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WORLD BANK LOAN \$4.9b next fiscal if projects are ready on time

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Bangladesh will get \$4.9 billion in loan from the World Bank for a dozen projects in the next fiscal year, given that those are ready on time for implementation as stipulated by the global lender.

The loan is expected to be used for projects in the education, health, youth, rural and urban infrastructure and water resources development sectors. The two health sector projects alone will get \$1.2 billion.

"This is an indicative plan of the World Bank," said an official of the Economic Relations Division, the finance ministry wing that manages foreign loans.

He said the loan approval in the 2023-24 fiscal year will depend on the timely preparation of the project documents and the subsequent nod from the Executive Committee on National Economic Council.

The funding will be provided under the WB's five-year (fiscal 2022-23 to 2026-27) Country Partnership Framework (CPF).

The WB board approved the CPF on April 27 ahead of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to its headquarters in Washington DC marking the lender's 50 years of partnership with Bangladesh.

The CPF report pointed out that project preparation and approval follows "a very complex and slow process" and it's a major challenge in implementing the framework.

"The country's complex political economy, including its intricate decision-making process, has over time resulted in delays in the approval and implementation of the World Bank Group-financed projects," the WB observed.

Project readiness means a project is ready for development and implementation as planned.

Of the 12 projects, the health, population and nutrition sector development programme (HPNSDP) will get \$900 million. The loan approval date for the project is March 27, 2024, according to the CPF.

This is the fifth HPNSDP being prepared by the health ministry.

Health ministry officials said the programme will account for more than Tk 1 lakh crore. Apart from the WB, the ministry was looking for other donors for funding, they added.

The fourth HPNSDP at a cost of more than Tk 40,000 crore is underway. The revised deadline for project implementation is June 2024, the officials told The Daily Star.

Urban health, nutrition and population project, involving \$300 million, is the other health sector project.

The WB will finance \$300 million for restoring ecology of the Dhaka rivers, a landmark scheme aimed at breathing life back into the five rivers surrounding the capital.

Bangladesh has already received \$2 billion under the World Bank's Country Partnership Framework in the current fiscal year.



A ruling Awami League man beats up a BNP activist near Pourashabha More in Patuakhali town during a clash between activists of the two parties on the second day of countrywide demonstrations of the latter. Such clashes took place in two other districts yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

BNP'S PROTEST PROGRAMME Police, AL men foil rallies in 3 districts

STAR REPORT

BNP and Awami League activists clashed in three districts on the second day of the opposition party's countrywide rallies yesterday.

Meanwhile in Khulna, police sued 1,200-1,300 unnamed people and 48 BNP activists over Friday's clash between police and activists near the Khulna Press Club.

BNP leaders in Jashore, where it intends to hold a rally on May 27, said at least 141 activists were arrested in recent days.

The party yesterday held a rally in the capital's Motijheel area, from where at least seven of its leaders were arrested.

As part of its countrywide anti-government demonstrations, the BNP held rallies in 21 organisational districts yesterday. It held rallies in 28 other districts on Friday, and the rest of its organisational district will be covered next Friday and Saturday.

The party has been demonstrating for the next general election under a caretaker government.

In Patuakhali town, at least 30 people were injured yesterday as police used firearms and teargas shells during a clash between the AL and BNP activists.

The clash broke out before BNP activists

could begin a pre-scheduled rally in front of the local BNP office on College Road around 10:00am, reports our correspondent from Patuakhali.

"We were trying to organise a peaceful event, but they [AL activists] began assaulting us," said Snenangshu Sarkar Kutti, member secretary of Patuakhali BNP.

Police sued 1,200-1,300 unnamed people and 48 BNP activists over Friday's clash between police and activists near the Khulna Press Club.

But Kazi Alamgir Hossain, Patuakhali AL president, said, "Chhatra Dal attacked a procession led by Chhatra League President Saiful Islam at Sabuj Bagh intersection."

An additional number of policemen were deployed in front of the BNP office to prevent further violence, said Saiful Islam, superintendent of police in the district.

Additional Superintendent of Police Mohammad Mainul Hassan said several cops were injured when the activists attacked law enforcers during the AL-BNP clash.

Cases will soon be filed against those who

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SYLHET CITY POLLS Mayor Ariful won't run

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Terming the upcoming Sylhet City polls a farce, Mayor Ariful Haque Chowdhury, also a BNP leader, has decided not to run.

After more than a month of delay, he finally made the announcement at a meeting held at the Registrar Ground in Sylhet's Bandarbazar yesterday afternoon.

"This election will be a farce. There is no question of participating ... As per instructions from my leaders Khaleda Zia [BNP chairperson] and Tarique Rahman [BNP acting chairperson], my mother and my religious mentor, I'm not running."

Criticising the electoral environment, he said, "Despite developed countries' opinions against



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AL takes Olama League under its wing again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League seems to have taken Olama League back to its fold.

The ruling party had been denying any affiliations with Awami Olama League for a long time, as the latter hogged the headlines by issuing statements that ran against secularism, one of the key ideals of the AL.

But things have changed with Olama League holding its first council and the next national polls only a handful of months away.

"It has been expected for a long time that it [Olama League] would be organised through a council. It took time, but their [Olama League leaders'] expectations have been met. This conference is being held at the instruction of Sheikh Hasina," said AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, who was the chief guest of the first council yesterday.

When asked whether the Olama League would be recognised as an associate body

"It has been expected for a long time that it [Olama League] would be organised through a council. It took time, but their [Olama League leaders'] expectations have been met. This conference is being held at the instruction of Sheikh Hasina."

Obaidul Quader

or a like-minded organisation, he told reporters, "Our leader [Sheikh Hasina] would decide that."

AL's Publicity and Publication Secretary Abdus Sobhan Golap also attended the council as a special guest.

Since its inception in 1996, Olama League has been seeking the status of an associate body of the AL or at least that of a like-minded outfit such as Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad.

The AL had been keeping distance due to Olama League's stance and statements on various issues.

For instance, on April 9, 2016, a faction of the Olama League led by Abdul Hasan Sheikh Shariatpuri demanded a ban on Pahela Baishakh festivities. It also demanded the withdrawal of the minimum age a girl must not get married at.

In January 2019, Olama League wanted Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) banned, claiming that the cricketing event was "producing gamblers".

The AL had then issued a press release, signed by then office secretary Golap, claiming that the party has no affiliations with the Olama League and urged the government to take legal action against the organisation.

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Two three-wheelers, vehicles that are banned on highways, racing on the Khulna-Satkira highway. While the cycle van on the left is running over the solid white line in the centre of the road to overtake, the other is carrying heavy loads. All these are violations of traffic rules, to which the authorities concerned remain oblivious. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Govt plans more LNG import

Energy expert opposes idea at talks with stakeholders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government plans to import more liquefied natural gas to meet the growing demand for gas, said Nasrul Hamid, state minister for power.

The move was opposed by energy expert Badrul Imam during a stakeholders' dialogue on "Energy Strategy: Towards a Predictable Future" organised by the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI).

The minister said, "We are increasing the local gas production. But we will need more gas for industrialisation and to sustain economic growth. We have a plan to build two new LNG regasification units."

He said the government would not subsidise gas and electricity and asked the business leaders to be ready to pay the prices set in line with the international market.

He said the government is trying to provide industries with uninterrupted power supply so that they do not use captive power plants which waste gas. "Captive power users consume 17 percent of the total gas but their plants have efficiency levels between 15 percent and 20 percent."

At present, Bangladesh has two floating regasification terminals in Moheshkhali

with a capacity of 1,000mmcf (million cubic feet a day). The two terminals are injecting around 750mmcf gas into the national grid.

Nasrul Hamid said talks were on to build two more terminals each with a capacity of 500mmcf in Moheshkhali and Payra.



He said gas demand would reach 5000mmcf by 2030.

The country's current demand is around 4000mmcf. About 2,100mmcf is produced locally while 750mmcf is imported.

"We are trying to sign two long-term LNG purchase agreements with Qatar and Oman," Nasrul said.

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