

## 'DEFAULTING LOANS' Bank probe claims Pabna farmers were rightfully sued

STAR REPORT

A three-member probe committee of Bangladesh Samabaya Bank Limited has found allegations of bank loan default against over thirty farmers in Pabna to be true.

The probe body also recommended the bank authorities to continue the legal battle against the farmers until they repay the money with interest.

The probe committee submitted its report with these findings and recommendations to the bank high-ups on December 14, said officials.

Forty farmers from Bhoroimari village in Pabna's Ishwardi upazila jointly took a loan of Tk 16 lakh from the local branch of the bank in 2016 under an organisation named "Bhoroimari Uttopara Vegetable Farmers' Cooperative Association Limited".

Each of the farmers was supposed to get Tk 40,000 and the bank issued separate cheques for each of them.

Talking to The Daily Star, some borrowers said they didn't get the cheques, rather the bank officials and the association authorities jointly prepared a list, took the farmers' signatures, and handed over the money.

Some farmers alleged that they were given Tk 20,000 to 30,000 each but were forced to sign documents stating that they received Tk 40,000 each.

Later in 2021, the bank filed a case against 37 farmers on loan default charges and a court in Pabna issued arrest warrants against them.

Some farmers alleged that they were made accused in the case, despite repaying the loans with interest.



The construction of Shaheed Minar and Cultural Complex in Chattogram city's KC De Road area is yet to be completed. The Public Works Department started the work last year after knocking down the old one. The work was scheduled to be done before this Victory Day. For this, the city dwellers will have to celebrate the day at a Shaheed Minar temporarily built at the Municipal Model School and College. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## Ukrainian forces shell Russian-controlled east

AGENCIES

Ukrainian forces staged their heaviest shelling attack in years in the country's Russian-controlled east yesterday, Moscow-installed officials said, as both sides ruled out a Christmas truce in the nearly 10-month-old war.

Alexei Kulemzin, the Russian-backed mayor of Donetsk city, said 40 rockets were fired from BM-21 Grad multiple rocket launchers at civilians in the city centre in the early hours.

Meanwhile, Russian forces kept up shelling and air strikes along the entire eastern front line, killing one person, while two were killed in the southern city of Kherson, Ukrainian officials said.

Moscow and Kyiv are not currently

holding talks to end Europe's biggest conflict since World War Two, raging mainly in Ukraine's east and south with little movement on either side.

"The Kremlin... is seeking to turn the conflict into a prolonged armed confrontation," a senior Ukrainian officer, Brigadier General Oleksiy Gromov, told a briefing, also dismissing the possibility of a truce over the festive period.

On Wednesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov had said a Christmas ceasefire was "not on the agenda".

Kulemzin cast the Donetsk attack as a war crime and said it was the biggest on the city since 2014, when pro-Moscow separatists seized it from Kyiv's control. Preliminary estimates showed five people

had been hurt, including a child, he said. There was no immediate Ukrainian response to his comments.

Ukraine's military General Staff said Moscow's focus remained on the eastern cities of Bakhmut and Avdiivka, and that Ukrainian forces had repelled Russian attacks.

It also said Russian forces continued to strike Ukrainian troops and civilian infrastructure in the Donetsk region and in the southern areas of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, reports Reuters.

"The Russians fired at different areas along the entire front line all night and in the morning," the Ukrainian governor of Donetsk region, Pavlo Kyrylenko, said on the Telegram messaging app.

## Break web

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reiterated that the country has enough reserves of foreign currencies to meet the five-month import expenditures.

"Many people are making various fabricated comments about our foreign exchange reserves. It is enough if there is a reserve to cover only three-month import expenditure. But now we've a reserve that is sufficient to meet five-month import expenditure," she said.

Sheikh Hasina said panic is being created by spreading rumours that there is no money in the banks.

"Don't pay heed to rumours. There is no shortage of money in banks. Don't invite your own danger by keeping your hard-earned money at home. Everything of us - investment, remittance inflow and import export situation - remains normal," she said.

She admitted that the prices of daily necessities have increased due to the Ukraine-Russia war, economic sanctions and counter-sanctions. Now it largely started becoming normal. Inflation is also declining, she said.

"I want to assure you that we will adjust the price as soon as that of any commodity - including fuel - drops in the world market," she said.

The PM stressed the need for boosting agricultural production and renewed her call not to leave a single inch of arable land uncultivated in order to fight the ongoing crisis.

Citing that it is normal that a crisis may come, she said, "Do not be afraid of the crisis. With the help of people, we have successfully tackled the coronavirus pandemic. We will also deal with the current global recession, Inshallah. I want your cooperation for this."

Highlighting her government's successes, Hasina said, in the last 14 years her government has reduced poverty from 40 percent to 20 percent, and the per capita income increased from US\$ 543 to US\$ 2,824 and the literacy rate increased from 45 percent to 75 percent.

The PM also focused on the development of other sectors including energy and connectivity, infrastructure, social safety net particularly food programmes for poor people, and agriculture.

Hasina warned that the descendants of the vultures of 1971 and the hyenas of 1975 are still active in this country.

"They hurt the country with teeth and claws whenever they get a chance," she said.

Sheikh Hasina, also the president of Bangladesh Awami League, said the democratic trend has been continuing from 2009 to 2022 and the voting rights of people remain ensured.

"Had the BNP-Jamaat alliance been in power (2009-2022), Bangladesh would never have made such progress. ... Now, it is up to you, the people of the country, to choose what you want - a continuation of a dignified life or a life with the hardships to be inflicted by the mischief of BNP-Jamaat alliance?" she asked.

## Break web of conspiracies

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Lieutenant General JFR Jacob, chief of staff of India's Eastern Army, reached the headquarters of Pakistani forces to discuss the issue of surrender.

Lieutenant General AAK Niazi, the military commander of Pakistan's Eastern Command, received Jacob.

"Col [MH] Khara read out the terms of surrender. There was dead silence in the room, as tears streamed down Niazi's cheeks. The others in the room became fidgety," Jacob wrote in his book titled "Surrender at Dacca: Birth of a Nation".

Pakistani forces expected that the document would be on conditions of cease fire and evacuation under arrangements of the UN.

Major General Rao Farman Ali objected to surrendering to the Indian and Bangladeshi forces. Niazi said what Jacob was asking him to sign was unconditional surrender.

Jacob assured that they would be treated as soldiers with due dignity and the Geneva Convention would be honoured strictly, and that there would be respect for all ethnic minorities.

"These guarantees and clauses in the instrument of surrender are unique and are not found in any other surrender documents," Jacob wrote.

Niazi passed the document to the others to study. They wanted some changes. Jacob reiterated that the terms were already very generous and walked out of the room, leaving the Pakistanis to deliberate.

"I asked him [Niazi] if the document was acceptable. He handed it back to me without comment. I took this as acceptance," Jacob said.

Then the two parties discussed the modalities of the surrender. Niazi said he would like it to take place in his office.

Jacob told him that the surrender ceremony would take place at the Ramna Race Course, now Suhrawardy Udayan.

He felt it would be appropriate to have a public surrender in full view of the people of Dhaka who had suffered so terribly.

Niazi argued that this was not appropriate.

Jacob said Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora, commander of the Eastern Command of the Indian Army, also chief of the joint Bangladesh and India forces, would be given a guard of honour by detachments of the Indian and Pakistani armies.

After that Aurora and Niazi would sign the documents. Niazi would then surrender his sword, proposed Jacob.

When Niazi said he did not have

a sword, Jacob said that Nazi would surrender his pistol.

Niazi seemed unhappy but kept silent.

"I again took this as acceptance," Jacob said.

In his book "The Betrayal of East Pakistan", Niazi wrote that among the generals, Farman's demeanor underwent a dramatic change.

The guilt and weakness he had displayed during the hours of crisis seemed to disperse. Farman's participation in the drastic military action on March 25 had aroused animosity and seething anger among Bangladeshis, who wanted to punish him for his crimes against them. He was also blamed for a massacre and fearing reprisals, he wanted to escape.

"I felt indignant and agitated, for the Indian proposal was inadequate, failing to highlight the measures for the safe custody of the [Pakistani] civilians [in Bangladesh]," Niazi wrote.

Niazi put forward two conditions: that the Pakistan troops would retain their personal arms for their own protection and that of the Pakistani civilians until adequate Indian troops were available to arrange their security in Dhaka; and that all Pakistani civilians will not be left at the mercy of the Bangladeshis.

Jacob readily agreed to the first demand, but argued that the civilians would have to stay in Bangladesh until swapped with the Bangladeshis stranded in camps in erstwhile West Pakistan.

After the discussion, Niazi went to Dhaka airport to receive Jagjit Singh Aurora.

Siddik Salik, the then public relations officer of the Pakistan army, in his book "Witness to Surrender" said that in the early afternoon, Niazi gave Jagjit a military salute and shook hands.

"It was a touching sight. The victor and the vanquished stood in full view of the Bangladeshis, who made no secret of their extreme sentiments of love and hatred for Aurora and Niazi respectively."

In the group of people with Aurora, there was Group Captain AK Khandaker, deputy chief of staff, Bangladesh forces, who represented the Mukti Bahini in the surrender ceremony.

Khandaker travelled with Aurora in his jeep to the Ramna Race Course ground.

They passed a sea of jubilant people as they went to the race course, the very ground from where nine months ago, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had announced the war of independence by uttering the words,

"...The struggle this time is a struggle for emancipation. The struggle this time, is a struggle for independence. Joy Bangla!"

The scene was set for the watershed event - the surrender of the Pakistani forces that carried out genocide, killed 30 lakh people, raped more than three lakh women and abducted and killed thousands of intellectuals.

After initial resistance, the Mukti Bahini operations stepped up from September and became better organised and more effective. They began to have a demoralising effect on the Pakistani government in Dhaka and also the Pakistan army.

While other surrender ceremonies had taken place after due preparations, on December 16, the preparations were hurried, with scant resources.

"The ceremony was simple and it ended within a few minutes," Khandaker recalls in his book titled "1971: Bhitore Baire".

There were only two chairs and a table. Niazi sat on one chair and Aurora on the other. No sooner had the clock struck 5:01pm, Niazi first signed the surrender instrument and then Aurora did the same.

Aurora handed a pen to Niazi to sign the document, but no ink flowed from it at first. Aurora took the pen, jerked it in the air, then handed it over to Niazi.

"This time the pen works and Niazi signed the instrument. Later, I learned that Aurora had bought the pen from Calcutta just to sign the surrender document that day," Khandaker recalled.

Niazi also handed over his revolver to Aurora as per the custom of surrender.

With this, around 93,000 Pakistani troops, among the largest assembled anywhere in the world, surrendered as the sun was setting, as if a metaphor for the end of the 24-year Pakistani repression on Bangladeshis.

Niazi himself said he signed the document with trembling hands as sorrow rose from his heart to his eyes, brimming them with tears of despair and frustration.

Before the ceremony, a French reporter came to Niazi and asked, "How are you feeling, Tiger?"

"Depressed," Niazi replied. After the ceremony was over, the city was in the grips of euphoria. People were shouting "Joy Bangla" from the streets to rooftops. Many were hugging each other, celebrating freedom.

"Ah! From today we will be able to sleep in peace, without fear," Khandaker wrote.

## Tiger census begins in Sundarbans

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The government yesterday started the much-awaited tiger census in the Sundarbans under the "Sundarbans Tiger Conservation Project".

Divisional Forest Officer of the Sundarbans West Division and Project Director of Tiger Conservation Project Abu Naser Mohsin Hossain said the inaugural work began in Kalabagi Forest Station area of the Khulna range.

The three-year-long project was scheduled to be implemented from April 2022 to March 2025 at an estimated cost of Tk 35.93 crore. However, the global economic recession delayed the release of funds. This project has two parts. One is tiger census and the other is tiger conservation.

Around 484 cameras will be installed in the Sundarbans to capture pictures of tigers and other animals to determine their numbers.

According to the 2018 survey, there are 114 tigers in the Sundarbans in Bangladesh.

MC COLLEGE GANG-RAPE

## Transfer cases to speedy tribunal: HC

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The High Court yesterday directed the authorities concerned to transfer the two cases filed over the incident of gang-rape at Sylhet's MC College in September, 2020, to the Speedy Trial Tribunal.

The HC also directed the government to issue a gazette notification in 30 days in this regard.

The bench of the court delivered the verdict following a writ petition filed by the husband of the victim seeking necessary directives in this regard.

The order comes after a committee, headed by the deputy commissioner of Sylhet, on February 14 this year decided to transfer the cases to the Speedy Trial Tribunal from the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal of the district.

## 15 injured as AL factions clash in Sarishabari

OUR CORRESPONDENT

At least 15 people were injured yesterday in a clash that broke out between two factions of Awami League over establishing supremacy in the Jamalpur Fertilizer Factory (JFCL) area in Tarakandi of Jamalpur's Sarishabari upazila.

The clash took place between followers of former organising secretary of upazila Awami League Rafiqul Islam and Pogaldigha UP Chairman Ashrafur Alam Manik at the gate of the factory yesterday afternoon.

Apart from the party men, three policemen were also injured in the clash.

## Metro rail opens on Dec 28

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He said at the start, they are likely to operate trains between Uttara and Agargaon without stopping at any station or stopping only at Pallabi Station for the first few days.

Nine stations are in this section.

There may not be dedicated police personnel for the metro trains from the first day, but police and security staffers will take care of safety and security of the service, he said.

Dedicated police personnel will join soon, he added.

It may take around 20 minutes to reach Agargaon from Uttara for now. Two-three minutes would be saved when operation is at full swing, officials said.

The journey from Uttara to Motijheel will take around 40 minutes. Now it takes over two hours by bus.

Meanwhile, DMTCL and Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation has signed an agreement for running shuttle buses to Uttara and Agargaon. As per the agreement, it is supposed to commence a week before launching of the metro rail.

It is expected that the metro rail line will carry 4.83 lakh passengers a day in 2025 when the full 21km section from Uttara to Kamalapur will be operational.

When the metro rail service is fully operational, the country will save around Tk 3,500 crore annually in

travel time and vehicle operation costs, said the rail authorities.

The government has taken up a plan to build around 130km of metro rail network - consisting six lines with both elevated and underground sections - by 2030 to reduce congestion and environmental pollution.

Although MRT Line-6 project was approved in 2012, physical works of the fast-track project started in September 2016 under eight packages.

The official deadline of the elevated rail project is June 2024, but the authorities gave dates for early commissioning of the project.

After the inauguration of a series of test runs in August last year, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader announced that the service would be launched partially in December this year.

For now, the 11.73km section of the metro rail from Uttara to Agargaon would be opened. The remaining 8km from Agargaon to Motijheel will be in operation by December next year. The other one km extended part from Motijheel to Kamalapur would be inaugurated by June 2025.

The original cost of the project was Tk 21,985 crore, but it rose to Tk 33,472 crore after revision. The escalation was mainly due to acquiring new land to change the stations' design and building the extended part.

## Acid test awaits Scaloni

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Scaloni often employs a 4-3-3 formation in the group stage, but has shown his tactical mastery by switching it up in the middle of the match and later in the knockout stages. He chose to adopt a 4-4-2 system against Croatia in the semifinal after playing a 5-3-2 formation against Louis van Gaal's Netherlands in the last eight.

Leandro Paredes came in for Lisandro Martinez as Scaloni changed his formation against Croatia. The Juventus midfielder was chosen over Angel Di Maria, who is a proven match-winner, and the five-man defence that performed so brilliantly against the Netherlands was cast aside.

Paredes offered Argentina a crucial link in the play's development and gave Enzo Fernandez more freedom, enabling the Benfica player to advance as an offensive threat. Overall, Argentina had a very easy 90 minutes as Croatia played some appealing football but were lacked the cutting edge up front.

The tactical adjustments made by the Argentina coach demonstrated his level of confidence in his team as well as his thorough analysis of the opposition. In the same way, the players needed to have confidence

that Scaloni was constantly making the best decisions for the group.

The biggest game of them all on Sunday will be the ultimate test for Scaloni, who has supervised a 36-match undefeated streak, defeated Italy in the Finalissima, and won the Copa America final, ending a 28-year title drought. And in that test he going to have Didier Deschamps as a worthy opponent.

In the earlier matches in Qatar, Belgium, Spain, and Portugal had struggled to match Morocco's tenacity. But Deschamps proved his team could fight hard and depend on individuals going above and beyond. While it may not always be attractive, the ability of Deschamps's team to win games at World Cups in several ways is helpful. Recall that they trailed Australia in their first game before crushing them.

Scaloni must now decide on a suitable formation to counter Deschamps's forces going into the final. Regardless of the outcome, he has demonstrated that he is an excellent manager and a great strategist. And if they want to win the World Cup, Argentina will look to Messi's craft as well as yet another masterplan engineered Scaloni.