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Govt suspends funding for new projects

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and ASIFUR RAHMAN

Although the planning ministry has passed several new projects ahead of the polls, it will not be able to make funds available for the projects due to the government's fresh austerity stance to rein in the spiralling inflation.

In a letter on October 31, the finance division directed the planning commission to suspend the Tk 11,669 crore block allocation from the annual development programme.

There was a Tk 10,244 crore block allocation in this year's ADP budget for new local-funded projects and another Tk 1,425 crore block allocation for development assistance for special purposes.

Those allocations will be suspended until further notice, said a finance ministry official informed with the proceedings.

"If the economic crisis subsides after the national election in January, the ministry will decide the next course of action," he said.

Without any authorisation from the finance ministry, the promised allocations from the planning ministry will remain suspended, said another finance ministry official.

Ahead of the polls, the ministries and divisions sent a huge number of projects for approval from the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec). A good number of projects were approved too.

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Relatives of the seven people, who died when a bus rammed a CNG-run auto-rickshaw, break down on the Hathazari Model Police Station premises, where the bodies were kept. The accident occurred in Chattogram's Hathazari upazila yesterday morning.

PHOTO: SIFAYET ULLAH

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Seven killed as tragedy tears thru family

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTG

"Right before the accident, my daughter had called to tell me that she was coming home to me. Now, she will never come to me ..."

Sabita Rani Das could barely hold herself together after getting the news.

Her daughter Rita Rani Das, 40, and grandchildren were among the seven of a family, who were killed after a bus rammed a CNG-run auto-rickshaw in Chattogram's Hathazari upazila yesterday.

The others killed were Rita's two daughters Srabanti Das, 17 and Barsha Das, 9; her twin boys Dwip Das and Diganta Das, 4; her sister-in-law Chinu Bala Das, 45, and nephew Biplob Das, 27, according to police.

The victims were residents of Chandanaish upazila's Dhopapara area.

Rita's family members were left in a state of shock and devastation.

"How will I survive without my daughter and grandchildren?" Sabita asked as she stared into thin air, sitting next to the seven bodies kept at Hathazari Model Police Station yesterday afternoon.

55-yr-old dies in police raid

Family alleges cops assaulted him; 3 policemen withdrawn

OUR CORRESPONDENT, narayanganj

A 55-year-old man died on Monday after he was allegedly assaulted by policemen raiding his house at Burumdi village in Sonargaon upazila of Narayanganj.

Officials last night said an assistant sub-inspector and two constables were withdrawn over the allegations, and the matter will be investigated.

Nurul Islam fell to the ground when police hit him and put him in handcuffs, said his daughter Mithila Akter, adding that doctors pronounced him dead when he was taken to the Upazila Health Complex in Araihaazar.

Mithila said Elias Ahmed, an assistant sub-inspector of Taltola Police Outpost, and another policeman, both in plainclothes, arrived in their house in the afternoon and said they would arrest her father and implicate him in a case filed over recent clashes between police and political activists unless the family gave them Tk 100,000.

When the family members said they could give Tk 50,000, the policemen put Nurul, who was a farmer, in handcuffs and tried to drag him out of the house, she added.

"When my father resisted, a scuffle took place between them. Then, the men hit my father in the arms with a stick. At one point, my father fell to the ground. After that the policemen left."

She added that when the law enforcers

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Tanks poised to attack Gaza City

Says Israeli forces; services close to 'breaking point': UN

REUTERS, Gaza/ Jerusalem

Israel gave civilians still trapped inside freshly encircled Gaza City a four-hour window to leave yesterday and escaping residents said they passed tanks in position to storm it.

Israel says its forces have surrounded Gaza City, home to a third of the enclave's 2.3 million people, and are poised to attack it soon in their campaign to annihilate the Hamas Islamists who stormed Israeli towns exactly a month ago.

In some of the first direct comments on Israel's plans for the future of Gaza after the war, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would take over responsibility for the territory's security once it defeats the militants.

Gaza services are close to "breaking point" without fuel supplies, the UN humanitarian office said. Gaza's interior ministry said all bakeries in the north were out of service due to Israeli attacks and lack of fuel.

War began on October 7 when Hamas fighters burst across the fence enclosing Gaza and killed 1,400 Israelis, mostly civilians, and abducted more than 200, according to Israeli tallies. Since then, Israel has relentlessly bombarded Hamas-run Gaza, killing more than 10,000 people, around 40 percent of them children, according to tallies by health officials there.

"It has been one full month of carnage, of incessant suffering, bloodshed, destruction, outrage and despair," UN Human Rights Commissioner Volcker Turk said in a statement at the start of a

PHOTO ON PAGE 2

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Gaza's interior ministry said all bakeries in the north were out of service due to Israeli attacks and lack of fuel.

2 BY POLLS

EC withholds gazette amid allegations of irregularities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission yesterday withheld the gazette notification of the Brahmanbaria-2 and Lakshmipur-3 by-polls' results as allegations of irregularities have surfaced.

EC Secretary Jahangir Alam made the disclosure at a press conference in the EC office.

On Monday, candidates nominated by the ruling Awami League won both by-polls amid alleged vote rigging.

According to unofficial results, Shahjahan Alam Sajju won in Brahmanbaria-2, while Golam Faruque Pinku won in Lakshmipur-3.

Returning officers, that same day, asked the respective district election officers to investigate the alleged vote rigging in one polling centre of Brahmanbaria-2 and one of Lakshmipur-3.

A video of a former Chhatra League leader

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BREAKING POLITICAL DEADLOCK

Diplomats keen on finding peaceful solution

PORIMOL PALMA

Worried over recent political violence and impasse ahead of the next election, foreign diplomats in Dhaka are approaching the government, ruling Awami League and opposition parties, and urging them to find solutions.

This is more so as many foreign diplomats think the last two elections were mired in irregularities.

The US had already announced visa restrictions related to election irregularities. Though the European countries have not taken such measures, their views often echo those of the US, sources say.

China, Japan, and South Korea are more concerned about the investments here, while India does not want any instability in Bangladesh because of its security concerns, they add.

"All the diplomats want the political deadlock to be over. They want a free and fair election," said a diplomatic source.

The BNP wants the national election under a non-partisan caretaker government. The ruling Awami League says it will be held under the current government.

US State Department Spokesperson Vedant Patel on Monday said the US is closely monitoring the electoral environment and "engaging appropriately" with the government, opposition, civil society and other stakeholders to urge them to work together for the benefit of the Bangladeshi people.

State Department officials repeatedly said they don't support one political party over another. Regarding the issue of caretaker government, the US said it was for Bangladesh to decide.

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UN voices concern over arrest spree in Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The UN yesterday expressed concern over the large number of people arrested in Bangladesh recently.

Stéphane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN secretary-general, said this at a press briefing in response to a reporter saying that BNP did not participate in the Election Commission's dialogue even though the party was demanding fair elections.

"Well, I can't speak to why, I mean, I don't have the details. I can't speak to why one party did not attend the dialogue. What I can tell you is that we very much hope for a fair and free elections in Bangladesh, free of violence. And as we said, we've expressed our concern about the large number of people who've been arrested," he replied.

The EC decided to hold the dialogue at a time when the ongoing political crisis had taken a turn for the worse.

Around a third of the parties invited, including the BNP, did not attend the talks.

Never met Joe Biden

DB chief says about Biden adviser imposter Arefy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mian Zahidul Islam Arefy, who claimed himself to be an adviser to US President Joe Biden, has never spoken to Biden, said the DB chief.

Arefy, however, participated in a Zoom meeting attended by Biden's wife Jill Biden and 28 to 29 other individuals during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, Harun Or Rashid, additional commissioner (Detective Branch) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star yesterday quoting Arefy.

A four-member DB investigation team, led by Harun, interrogated him at the Kashimpur jail yesterday for about two and a half hours in a case filed with Paltan Police Station over deceiving people using false identities.

The DB chief said they had earlier questioned Lt Gen (ret'd) Chowdhury

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With a one-day break in ongoing nationwide blockade yesterday, city streets returned to their traffic-riddled state as all transports, both public and private, were back on the roads again.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Astronomers find 7 planets being 'fried' by their star

REUTERS, Washington

In our solar system, little rocky Mercury is the planet orbiting closest to the sun, perpetually fried by solar radiation seven times more intense than what we experience on Earth.

Astronomers using data obtained by Nasa's now-retired Kepler space telescope have identified seven planets orbiting a star in our Milky Way galaxy, with all of them suffering the wrath of their star - radiant energy - even more brutally than Mercury. This is the second-most planets so far discovered around any star beyond our solar system.

All seven are larger than Earth, the biggest of our solar system's four rocky planets, but littler than Neptune, the smallest of our solar system's four gas planets. All of them have orbits closer to their star, called Kepler-385, than Mercury's average distance to the sun.

"All of the planets are 'fried' more intensely than any planet in our solar system," said astronomer Jack Lissauer of Nasa's Ames Research Center in California, lead author of the study set to be published in the Journal of Planetary Science and currently posted on the arXiv research site.

