

DB arrests ex-employee of Money Plant

Tk 87.50 lakhs more recovered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives arrested Sohel Rana, a former driver of Money Plant Link Private Ltd and allegedly one of the masterminds behind the recent robbery of Tk 11.25 crore from a microbus of the company.

Muhammad Harun Or Rashid, chief of the Detective Branch of police, said they arrested him from Savar's Hemayetpur on Friday night and also recovered Tk 87.50 lakhs from him.

So far, around Tk 7.89 crore was recovered from 12 arrestees.

Besides, the DB seized a microbus worth Tk 20 lakh from Khilkhet.

Sohel had the vehicle's spare key with which the robbers opened the door and snatched away the money, the DB chief said.

Sohel and another arrestee Akash mainly planned the robbery, while

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6

AL INFIGHTING

300 men sued in Patuakhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Police sued some 300 unidentified men over the attack on law enforcers during Friday's clash between two factions of the ruling Awami League in Patuakhali.

The case was filed with Bauphal Police Station in connection to the incident that left nine of its police personnel, including Officer-in-Charge Al Mamun, injured while they were trying to quell the situation.

Speaking to The Daily Star, OC Mamun said they would conduct a thorough investigation and take legal action accordingly.

At least 50 people were injured in the clash that took place around 11:30am during the celebration of the 103rd birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and National

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1



Second from left, Ramiza Begum, widow of the 65-year-old man shot dead by Rab in Narayanganj, and the family members are in shock.

PHOTO: SAURAV HOSSAIN SIAM

Finland on course to join Nato

Turkey, Hungary drop objection; Erdogan says Ukraine grain deal extended

AFP, Ankara

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan ended months of diplomatically charged delays on Friday and asked parliament to quickly back Finland's bid to join Nato.

A simultaneous decision by fellow holdout Hungary to schedule a Finnish ratification vote for March 27 means the US-led defence alliance will likely grow to 31 nations within a few months.

In another development, Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday announced the extension of a deal that allowed exports of Ukrainian grain to resume following Russia's invasion.

"Following talks with the two parties, we have assured the extension of the deal that was due to expire on March 19," Erdogan said in comments broadcast on Turkish television, just hours before the agreement was due to expire at midnight.

Nato's expansion into the country with

a 1,340-kilometre (830-mile) border with Russia will roughly double the length of the bloc's current frontier with its Cold War-era foe.

Finland had initially aimed to join together with fellow Nato aspirant Sweden -- a Nordic power facing a litany of disputes with Turkey that ultimately sunk its chance to join the bloc before an alliance summit in July.

Helsinki and Stockholm ended decades of military non-alignment and decided to join the world's most powerful defence alliance in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Their applications were accepted at a June Nato summit that signalled the Western world's desire to stand up to Russia in the face of Europe's gravest conflict since World War II.

But the bids still needed to be ratified by all 30 of the alliance members' parliaments -- a process that got hung up

once it reached Turkey and Hungary.

Friday's breakthrough followed months of tense negotiations between Ankara and the Nordic neighbours that threatened to collapse several times.

Erdogan told Finnish President Sauli Niinisto that Helsinki had shown a strong commitment to addressing Ankara's security concerns.

"We decided to start the protocol of Finland's accession to Nato in our parliament," Erdogan told reporters after the talks.

Erdogan added that he "hoped" that parliament will approve the application before Turkey's crucial general election in May.

The Turkish parliament is expected to end its current session in mid-April.

Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed Turkey's decision while stressing the importance of Sweden also joining "as soon as possible".

A new era in energy cooperation

FROM PAGE 1

India will be reduced significantly with the use of this pipeline."

She said the supply of diesel to Bangladesh's 16 northern districts will remain stable.

Terming India a genuine friend of Bangladesh, Hasina said, "I want that the friendship of our two countries will remain intact."

She said that the government has developed Mongla and Chattogram ports, international airports in Sylhet and Chattogram and upgraded the Syedpur Airport as a regional airport.

"We are opening these ports for India completely. There will be no problem for India to use these ports. It will ease the trade and business activities, and the people of both the countries will be benefited."

The PM invited Indian investors to invest in Bangladesh's economic zones. She hoped that like this pipeline, Bangladesh and India will jointly celebrate many more successes in future.

Hasina recalled the contributions of the government and the people of India

during Bangladesh's Liberation War, and expressed her personal gratitude for the cooperation they extended to her after the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975.

PROGRESS MADE IN CONNECTIVITY

Modi said the supply of diesel through the pipeline would cut the cost and also reduce the carbon footprint of the supply.

Highlighting the increasing connectivity between the two neighbours, he said that the two countries together have made a lot of progress in the sector.

He observed that the rail connectivity between the two nations helped sending Covid vaccines and oxygen to Bangladesh through rail network. "I heartily congratulate Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Ji for her far-sighted vision."

The Indian premier said the inauguration of the pipeline was taking place a day after the birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"Bangabandhu's 'Sonar Bangla' vision included the harmonious development and prosperity of the entire region. This joint project is a perfect example of that vision."

Modi thanked Hasina for her constant guidance on the project and expressed his willingness to continue working with her for the benefit of the two peoples.

The cross-boundary pipeline will carry diesel from Assam-based Numaligarh Refinery Ltd's (NRL) marketing terminal at Siliguri in West Bengal to the Parbatipur depot of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC).

The project is jointly implemented by the NRL of India and Meghna Petroleum Ltd of Bangladesh.

The Bangladeshi part of the pipeline is 126.57 km long while the remaining 5 km was installed in India.

Under the project, Bangladesh will annually import 2.5 lakh to 4 lakh tonnes of diesel from India.

Bangladesh needs to import 6.6 million tonnes to 7.7 million tonnes of petroleum to meet its annual

demand.

The country currently imports 22,000 tonnes of diesel from India per month on railway wagons.

'NOT MUCH BENEFIT RIGHT NOW'

Speaking to The Daily Star, BPC officials said Bangladesh will not get cheaper diesel from India through the pipeline right now.

They said there is an agreement between the two countries under which Bangladesh imports fuel from India at a rate fixed considering the international benchmark oil price.

"Bangladesh will get diesel from India through the pipeline at this international rate. However, the transportation cost will reduce," said a BPC official on condition of anonymity.

India purchases Russian fuel at a discounted price. The Numaligarh Refinery is one of the Indian refineries which get Russian crude oil at a cheaper rate.

"If Bangladesh increases oil import after negotiating the prices with India, it may be able to get fuel at cheaper prices," the official added.

IMF conditions

FROM PAGE 1

the social safety net programme and distributing food among the poor at a low price or for free; and putting emphasis on subsidy on electricity, gas and agriculture considering fuel and fertiliser price hike in the global market and slump in the exchange rate.

The three other priorities continuation of the subsidy on fertiliser and mechanising agriculture; human resource development and employment generation, and rural development.

The government is also keeping in mind the IMF conditions related to the budget, said finance ministry officials involved with the proceedings.

Besides, the election is not far away.

"The government is preparing the budget keeping all these things in mind," said one of the officials.

With that frame of mind, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal would be starting his series of pre-budget meetings today.

Today, he would be meeting with the economists.

In the three-day pre-budget discussions, Kamal will also meet with the business community and editors of the print and electronic media, where he will seek their opinion on how the next budget should be considering the myriad of challenges.

Ramping up revenue collection is one of the major conditions for the \$4.7 billion loan programme from the IMF.

The Washington-based lender has stipulated a tax-revenue collection of Tk 143,640 crore for the July-December period.

Keeping the IMF target in mind, the government has planned a revenue collection target of Tk 420,000 crore, according to the finance ministry and IMF documents.

The IMF has also prescribed a budget deficit ceiling of Tk 114,110 crore for the first six months of the fiscal year. The government primarily earmarked a budget deficit of Tk 264,193 crore for the next fiscal year keeping the IMF deficit threshold in mind.

The government is also preparing the next budget keeping the other IMF conditions like reducing subsidies in different sectors including power and energy, reform measures to increase revenue collection and more focus on social spending including health and education.

The budget for the next fiscal year would most likely be Tk 750,165 crore, up from the current year's Tk 678,063 crore. The annual development programme getting a Tk 265,000 crore kitty.

The total revenue collection target would be Tk 486,000 crore, up from this fiscal year's Tk 433,000 crore.

The government is planning to achieve a 7.5 per cent GDP growth and keep inflation within 6 per cent.

"IMF did not give us any condition -- they gave us some suggestions. We are taking some steps which may match with the IMF suggestions," said Shamsul Alam, the state minister for planning.

The government's main objective is to keep the budget deficit within the limit and also rein in inflation, he said.

"We will provide the necessary budget support to increase agricultural production and keep the supply side uninterrupted," Alam added.

The IMF pressure is there but the reform initiatives that the Washington-based multilateral lender suggested should be considered in the budget, said Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

"The IMF suggestion to increase the revenue collection proportionately is something that we should do for our own interest as it only helps increase our fiscal space."

The government should not go for any populist measure keeping the next election in mind, he said.

"It might create a negative impact on the economy. In the current context, the best election budget should be focused on keeping the macro-economic stability and avoiding wasteful expenditure," he added.

Alam thought said that the budget would not be election-focused.

"We will go to the voters showcasing what we have done in the last four and a half years," he said.

Tigers feast

FROM PAGE 1

Hossain registered career-best ODI bowling figures, scalping four wickets for 42 runs while left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed took three. Taskin Ahmed also got in on the act with two wickets. Shakib got the other.

Bangladesh were in a spot of bother after being asked to bat early in their innings, losing skipper Tamim Iqbal for three. Liton Das and in-form Nazmul Hossain Shanto also were also dismissed in the twenties as the hosts were reduced to 81 for three inside 17 overs.

It was then that Hridoy and Shakib rebuilt the innings, adding 135 runs off 125 balls for the fourth wicket to lay the platform for a big total.

Shakib, eyeing his tenth ODI century, fell short by just seven runs after being caught behind off the bowling of Graham Hume. He made 93 off 89 balls, striking six fours.

Hridoy also impressed, showing maturity and intent, and the right-hander scored the highest individual score by a Bangladeshi on debut before falling for 92 off 85 balls, featuring eight fours and two sixes.

Ireland's right-arm seamer Hume registered his best bowling figures, ended up with four wickets for 60 runs.