

£10m heroin entered UK

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confidential intelligence report of Bangladesh Department of Narcotics Control.

The name of M/S Bengal Bay, another UK-based company, also appears in the report as the intended recipients of the heroin consignments seized at UK ports. Located above a coffee shop on the Edgware Road, London, the import/export firm is now subject of an investigation by the Metropolitan Police Service of greater London.

Over the past year a series of ostensibly legitimate firms with links to Bangladesh have joined a bulging group of import/export firms that have attracted the attention of the London police.

The newspaper report says in total, some 140kg of heroin - worth nearly £10m once sold on to Britain's 260,000 heroin addicts - had entered the UK from Bangladesh.

It says several seizures of the drug sent by Bangladesh-based companies—Emdad Trading, Jamil International, and Green Heaven Enterprise—at different ports last year concerned the UK Customs officials. Previously, they had not considered Bangladesh to be a major conduit for heroin.

The total amount of heroin found in just a handful of seizures in three months doubled that acknowledged by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDC) as passing between the port of Chittagong and the UK in the whole of last year,

and suggested the smugglers were changing tactics.

"The seizures made in the UK in 2005 relate to an overall pattern where ethnic/language-based groups are moving product within south Asia by making many, many small runs.

The UNDC said it was clear that the Bangladeshi heroin trade was now an urgent threat, one that had caught the UK authorities off guard.

The sophisticated nature of the operation was also alarming. The export companies such as Ocean Line Foods and M/S Bengal appeared to have legitimate licences and tax identification numbers, which had been issued by the Bangladeshi authorities. They had recognised postal addresses in the UK.

Seemingly out of nowhere, a well-resourced and extensive drug-smuggling operation had sprung up on the back of a legitimate trading network.

Amid growing concern at the Foreign Office, the British High Commission in Mumbai wrote to the Bangladesh authorities asking for its Customs Intelligence and Investigation Department to investigate the trafficking.

The Bangladesh government's response in the short term was swift.

Over a four-month period the group interviewed scores of suspects, examined box-loads of import/export licences and ploughed through thousands of shipping licences during an exhaus-

tive investigation that produced an extensive picture of Bangladesh's heroin trade to Britain and, crucially, named names.

The report said with a global workforce of 3,000, BD Foods is one of Bangladesh's most respected companies. Unfortunately for BD Foods, a number of its consignments now lie stranded in ports around the world as customs officials probe their contents.

The freeze stems from the leaking of the special committee's report, which the Bangladeshi government has yet to publish - on the grounds that its investigations are continuing.

The excuse has not stopped some critics in Bangladesh suggesting that the government is trying to protect those accused in the report.

It shows that Emdad Trading, Jamil International and Green Heaven Enterprise were owned by former employees of BD Foods.

It transpires that these were in reality 'ghost' companies that were illegally using BD Foods' VAT numbers to obtain export licences so they could ship heroin to businesses in the UK that existed only on letter-heads.

Fighter purchase

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the basic price of the 16 aircraft was reduced to \$94.2 million, at the average unit price of \$5.88 million.

According to the statement, the final procurement cost for the fighters were \$117.9 million, including \$94.2 million basic price and \$23.7 million for accessories and technical support.

But, in the April 16 report, the BAF told the parliamentary standing committee that after negotiations, the price of each aircraft stood at \$5.85 million, or total \$93.6 million for the 16 fighters.

Water Resources Minister Hafizuddin Ahmed, who also looks after the defence ministry's parliamentary affairs, gave his resignation to the House on February 22 replying to a query of lawmaker.

The BAF report to the parliamentary body said the basic price of the 16 fighters in the budgetary offer was \$120 million, which later increased to \$135.4 million to cover the accessories and shipment cost, meaning \$15 million extra-expenditure for accessories and shipment. But, Saturday's statement said extra-expenditure actually was \$23.7 million. The Daily Star in a report headlined "Fighter purchase: \$9m spending in text plan" on Friday pointed out the gap.

In its clarification, the BAF headquarters said the quoted price of the aircraft in the budgetary offer was precisely \$124.9 million including the basic price of \$98.6 million.

"Later, the final requirement also with the technical specification was sent to the COSTIND [Commission of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence of China] and on basis of that, the COSTIND sent a detailed offer in October 2004. In that offer the quoted price was 135.4 million USD. In that the basic price of 16 aircraft was 98.6 million USD and price of other accessories was 36.8 million USD," went on the clarification.

It said, "After a series of negotiations between the two teams of Bangladesh and Chinese governments, the basic price of 16 aircraft could be reduced to 94.2 million USD. Most importantly, the price of spares, additional engines, technical support and maintenance had been reduced from and price for other items was reduced from 36.8 million USD to 23.7 million USD."

BAF VS LAWMAKERS

Referring to The Daily Star report the BAF statement in conclusion said, "As such the report, which has been published in your esteemed daily, carried some inaccurate figures and analysis, which might create confusion leading to misinterpretation."

"It is, therefore, requested that such

kind of reports, which involves organ of the armed forces, should be accurate and authentic to prevent possibility of any misunderstanding," it reads.

But, the lawmakers who participated in the debate on the purchase said the airforce headquarters itself handed out inaccurate information. They held it responsible for confusing parliament by providing erroneous information and expressed doubts about the validity of its clarification too.

Lt Gen (Retd) Mahbubur Rahman, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on defence ministry, remarked, "Everybody should be very careful in providing information to the House and the parliamentary bodies."

"Misunderstandings are created if anyone or any institution provides misinformation to the House. It also tarnishes the image of the House," he told The Daily Star.

A member of the parliamentary standing committee, Awami League lawmaker Shawkat Ali, accused the government of playing hide-and-seek about the purchase.

Talking to The Daily Star he said, "It is regrettable that the defence ministry and the airforce headquarters have provided such inaccurate information. The airforce headquarters should disclose the main documents on the purchase."

According to Shawkat Ali, "By issuing erroneous information on different occasions, the government has proved that there is corruption and irregularities in defence purchase. Everybody knows who dominates the defence purchase."

Jatiya Party lawmaker GM Quader, who first raised the question in parliament last February, said providing misinformation to the House or any parliamentary body is a punishable offence.

"Parliament has been made a laughing stock in front of the nation by providing false information," he maintained, adding, "How can we be sure that the information provided this time is not incorrect too?"

Bangladesh

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balls to help the world champions avoid an unlikely upset in front of an electric crowd in the port city while Brett Lee was not out on 12.

Earlier, it was yet another pathetic batting display by the Tigers, who made a meek surrender after captain Habibur Bashar won the toss. They failed to capitalise on the advantage on a flat track because of senseless batting by the top order, especially Rajin Saleh (7), local boy Aftab Ahmed (30) and Mohammad Ashraf (5), who got dismissed for wrong shot selections.

After early hiccups, Bashar showed some resistance in the middle against an inexperienced Aussie attack but his 93-ball 52 -- his eleventh one-day fifty -- was not good enough to build a fighting total.

At one stage, there was a realistic chance for Bangladesh to notch 230 plus runs, but the loss of the last four wickets in the space of 24 runs saw them bundle out for 195 with three overs yet to be bowled.

It could have only been possible had Bashar batted through, but the right-hander, who smote three fours and hit debutant off-spinner Dan Cullen for a six over mid-wicket, went down the track against left-arm unorthodox spinner Brad Hogg to be stumped by Gilchrist. Hogg was the most successful Aussie bowler with 3-37.

Bangladesh had to make one change in the team in the last moment after all-rounder Alok Kapali got hit by a ball in the face during the warm-up. He had to have three stitches on his lips, making way for Tushar Imran, who made 20.

Bashar's men, who completed their Chittagong campaign losing the second Test and the first one-day, will play the remaining two limited-overs games at Fatullah Stadium on April 26 and 28.

Separation

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to Bangladesh Patricia A Butenis called on him at his office.

Moudud said a bill seeking amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedure had already been placed in parliament and the judiciary would be separated as soon as the bill is passed.

He apprised the ambassador of the legal reforms for modernising the judiciary and reducing the logjam of cases.

Referring to the US cooperation in reducing the logjam of cases through Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), Moudud said the lawyers and litigants were happy with the system. Some 9,000 cases have been disposed of through the ADR.

The ambassador assured the minister of more cooperation of her government for development of the judiciary of Bangladesh.

Eyesight of 13

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Mekail Karim, sales manger of Opso-Saline, however, claimed that following the allegation they also conducted tests of their medicine but did not find anything wrong about it.

"The BNSB authorities tested the fluid after three days of opening the container. So, they may find bacteria there," he told The Daily Star. "We produced 5,200 containers of fluid in the same batch and all famous ophthalmologists are using it and never complained," he added.

"There are many reasons behind losing eyesight. It was not caused by our fluid," Mekail said.

The patients who lost their eyesight are Ansar Ali, 65, Habur Rahman, 60, Hamida Bibi, 60, Momena, 70, Jamila Bewa, 90, Jamila, 60, Monowara, 57, Hasina, 70, Khairun Bewa, 70, Afzal Hossain, 60, Zobeda Bewa, 65, Amzad Hossain and Nurunnesa, 65.

Almost all the patients are poor and attended the BNSB eye camp for cataract operation.

Biggest investor

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developing gas fields when the other national gas companies hire consultants even for surface level works, said a high official of Bapex.

"Bapex has experience of working both at surface and underground levels, whereas the BGFLC can conduct mainly surface level works. So, Bapex, not the BGFLC, has all the qualities to have the operatorship," he added.

Bapex also does not need to hire any consultant, which the BGFLC or SGFLC need even to set up a processing plant, he said, adding, "Such provision of the JVA should be rectified from the beginning in the interest of Bapex and the nation."

Meanwhile, Bapex asked the energy ministry to compensate as it had invested Tk 21 crore in 1979, but the ministry has not made any positive response in this regard.

Though gas production under the JVA is being designed for the earlier abandoned Begumganj gas field, such agreements can be applicable in case of Semutang, Kamta and other new gas fields too, officials said.

When contacted, Energy Advisor Mahmudur Rahman refused to make any comment, saying, "I don't talk with The Daily Star."

Judges killing

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are on the run while the rest six are behind bars.

The court fixed April 26 as the date for examining witnesses and evidence in the case.

Rahman, Bangla Bhai, Sunny and Awal were brought from Dhaka amid tight security. A huge number of law enforcers including Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) men were deployed in the court area before and during the charge framing.

After reading out the charge, Judge Reza Tarik Ahmed asked the accused whether they are guilty or not. Rahman, Bangla Bhai, Sunny and Awal did not show any repentance. They said they did not do anything wrong and will 'continue their campaign until the Islamic rule is established'.

Mamun however pleaded guilty while Sultan, accused of assisting Mamun in renting a house in Jhalakathi town, pleaded not guilty. Sultan said he did not know anything about the militant activities.

Oil prices

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banks alone.

Presently international oil prices have gone further up reaching over \$74 per barrel. Consequently, the government is under tremendous pressure from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Asian Development bank for raising oil prices.

An IMF mission is due to visit Bangladesh at the end of this month concerning the release of its 6th instalment of PRGF loan. They are also going to emphasise on raising oil prices.

The last fuel price hike was made in the first week of September 2005, raising the price of one litre of octane by 18 percent to Tk 45, petrol by 17 percent to Tk 42, and diesel and kerosene by 15 percent to Tk 30.

Since assuming office in October 2001, the coalition government has raised fuel prices on eight occasions. In December 2001, petrol sold at Tk 28 per litre, and diesel and kerosene at Tk 17.

Laden condemns

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Qatar-based Al-Jazeera satellite television was the first purported recording by the Western world's most wanted man in three months.

"The voice on the tape also said the situation in Sudan was also part of the 'crusades against Islam.'"

In the last audiotape attributed to bin Laden and aired by Al-Jazeera in January, he threatened new attacks against the United States but also offered the American people a conditional 'truce'.

That tape marked the first time that bin Laden had been heard from in more than a year but there is still no information about the whereabouts of the man behind the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States and a host of other terror strikes. The Saudi-born militant had previously not been heard of since a December 27, 2004 audiotape in which he anointed Abu

US wants

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action to prevent bird flu.

Mosharrar said import of poultry birds from the affected countries has been prohibited and steps have been taken to prevent any import of poultry birds from the affected countries.

The visiting US official praised Bangladesh for the quick measures it had taken before the outbreak of bird flu in the country.

After hearing statements of the six, the court framed charge against the eight at 12:15pm. Earlier Public Prosecutor Haider Hossain placed the case file before the court and prayed for framing charges against all accused in the charge sheet submitted by Munshi Atikur Rahman, ASP of CID.

In the charge sheet, eight were accused under section 120/B, 302, 326, 427 and 34 of criminal procedure act of killing two judges on November 14, 2005.

Lawyers of Jhalakathi Bar Association refused to represent the JMB leaders in the court.

Advocate Siddik Hossain was the state-engaged lawyer for Sultan according to his prayer before the court.

Meanwhile, Jhalakathi sadar magistrate's court the yesterday placed Sunny on a 10-day remand for interrogation about the August 17 serial blasts.

Speedy Trial Tribunal of Barisal on February 20, 2006 awarded the same accused 40 years' rigorous imprisonment in another case filed in connection with the judges killing under explosives act. Sultan however was acquitted of the crime.

Russian split

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denies, that Russia says is worrisome but unproven and that no one expects to be proven conclusively in the report from the UN nuclear agency to be delivered Friday.

"Russia has veto power at the UN Security Council and it will have to decide if it is prepared to use it to block strong action now against Iran" as sought by Washington, Pribylovski said.

"If there is a UN vote on something that would open the way to military action against Iran then Russia will definitely veto it. If there is a vote on sanctions against Iran, Russia may well veto this too," he said.

The rising stakes in the diplomatic tension between Washington and Moscow over how to deal with Iran were highlighted by the British economic weekly The Economist, which said in its latest issue that as US attention to Iran grows so too do the implications of Russian opposition to Washington.

Musab al-Zarqawi, Iraq's most wanted man, as al-Qaeda's leader in the war-torn country.

Bin Laden's last video appearance was on December 16, 2004 when he also called on his fighters to strike Gulf oil supplies and warned Saudi leaders they risked a popular uprising.

The West has cut off funding to the Hamas-led government since the militant Islamist movement took office last month after its landslide election win in a Palestinian election in January.

Aug 17 blast

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The case was filed under the Explosive Substances Act with Tejojan Police Station on August 17 last year.

The other accused are JMB military commander Ataur Rahman Sunny, its Majlis-e-Shura member Abdul Awal, JMB regional commander of Gazipur Enayet Ullah alias Jewel, Hafez Mahmud, Salahuddin and Ekramul Islam.

Metropolitan Magistrate Shamsul Alam yesterday again directed the IO saying that since the IO did not submit the probe report of the case under section 173 of the Criminal Procedure Code, he is instructed to do so immediately.

Parties keep pressure

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offer to allow the alliance to select a prime minister, which came late Friday following two weeks of daily calls for an end to his absolute rule.

The offer by Gyanendra to return power to the people earned a qualified welcome from the international community, which called it a step in the right direction, but was flatly rejected by Nepal's opposition.

The parties want parliament, dissolved in 2002, to be reinstated and agree to a constituent assembly to review the constitution including the role of the monarchy, which now has control of the armed forces.

Gyanendra wants to keep the current 1990 constitution which allows him executive power in emergencies and gives him some powers over the dissolving of parliament.

A heavier than usual contingent of soldiers, armed with machine-guns, were posted every few hundred yards (metres) around the perimeter of the royal palace on Sunday, an AFP reporter witnessed.

Police were posted at nearby intersections and officers huddled around radios outside their headquarters, apparently listening to the latest news of the crisis following the start of the curfew at 9:00 am (0315 GMT).

An editorial in the state-run newspaper, Rising Nepal, warned of a "historic blunder" if the opposition parties failed to accept the king's

Pickets fight with cops

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because of a one-day cricket match between Bangladesh and Australia.

The 12-hour general strike hampered normal life and businesses in Dhaka and elsewhere when no long-route transport was seen plying through the highways.

The number of motorised vehicles on city streets was also small and educational institutions, shopping malls and most of the private offices were closed.

DHAKA
Jubo League and Jubo Mohila League brought out a joint procession from Bangabandhu Avenue at about 11:30am and it damaged two police requisitioned buses when the procession reached near the main entrance of Bangabandhu National Stadium. As police came to prevent the procession, they pelted police with bricks bats leaving Police Inspector Abu Salekh critically injured.

The activists of the two front organisations of AL also damaged a CNG-run three-wheeler and a human hauler at Bangabandhu Square in Gulistan and damaged at least 10 roadside shops including two restaurants when they were returning to Bangabandhu Avenue.

After entering the avenue, they hurled bricks bats at the law enforcers who were guarding both sides of the avenue. Agitated pickets from the rooftop of AL central office and on the ground continued throwing bricks bats at police for more than half an hour and broke through the police barricade.

But law enforcers were seen standing silently. Finally police retaliated with four teargas shells to disperse the pickets.

Fire broke out in a tailor shop at Ramna Bhaban and Joy Market adjacent to AL's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue when the opposition pickets were throwing bricks bats at police. Fire fighters rushed to Bangabandhu Avenue and brought the fire under control.

"Fire might have broken out due to a short circuit in the electric lines caused by bricks bats of opposition activists," an on-duty police official said.

But, the opposition alleged that the fire was caused by police tear-gas shells.

Meanwhile, police picked up three Jubo Mohila League activists including its president Nazma Akther from Noor Hossain Square at about 2:30pm while they were on their way to their homes. Protesting the arrest other Mohila League activists gathered in front of AL central office again, attacked the police with bricks bats and brought out processions.

"We are showing maximum tolerance," Deputy Commissioner (East) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Mahbub Alam told The Daily Star at Bangabandhu Avenue. He said the police retaliated only after being attacked and to maintain law and order.

The opposition also brought out processions at Khilgoan, Demra, Motijheel, Dhaka District Court, Malibagh, Jurain Rail Gate, Uttara, Lalbagh and other parts of the capital supporting the shutdown.

An AL procession led by Motia Chowdhury, Obaidul Quader and Abdur Rahman was brought out from the National Press Club area at 6:00am. Police intercepted the procession on its way to AL's central office when it reached Pallan Crossing. What followed was a fierce altercation between the police and demonstrators. Later, police prevented most of the pickets from marching towards AL central office, except senior leaders.

Police dispersed a pro-hartal procession led by Samyabadi Dal

President Dilip Barua by charging batons when it was marching through the streets near Noor Hossain Square at 8:30am.

Police chased a group of Jubo Mohila League activists near Dhanmondi Government Boys School on Mirpur road when opposition women were trying to damage some vehicles on the road at about 10:30am. Nine women were picked up from the spot.

At about 10:20am, police attacked another AL procession led by its senior leader Abdur Razzak near Kalabagan bus stand leaving 10 people injured. After being dispersed opposition activists hurled bricks bats at police.

Besides, a number of small processions marched through Mirpur Road, from Kalabagan to Dhanmondi road no 27 since 9:00am and merged into a joint rally at Russell Square that continued till 2:00pm.

At least five were injured during clashes between police and pickets in front of the Forest Building at Mohakhali at about 8:00am. Police used batons to disperse opposition activists and they responded by throwing bricks bats.

Twelve people were picked up from the spot.

Police also barricaded and baton charged leaders and activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jubo League when they came near the Forest Building from Government Titumir College. The pickets broke at least four CNG-run three wheelers after police dispersed them.

Later opposition activists gathered in a rally there led by Tofail Ahmed, Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Mainuddin Khan Badal and Advocate Sahara Khatun. But, police once again attacked them at about 9:15am and dispersed the rally.

A pro-hartal procession led by AL leader Kamal Ahmed Majumder came under police attack near Mirpur 10 crossing at 9:00am leaving at least 10 people injured. The opposition activists responded to the police baton charge by hurling bricks bats. During an hour-long violence pickets damaged a number of vehicles. Police picked up seven pickets from the spot.

In another incident, police charged batons to disperse a pro-hartal procession near Chourangi Market at Mirpur resulting in an hour-long clash between pickets and law enforcers since 9:00am.

CLASHES IN NARAYANGANJ
UNB reports that over 50 people, including cops and a journalist, were injured in clashes between pickets and police in the district till noon during yesterday's hartal.

District and town units of Jubo League brought out a procession in the morning in DIT area defying police barricades. The activists damaged a BRTC bus and a baby-taxi there, witnesses said.

"Police charged batons on the procession at the time, leaving a number of Jubo League activists injured," said an eyewitness.

AL activists became agitated when an anti-hartal procession of BNP, led by Municipal Commissioner Maksudul Alam Khandaker, passed by a gathering of the opposition at Ukilpara.

Police again resorted to clubbing AL activists when they brought out a procession in favour of the hartal. Bangabandhu Sarak turned into a battlefield when the pickets also started pelting the law-enforcers with bricks bats.

"At one stage of the clash, police reinforcements came to the scene, cordoned off the Awami League office and charged baton on the AL activists," said the eyewitness.

Photo journalist Sazzad Nayan, police sergeant Habib, sub-inspector Anwar, constables Idris Ali, Shamsul Alam and Asaduzzaman and nearly 50 AL leaders and supporters were injured during the hour-long clash.

OTHER DISTRICTS

Our correspondents from different districts also reported violence during the hartal hours.

At least 13 people were injured in two separate incidents in Rangpur yesterday. Police charged batons on AL activists in the morning while they were attempting to vandalise a shop at Pirganj Bazar.

Police attacked 14-party rallies several times at Machuabazar, Muktarpara, Satpai, Chutabazar, and Azahar Road injuring more than 10 pro-hartal activists, reports our Netrakona correspondent.

Our staff correspondent and Rajshahi University correspondent reports that pickets set fire on a motorcycle at Smriti Cinema crossing and damaged a human hauler at Gourhanga Intersection around 10:30am. Police also exchanged bricks bats with pickets at Ranibazar and Bata crossing in Rajshahi.

Our Sirajganj correspondent reports that pro-hartal supporters damaged at least 25 vehicles on the Dhaka-Rangpur highway at Raiganj upazila in the district.

The daylong hartal in Barisal was observed amid sporadic incidents of violence and muscle flexing of the ruling party cadres. Pickets ransacked eight rickshaws and a number of human haulers at different points of the city during the hartal. They also damaged a motorcycle of a ruling party activist.

Our Mymensingh correspondent reports that police arrested four leaders of Bangladesh Chhatra League from Natakganj by-lane area of the district town during picketing in the morning.

Long queue

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the discharge facilities and accelerate the clearing of export and import goods.

All the container carriers are in the waiting line since April 18, sources said, adding that the authorities received declaration of 28 ships to call at the port within this month while some other declared ships already sailed from Singapore or are on the way to Chittagong.

The situation will deteriorate further when those ships reach the port.

Earlier two or three container ships used to wait at the outer anchorage for getting berthing space and they had to wait for a couple of days but now the number of waiting ships at the outer anchorage often crosses one dozen and they have to wait for even more than a week, said a source.

The rise of the country's export and import business is the main cause of ship congestion at the premier port, source said, adding that recently the import in the country rose by 25 per cent while the export