

Probe team asks

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trace the entire racket, all the racketeers," he added wishing anonymity.

A special superintendent of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police heads the team, with one official each from the Bangladesh Bank (BB), Special Branch (SB) of police, and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) as members.

The team started the probe on a home ministry directive after a National Board of Revenue (NBR) inquiry had found five Bangladeshi business firms' involvement in the drug running. The NBR took up the inquiry last year as the UK customs in a message through the British mission in Mumbai, India accused BD Foods Ltd, Emdad Traders, Jamil International, MM Enterprise, and Green Heaven Enterprise of trafficking 75.5kg heroin to the UK.

The team so far has arrested six persons for their suspected involvement in the drug running. They are Mainuddin and Abu Bakar Siddique Mithu of BD Foods, Moklesur Rahman, an associate of Mithu, Nazmul Haider Bulbul, a former official of BD Foods, Kazi Zafar Reza of Rainbow Enterprise, and Abul Bashar of Green Heaven Enterprise.

Besides, a primary customs intelligence investigation found Rainbow Enterprise in collusion with two other firms -- Tipu Enterprise and a Kakrail-based company in the DIT Avenue -- smuggled another 72kg heroin to the UK in October last year.

BB YET TO REPORT ON SUSPECT FIRMS
The Bangladesh Bank could not provide all the banking information of 12 business houses including BD Foods and its nine sister con-

cerns as asked by the probe team yesterday, the deadline, as most of the commercial banks had not submitted their reports to the BB.

The BB on May 3 asked all the commercial banks to report within a week all banking information of the 12 suspect business firms. A BB source said only a few private banks have met the dateline.

Though a probe team member said the BB may come up with the information today, BB sources said it may take a few days more, as most of the banks sought more time to report the banking information of the dozen suspect companies.

The BB took the step on a request of the investigation team, which deems the banking information of the 12 suspect firms vital for its investigation at this point, both BB and CID sources said.

Nine of the 12 companies are sister concerns and share the same address -- 9 DIT Avenue, Motijheel, Dhaka. They are BD Food Limited, Universal Trade International, Al Ajmir Trade International, King & Company, Camellia International, Oriental Export, Greenway Traders, Famous Business International, and BD Sea Food.

The head office of BD Food Corporation, another sister concern of BD Food Limited, is in Sagarkira Road in Chittagong.

The two other firms on the suspect-list are NHB Corporation and Rainbow Enterprise.

JS sees

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partners had perpetrated the blasts.

She termed the government's role "dubious" in dealing with bomb blast cases.

On the ongoing power and water crises, the opposition leader said the government has failed to ensure smooth supply of electricity and water. She cautioned that a situation like Kansat might occur across the country in demand for utilities.

In this regard, Hasina referred to the public protests in Shanir Akhra. The government will have to face such protests all over the country for its failure to run the country and for plundering public property. "People have become frustrated," she said.

The AL chief alleged that the late president Ziaur Rahman had a hand behind the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. She also alleged that Zia had come to power through backdoor and later legalised it through constitutional amendment.

Referring to the opposition's demand for Jamaat's exclusion from the government dialogue team, BNP lawmaker KM Obaidur Rahman said the AL had held discussions with Jamaat and even Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan, but today it is unwilling to sit with Jamaat.

"Awami League is today critical of military rule, but the party itself gave legality to Ershad's rule by taking part in 1986 election," he said.

Earlier, AL lawmaker Mohammad Nasim said election cannot be held with the voter list that Chief Election Commissioner MA Aziz has made.

On the militancy issue, Nasim said the war criminals of 1971 gave birth to militancy in Bangladesh.

Demanding international probe into the August 21 grenade attack on an AL rally at Bangabandhu Avenue, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim said the prime minister will be brought to justice if the probe is not done under the United Nations.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, AL Presidium Member Abdur Razzak, Jamaat Ameer Matiur Rahman Nizami and Health Minister Khandaker Mosharrif Hossain, among others, took part in the debate.

9-year-old boy

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hanging himself from a ceiling fan at their house at around 10:30am.

Police recovered his body and sent it to Dhaka Medical College Morgue (DMCH) for an autopsy.

Monowara Begum, mother of Deen Islam, said on returning home from school Islam demanded Tk 2 from her. Monowara promised to give her son the amount provided that he takes his meal first.

In the meantime she went to buy vegetables in the nearby market, but after returning home found the door closed from inside.

Breaking the door with the help of the neighbours she found her son hanging from the ceiling fan.

Pandora's box

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open the Pandora's box. All of you will be exposed," Rahman told prosecution witness Munshi Atiqur Rahman, also investigation officer (IO) of the case.

CID Assistant Police Superintendent Munshi prosecuted JMB leaders for murder of two assistant judges at Jhalakati last year.

"I want the trial to be held under the Islamic law, otherwise, I will divulge everything," Rahman told the court, which completed the recording of statements of 45 prosecution witnesses, including the investigation officer of the case, yesterday.

He told the court that his brother Ataur Rahman Sunny was physically tortured in the Joint Interrogation Cell. He was compelled to admit killing of innocent men by bomb attacks. Sunny was also forced to express repentance for his action and call upon him (Rahman) to surrender. All this was videotaped and had been repeatedly telecast through TV channels to create confusion and mislead the nation.

"Who have asked you to stage the drama?" Rahman asked the prosecution witness.

The investigation officer pleaded ignorance about torture of Sunny in the Joint Interrogation Cell.

Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai told the court that he was suffering from blood cancer due to inhuman physical torture by CID police. The investigation officer has implicated him in the case at the behest of high-ups.

Denying the charge, the investigation officer said he had independently investigated the case, not acted under any influence.

The hearing of the case will resume on May 15.

Legal notice

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appropriate action against Harbin although the company could not discharge its contractual obligation in respect of Tongi 80 MW power plant.

Dr Kamal Hossain and Associates on April 30 served the notice on the secretaries of power division of the energy ministry and the finance ministry, the cabinet secretary, principal secretary to the prime minister, chairman of Power Development Board and project director of the Chandpur project.

The notice expressed serious concern at the government's "illegal, arbitrary and mala fide decision" in approving and awarding the tender for construction of the Chandpur 150 MW Combined Cycle Power plant in favour of Harbin. This approval was given in gross violation of the tender documents and in complete defiance of the Public Procurement Regulations 2003 (the PPR 2003), particularly ignoring the decision of the government's Review Committee.

The notice demanded cancellation of Harbin's bid and implementation of the decision of the Review Panel to ensure transparency in the decision-making process in the power sector.

In violation of tender terms, Harbin did not submit its technical proposal with its financial proposal in the Chandpur tender. The PDB, instead of disqualifying the bid, sought the technical proposal nearly two weeks later and then selected Harbin's bid for the project.

As the other Chinese bidder CMEC's complaints were ignored, the CMEC resorted to the Review Panel under the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) last year. The panel found PDB's selection of Harbin illegal and the tender process lacking transparency, and it asked the PDB to negotiate with the CMEC. But its decision was overturned.

Considering the poor performance of the Tongi plant built by Harbin, awarding another contract to the same company raises questions about transparency. It has been found that Harbin has not supplied huge quantities of parts and spares as per contract. Frequent tripping of this plant imposed crores of taka loss on the PDB. Yet the PDB has not penalised Harbin for its failures in case of this plant.

The instance of Tongi plant raises questions about the authenticity of Harbin's so-called low price quotes for the Chandpur project.

The notice adds that in the last nearly five years, all the power projects have been awarded to one particular company -- Harbin-- which has been quoting the lowest price to grab contracts and later on acting in violation of the tender specification.

The notice urged the government to cancel the recommendation to award the contract for the project to Harbin and take appropriate legal action against the company for breach of contract in the Tongi plant.

"In the event of your failure to do so, we would be constrained to move before the Hon'ble High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh under Article 102 of the Constitution to ensure good governance, transparency, prevent proven bias on your part to awarding power sector projects in favour of particular company at the instance of vested quarter ignoring the national interest, in which event you would be personally liable for all costs and consequences thereof," the notice said.

Kushtia BNP MP

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Sagar, staff correspondent of ATN Bangla and Kushtia correspondent of Daily Jugantor, Munshi Tarikul Islam, Kushtia correspondent Daily Samakal and Chennel i, went to his house at Bheramara on May 2 and demanded Tk 50,000 from him.

He alleged the journalists said they would run news against him when he refused to pay the money.

A report, based on public opinion, was published in Daily Manabjabin on May 7 about the declining popularity of three lawmakers including Shahidul. The report suggested BNP might lose the three seats in parliament.

On Monday at the 145th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore at Shilaidah the lawmaker termed them 'yellow journalists' threatened of dire consequences if false news against him were run. A number of dailies ran the news yesterday that he had threatened journalists of Kushtia.

On contact Shahidul termed the journalists dishonest and said, "I gave them money several times when they were in hardship but I refused to pay when they tried to blackmail me."

Kuwait

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discuss the matter of fixing the price of oil for Bangladesh in line with the agreement.

They said the Kuwaiti prime minister told Khaleda Zia that Kuwait will always stand behind Bangladesh at all times and extend all cooperation in difficult situations.

Talking to diplomatic correspondents Moshed Khan said Kuwait also agreed to lift the 3-year restriction on import of manpower from Bangladesh.

"With the withdrawal of the embargo, not only unskilled workers but semi-skilled and high skilled doctors, nurses, engineers and other professionals will also be able to get jobs in the oil-rich Gulf state," he added.

The foreign minister said the Kuwaiti government agreed to provide \$51 million for construction of the third Karnaphuli Bridge and a new power plant in Chittagong.

He said the director general of Kuwait Fund will come to Dhaka next week to sign the contract for the Karnaphuli Bridge.

Earlier, briefing reporters Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin termed Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's two-day official visit to Kuwait on May 7-8 as 'extremely successful'.

He said the Kuwaiti government and the people of the country consider Bangladeshi people as their brothers and friends as Bangladesh sent troops to reconstruct war-ravaged Kuwait in 1991. Currently some 5,200 Bangladeshi soldiers are engaged in clearing minefields in Kuwait.

Hemayetuddin said a cultural team from Bangladesh will soon visit Kuwait to strengthen people-to-people contact.

On trade, he said both Bangladesh and Kuwait agreed to expand trade and investment through private sector initiatives. Bangladesh wants to export pharmaceuticals, ceramics and agricultural products to Kuwait.

On the meeting with Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on May 8, the foreign secretary said it was a very constructive and fruitful meeting.

EC to use

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on voters, it was aimed at facilitating revision of the existing voter roll instead of preparing a fresh one ahead of every parliamentary election.

Former chief election commissioner (CEC) MA Syed, who retired in May last year, was kept to use the database in preparing the voter list for the next general election. But he could not initiate any move to this end.

Then as current CEC MA Aziz unilaterally decided to go for a fresh voter list, the database prepared in 2000 has not been of any use.

So, the database now being planned to be prepared based on the controversial fresh roll might too go down the drain if the EC in the future again prefers a fresh voter list ahead of parliamentary polls, observed an election official seeking anonymity.

At Monday's meeting, the EC Secretariat also discussed the issue of printing the fresh voter list, draft of which was published on May 3. The date for publication of the final list has yet to be declared.

There has been widespread controversy over the draft roll for unusual rise in the number of voters. Still the final roll will see little change from it [draft], as the commission does not have at its disposal any appropriate mechanism to detect ghost voters or other anomalies, said officials at the EC Secretariat.

About the preparation for printing the voter list before publication of the final list, a senior officer wishing anonymity told The Daily Star, "As very little time is left for the commission to go before the election, we want to complete by this time the preliminary process regarding the printing job."

50 vehicles damaged

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with the demonstrators during the turmoil.

The KJSP procession then marched towards Motijheel.

Immediately afterwards, the ruling BNP's youth front Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal brought out a procession from Dainik Bangla intersection. It moved up to Purana Paltan intersection, chanting slogans in favour of Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas.

Sources said the Jubo Dal procession was not scheduled earlier.

The opposition procession was intercepted by police at Shapla square. A brief exchange of brickbats between the two sides took place there.

The demonstrators then held a rally there, protesting police interception and atrocities on them.

Speakers at the rally alleged that the Jubo Dal and Jamaat-Islami's youth front damaged the vehicles in a pre-planned way. They blamed the crises of electricity, water and fuel on syndicated business and corruption by 'Hawa Bhaban' people.

Chaired by Jubo League President Jahangir Kabir Nanak, the rally was addressed by, among others, its General Secretary Mirza Azam, Sadaqat Hossain Bakul, Sagir Anwar, Shaiful Islam Babul and Karim Sikder.

FRESH PROGRAMMES
The KJSP announced that they would lay siege to electricity offices of upazila headquarters on May 14, and Election Commission offices across the country on May 18 demanding cancellation of fake voter list.

The Workers' Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and Dhaka City AL and KJSP condemned the police attack on the procession.

The JSD city unit also held a rally demanding immediate solution of the ongoing crises.

Meanwhile, Palli Bidyut Samity offices in Gazipur, Savar and Faridpur were besieged yesterday by political activists and students demanding uninterrupted power supply in the areas.

In Gazipur, district unit of Jubo League laid siege to Palli Bidyut Samity office at 11:00am protesting load shedding in the district.

Jubo League leaders and activists staged a rally in front of the main gate of Palli Bidyut Samity office demanding smooth power supply. Later, they staged a demonstration on Gazipur-Dhaka highway, according to BDNEWS.

In Savar, about 200 students from different schools and colleges of the upazila surrounded local Palli Bidyut Samity office in the morning protesting power outage.

Sources said the students assembled in front of the samity office at around 10:30am and chanted slogans demanding uninterrupted power supply.

Our Faridpur correspondent reported that local unit of Awami Jubo League staged a sit-in in front of Palli Bidyut Samity office from 11:00am to 1:00pm protesting load shedding.

Addressing a rally at the sit-in venue, leaders of Jubo League urged the authorities to take immediate steps to ensure smooth power supply in the district.

Major powers

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next week but sponsors -- aiming for unity -- have backed off a timeline for security council action, the US official said.

Russia and China have been resisting a UN Security Council resolution sponsored by Britain and France and backed by the United States that would legally require Iran to halt uranium enrichment. Britain and France had wanted to get the resolution passed before the Monday night ministers' meeting.

The meeting of the Security Council's five veto-wielding permanent members plus Germany and European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana came after Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad wrote to President George W. Bush proposing "new ways" to resolve their differences.

But a copy obtained by Reuters showed a long rambling treatise that focused on American wrongdoings and did not contain ideas for ending the dispute over Iran's nuclear ambitions.

It was the first letter from an Iranian head of state to a US president since Washington broke off relations after the 1979 Islamic revolution.

Sceptical US officials dismissed the 18-page letter as a diversionary tactic. But a European diplomat who works on the Iran issue but was not authorized to speak publicly called the letter "another tactical masterstroke that was deliberately timed to come out today (ahead of the ministers' meeting) and has made administration officials very nervous."

Iran's letter did not prompt calls from the other powers for Washington to change its tough policy or to hold direct talks with Tehran, a senior US official said.

While the immediate issue was Iran's nuclear ambitions, participants said the Monday night discussions were much broader, including terrorism and regional security.

Margaret Beckett, Britain's new foreign secretary, said "No one has the intention of taking military action (against Iran). That was not discussed. It was not an issue."

Washington and its allies accuse Iran of developing nuclear weapons. Tehran says it only wants to make civilian energy.

Earlier on Monday, China made clear that any reference to possible sanctions or war should be eliminated from the UN resolution ordering Tehran to curb its nuclear programme.

Moscow and Beijing want a resolution but oppose invoking Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, which is used routinely in dozens of Security Council resolutions for peacekeeping missions and other legally-binding actions.

The United States, France and Britain insist on Chapter 7. It allows for sanctions and even war, but a separate resolution would be required to invoke further steps of that nature.

Russia and China fear too much pressure on Iran would be self-defeating or precipitate an oil crisis. Both worry the United States would use a resolution under Chapter 7 to justify military action.

The United States and Iran severed diplomatic ties in 1980 after radical students stormed the US embassy in Tehran and seized 52 Americans, holding them hostage for 444 days.

Iran recently accelerated its pace of uranium enrichment but remains far below levels needed to make an atomic bomb.

Iranian officials note the IAEA, the UN nuclear watchdog, has not found a weapons programme after three years of scrutiny and does not consider Iran an imminent security threat.

Top US anti-terror

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while a number of US experts have visited Bangladesh and held discussions with the BB and government officials concerned.

Following the recent Islamist militant activities across the country, the BB could identify some bank accounts used for suspicious monetary transactions but failed to trace the sources of the funds.

"We could not find out information beyond the suspicious nature of the transactions," said a BB source, "and so far have forwarded over a hundred such cases to the Criminal Investigation Department of police." But, there has been little progress in investigating those cases, he added.

Sources said, although the CID has formed a cell to deal with money-laundering and terrorist-financing cases, it remained virtually dysfunctional due to lack of manpower and fund.

The cell requires at least 110 qualified staff and about Tk 10-crore fund a year to carry out the required investigations, sources said. The CID sent a proposal in this regard to

the BB as well as the home ministry but is yet to receive any response from either of them.

The existing Anti-Money Laundering Act has many weaknesses. For example, it lacks in investigation modality and punitive provisions. It's why, though the central bank found involvement of some banks in terrorist financing, it could not penalise them except fining them Tk 1 lakh at the highest.

Following the US government's insistence to refurbish the law in line with its counterparts in other countries and a lot of examinations, the finance ministry drafted and sent a new anti-money laundering and terrorist financing act to the cabinet a couple of months ago. But, the cabinet sent it back for further scrutiny and revision. Then, a recent inter-ministerial meeting decided to amend the existing law instead of introducing a new one. The process of drafting the amendments is on and the sources concerned said there is little chance of making the amendment during the present government's tenure.

Thailand prepares

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Thaksin will run again for prime minister.

Thaksin, who remains a lawmaker and the leader of his powerful party, has dodged the question.

"Why are you following a jobless man?" he asked reporters who quizzed him recently as he went shopping with his wife. Senior aide Prommin Lertsuridej said the billionaire businessman would run for a seat in parliament, but would not say whether he had his sights set on being premier.

"I cannot answer on his behalf whether he will seek another role. He will be the sole person to make that decision. As of today, there is no decision," he told reporters.

Before the snap elections, Thaksin had faced months of street protests accusing him of using his political office to enrich his telecom empire.

One of the protest leaders, media tycoon Sondhi Limthongkul, warned Thaksin not to stage a comeback.

"Thaksin does not realize that he was the centre of the problem, so he should pull out of politics completely," Sondhi told reporters.

Sondhi also threatened to call new protests unless the Election Commission resigns.

"We believe that if the existing EC organizes the new polls, the new election will not be fair for everyone, even if Thaksin doesn't run," he said.

The courts have also raised questions about the Election Commission, which has received much of the blame for the failure of the April 2 polls.

The opposition, which boycotted those polls, has accused the commission of being too closely aligned with Thaksin.

The opposition on Monday also called on the commissioners to resign, but the government has warned that naming new members to the panel could drag out the organization of the next polls.

But Charan said the Supreme Court was prepared to name new members to the panel, saying that appointing new commissioners would help ensure public confidence in the polls.

Police chiefs agree

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Safar Raj Hossain inaugurated the conference that came two days ahead of Saarc home ministers' meeting.

Designed like Interpol and Europol -- Saarcpol will be a regional platform of police organisations where they will meet frequently and assist each other, Quayyum told reporters emerging out of the conference in the evening.

"It will not be a separate police force, rather an association of police organisations of Saarc countries. It will provide assistance to the member countries as done by Interpol."

The proposal will be placed at the sixth meet of Saarc police chiefs to be held in India.

"We'll have to do the groundwork first. It involves cost and management and we need to prepare a concept paper and work out modalities," he said adding that formation of Europol took seven years.

After completion of the groundwork, member countries will send their reports to the Saarc standing committee before raising it in the next Saarc police chiefs' meet.

Observing that manpower at Saarc Secretariat is very inadequate, the police chiefs decided to send a proposal for formation of an association of Saarc police chiefs that will enable them to meet frequently to share information and strengthen cooperation on organised crimes, smuggling and drug trafficking.

The proposal will be placed at today's meeting of Saarc home secretaries to be held at the same venue. The meeting will be the first ever of its kind.

Answering to a query, the IGP told reporters that no discussion was held about signing of extradition treaties among the member countries.

Talking on the agenda, Quayyum said they discussed 'establishment of Interpol style networking arrangements'.

Since it is a very technical matter, he said, the participants have to send the matter to experts who will prepare a concept paper after discussion.

While discussing organised

crimes, the police chiefs noted that Saarc Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD) is not actively working. To make it dynamic, experts from Saarc countries will meet in a workshop and make recommendations that will be placed at the next police chiefs' meet.

To check drug trafficking and money laundering crimes, Saarc member countries will share experiences and expertise among themselves. "We'll study what steps and laws other member countries have in this regard, how they implement those and what are their achievements," Abdul Quayyum told reporters.

Besides sharing information and expertise, each member country will strengthen its drive to check crime and will work to stop drug and human trafficking to other countries, he said.

On sharing expertise, the IGP said, "We've reached a consensus and made offers to exchange technology, knowledge, techniques and both specialised and general training under existing Saarc practice."

VK Joshi, director general (DG) of the Indian Bureau of Police, Muhammad Shoaib Suddle, DG of Pakistan National Police Bureau, Chandra Fernando, Sri Lankan IGP, Amar Singh Shah, additional IGP of Nepal, Major Lody Jantsho, training and staff development officer of Royal Bhutan Police and Ibrahim Latheef, deputy commissioner of the Maldives Police Service, led their delegations at the conference.

Meanwhile, key issues to be discussed at Saarc home ministers' first ever conference tomorrow include tackling terrorism, controlling drug abuse, trafficking in women and children, menace of money laundering, technical cooperation in police matters, training of police personnel of the member countries and strengthening of the existing structures of STOMD and Saarc Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD).