Tahsina said she was running her family with her pension money.

Ilias' wife filed a writ petition with the HC on April 19, 2012 claiming that law enforcers illegally kept her husband in detention. She sought HC orders on them to produce her husband before it.

In response, the HC

issued a rule upon the law enforcement agencies to explain within 10 days why they should not be directed to produce Ilias before it or prove that he was not detained by them.

The HC is yet to start holding hearing on the rule as neither the petitioner nor the state has taken any initiative in this regard and therefore, the matter remains unresolved.

However, five law enforcement agencies submitted reports to the HC claiming that Ilias was not in their custody since they did not pick up or detain him, said sources at the attorney general's office.

In May, 2012, five law enforcement agencies submitted as many reports to the HC in line with the rule issued by it on April 19.

In those reports, the agencies claimed the BNP leader was not in their custody since they did not pick up or detain him.

The reports, prepared

by the offices of the inspector general of police (IGP), Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Special Branch (SB) of police, and Banani Police Station, claimed that they were making all necessary efforts to establish Ilias' whereabouts.

Following Ilias' case, several others were moved before the HC, seeking necessary directives on the authorities concerned over incidents of enforced disappearance, but no order has yet been issued by the court as a remedy for such incidents.

AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon, the lawyer representing Ilias' wife, earlier told this correspondent that he did not take any initiative for holding hearing on the HC rule considering that no remedy would be available as the law enforcement agencies told the court that they did not detain the BNP leader.

Contacted on Friday,

Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star, "I don't know anything about Ilias Ali. So I will not make any comment on this issue."

Attorney General AM Amin Uddin also refused to make any comment on the writ petition filed by Ilias' wife, saying that he did not know anything about the case.

Eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik said, "If the government keeps denying that incidents of disappearance and extrajudicial killings have occurred, our relations with the West will not improve."

The number of such incidents has dropped in the last few months after a sanction was imposed, he told this newspaper on Friday.

Shahdeen, also a rights activist, said it is uncertain whether the victims' families would have any remedy from the court as the law enforcers say they have not detained or picked up the victims.

thousands of acres of Boro harvest were damaged.

Razzaque said, "Around 12 to 14 lakh tonnes of paddy is produced in the haor but flash floods damage the harvest."

"Farmers should be discouraged to cultivate BRRI-28 due to blast disease and BRRI-29 for its longer timeframe. Rather, the farmers should now consider BRRI-89, BRRI-92 and BINA-17, and the government will hand out the seed to interested farmers."

The minister also assured food support under vulnerable group feeding (VGF) to the farmers who lost their harvest.

"We will also give the seed, fertilizer and agriculture materials in the next harvest season."

Being asked about corruption and irregularities in levee construction work to protect the cropland, the minister said, "There are many irregularities in forming the PICs (Project Implementation Committee)."

No ordinary guard of honour

FROM PAGE 1
to be hoisted, an ensemble ready to sing what would eventually become the national anthem -- were prepared for the swearing in ceremony of the first Bangladesh government on the morning of April 17, 1971.

Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, sub-divisional officer of the erstwhile Meherpur sub-division, during a last-minute inspection of the arrangements for the momentous occasion, found there was no sign of Major Abu Osman Chowdhury,

the then commander of the fourth wing of East Pakistan Rifles located in Chuadanga. Osman was supposed to lead the group presenting the guard of honour to dignitaries of the new independent state.

"What could we do in case Major Osman does not turn up in time?" Tawfiq asked Mahbub Uddin Ahmed, the then sub-divisional police officer of Jhenaidah, who was given the status of captain at that time.

Mahbub said, "If you want, I can make a snap preparation with the people guarding the BOP [border outpost]. I have been trained in the Police Academy and those people too have been taught how to present a guard of honour..."

"Go ahead," replied Tawfiq, who is now an adviser to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and was one of the organisers of the oath-taking ceremony.

In his book -- "Chariot of Life: Liberation War, Politics and Sojourn in Jail" -- he recalled the ceremony. After Tawfiq spoke to him, Mahbub immediately started rehearsing the guard-of-honour presentation.

Abducted child rescued, 3 held

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

Police rescued a child, who was abducted from the port city's Roufabad area on April 13, and arrested three people from Chandpur early yesterday in this regard.

The arrestees are Kulsum alias Sumi, 27; her husband Soheli, 29; and his mother Khorsheida Begum, 55, said police, adding Sumi kidnapped Abdul Khalek's 18-month-old son Arju.

Mohammad Kamruzzaman, OC of Bayezid Bostami Police Station, said Arju was with his elder sister Nazma, 12, while their parents were at work.

"When Nazma was busy, Sumi took the baby and fled. She later took the child to the port city's Amin Colony, where Soheli and his mother waited for her. The trio later left Chattogram to avoid arrest and hid in a rented house in Chandpur's Habiganj."

After a case was filed by Arju's mother Mukta Begum, police scrutinised CCTV footages and later identified the culprits and their location.

Schoolboy stabbed dead by rival teen gang

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A schoolboy was stabbed to death while another was injured by another teenager in Chattogram's Eidgaon early yesterday.

The dead was identified as Md Fahim, 15, son of mechanic Md Jahir and an eighth grader of Gonopurto High School.

Talking to The Daily Star, Mustafizur Rahman, OC of Pahartali Police Station, said, "Two groups of teenagers clashed earlier at a local fair in Dulhan Community Centre in Halishahar on Friday night. The next day, the two groups decided to settle the matter. When they met again, one of the boys from the rival group suddenly stabbed Fahim and his friend Emon around 11:45pm.

"Fahim's father rushed him to Chattogram Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead."

Emon survived with injuries, he said. A case was filed in this regard and police were interrogating all the boys present during the incident to arrest the killer.

Pharma owner hacked to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A drugstore owner was hacked to death in Tulatla area of Patuakhali's Sadar upazila on Friday.

Mizanur Rahman Talukder, local union parishad member, said victim Yusuf Mridha, 45, used to run a drugstore in Ward-9 of Patuakhali municipality. As always, he closed his shop and left for home around 10:00pm.

As he didn't return home, his wife Nurunnahar Begum went to the store to look for him around 11:00pm. On her way back, she discovered him on the road in a pool of blood.

Locals rushed to the spot hearing her screams and took him to Patuakhali Medical College hospital, where he was declared dead.

Moniruzzaman, OC of Patuakhali Police Station, said, "His body has multiple wounds inflicted by sharp weapons. A case is being filed in this regard."

Nurunnahar alleged her husband was killed over land dispute with other locals.

Farmers in despair

FROM PAGE 14
village, said, "I took Tk 1.5 lakh as loan and am now being pressured by the NGO."

"I don't know how to repay as there is no alternative income source in the haor."

Meanwhile, thousands of farmers in the haors were in fear of losing their crops as another flash flood was on the card.

Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre yesterday (Friday) forecasted a flash flood to hit the haor areas

of the districts in the next 24 to 72 hours.

To save the harvest, hundreds of farmers along with concerned officials were now struggling to protect all standing dykes in the haor.

Md Muntasir Hasan, upazila nirbahi officer of Dharmapasha, said, "Some 1,065 hectares were submerged in the upazila alone in the first blow and we are now struggling to protect all risky dykes."

Bijon Sen Roy, general secretary of Haor Bachao

Andolon, said, "The farmers of the haor have only one crop to grow in a year and if the Boro is lost they wouldn't have alternatives. They must be compensated by the government accordingly."

Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque yesterday said the rice price would soar if the Boro harvest is damaged.

He made this remark while visiting Chaptir Haor in Sunamganj's Derai upazila where an early flash flood broke a dyke and