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## Falling reserve, bad loans worrying

Rehman Sobhan suggests further import curbs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The falling foreign exchange reserves and the ever-rising defaulted loans are very concerning for the economy, and the government should respond fast to avoid a looming crisis, eminent economist Prof Rehman Sobhan said yesterday.

The reserve is falling continuously, and if it continues to fall below \$10 billion, the situation will be worrying and the IMF may not be able to help Bangladesh in that case, he said.

“Although I did not believe that the foreign exchange reserve may fall below \$30 billion, it has already come down to \$18 billion, which was \$45 billion



“Defaulted loan is now an in-built practice in the business model.”

Forum at its office in the capital. Given the falling reserve, the government should introduce import

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previously,” said Prof Rehman, also chairman of Centre for Policy Dialogue.

Bangladesh's economy is still better than that of Sri Lanka, considering the former's higher remittance and export earnings capacity, but the government should not think that Bangladesh is unlikely to experience such a dire situation, he said.

He was speaking at an event titled “Conversion with Professor Rehman Sobhan” organised by Economic Reporters

## Khaleda Zia should be sent abroad

Opines medical board, says her treatment options here exhausted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The medical board formed for BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's treatment yesterday said there was nothing more they could do for her in Bangladesh and advised sending her abroad for better treatment.

“We have done all that we can with whatever we have,” Shahabuddin Talukder, chief of the medical board, told journalists at a press briefing at the Evercare



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A Palestinian mother tries to flee an area with her child following an Israeli airstrike on the Soussi mosque in Gaza City yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## Compromise with BNP not possible

AL tells US team; BNP says free, fair polls can't be held under this govt

STAR REPORT

The Awami League has told the visiting US pre-election assessment mission that no compromise can be worked out with the BNP violating the constitution. The BNP, however, said that no credible election is possible under the AL government.

The ruling party has also told the US delegation that the BNP has “blocked the space” for making any compromise or adjustment.

“They wanted to know whether it is possible to reach a solution through ‘compromise and adjustment’ with the BNP. We replied that there must be a space for that. The BNP

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## Hold dialogues to avoid confrontation

Eminent citizens urge major political parties to reach consensus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A political consensus through dialogues is now urgently needed to avoid possible violence in the days ahead, said eminent citizens at a dialogue yesterday.

Citing the fact that major political parties are at odds over the upcoming national polls, several of them opined that all should join the dialogue with an open mind and that the government should take steps to hold the talks.

The Hunger Project in collaboration with Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujon) organised the dialogue at the Cirdap Auditorium in the capital.

Political scientist Prof Rounaq Jahan said nobody disagrees that a dialogue between the two major parties should be held.

Political parties must reach a consensus so that the lives and livelihoods of the leaders and activists of the party defeated in polls are not affected afterwards, she said.

“We need to change the political culture. Considering that it might be neutral, the caretaker government system was introduced after a lot of hard work. But we saw how it was made partisan,” said Prof Rounaq, also a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

She said the parties cannot agree to talks but they agree on lawmakers getting duty-free cars, special allocations for the development work in their constituencies, and other benefits.

Nobody in power wants to quit, she added.

Shujon Central Coordinator Dilip Kumar Sarkar said people expect a free, fair, participatory, and peaceful national election but the existing political situation is not conducive to participatory polls.

The Awami League and its allies want polls under a partisan government in line with the constitution while the BNP and other parties want polls under a neutral

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## Israel lays total siege to Gaza

Calls up 300,000 army reservists as it readies for possible ground assault

AGENCIES

Israel imposed a total siege on the Gaza Strip yesterday and cut off utility supplies as it kept bombing targets in the crowded Palestinian enclave in response to the Hamas surprise assault.

Reeling from the Islamist group's unprecedented ground, air and sea attacks, Israel has counted over 800 dead and launched a withering barrage of strikes on Gaza that have killed 560 people there.

The skies over Gaza were blackened by plumes of smoke from deafening explosions as Hamas kept launching rockets as far as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, where missile defence systems fired and air raid sirens blared.

Hamas — whose militants surged into Israeli towns on

Saturday, spraying gunfire at civilians and dragging off about 100 hostages — yesterday claimed that Israeli air strikes had killed four of the captives.

Death toll rises to 800 in Israel; 560 killed in Gaza

It also threatened to kill hostages if the air strikes on Gaza continues.

The Israeli military said it had called up an unprecedented 300,000 reservists for its “Swords of Iron” campaign and was imposing a total blockade of the Gaza Strip, signs it could be

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## Nowhere to go

Gazans wait for ‘worst’ Israeli assault

REUTERS, Gaza

As Israel's military sent phone messages telling Palestinians to leave some areas of Gaza after Saturday's deadly Hamas raid, Mohammad Brais did not know where to seek safety from an assault that residents expect to be the worst they have ever faced.

“Where should we go? Where should we go?” the 55-year-old father asked.

He had fled his home near a possible front line to shelter at his shop — only for that to get hit in one of the hundreds of air and artillery strikes already pounding Gaza.

Palestinians are preparing for an offensive of unprecedented scale on

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## Kiwis thump the Netherlands

REUTERS

New Zealand roared to a second successive victory at the World Cup as they beat the Netherlands by 99 runs in Hyderabad on Monday, with Mitchell Santner taking five wickets.

Will Young, Rachin Ravindra and Tom Latham all cracked half-centuries for New Zealand.

The Netherlands lost a couple of early wickets chasing 323 and had some hope when Colin Ackermann (69) was at the wicket, but their target proved too steep and they folded for 223 in 46.3 overs with spinner Santner taking 5-59.

New Zealand built a good platform with Devon Conway (32), Young (70), Ravindra (51), Daryl Mitchell (48) and Latham (53) all firing and although the Dutch responded they leaked runs late on and let the 2019 runners-up post 322-7 in 50 overs.

The Dutch spin-pace duo of Aryan Dutt and Ryan Klein earlier started with three straight maiden overs after they won the toss and elected to bowl although Young and Conway quickly broke the shackles to get New Zealand back on track.

The aggressive Conway looked to accelerate and holed out to Bas de Leede in the deep off Roelof van der Merwe, but Young was patient and reached his sixth half-century before carting Colin Ackermann for a massive six in the 22nd over.

He continued to milk the runs off the Netherlands

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Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan, seen here talking with chief selector Minhajul Abedin, was in jovial mood at the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association Stadium in Dharamshala yesterday where the Tigers will play their second match of the World Cup against England today.

PHOTO: EKUSH TAPADER

## Tigers calm before intense clash

MAZHAR UDDIN from Dharamshala

Bangladesh are set for a much steeper hurdle in their second World Cup match against England in Dharamshala today following a convincing six-wicket victory over Afghanistan at the same venue.

Ahead of facing one of the tournament heavyweights, the travelling Bangladeshi journalists covering the ICC World Cup in India were looking to get insights on team strategy — especially from captain Shakib Al Hasan who was yet to officially face the Bangladesh media so far in the prestigious tournament.

However, it was Bangladesh spin-bowling coach Rangana Herath who arrived at the pre-match press conference.

On the contrary, rubbing salt in the wounds of their Bangladeshi counterparts, the travelling English media were privileged enough to have interacted with some England players, including captain Jos Buttler during the official presser.

As Herath spoke to reporters, Shakib, on the other hand, was busy inspecting the Dharamshala pitch with

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