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Ershad likely to join 4-party by Sept

Accord to clear all cases; may be named president

RABIK HASNET SUMAN

In a major political development, Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad may join the ruling coalition within the next two months.

To meet his demands, the government has agreed on principle to have all cases filed against Ershad disposed of within a month. The ruling BNP is even pondering over his condition that he should be nominated for presidency in case of their (prospective) coalition coming to power, sources said.

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GM Quader to quit JP if Ershad joins four-party

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party (JP) presidium member GM Quader MP has said he will resign from the party if JP Chairman HM Ershad joins the BNP-led four-party alliance.

"I will definitely quit the JP if Ershad joins the four-party alliance," Quader told The Daily Star yesterday.

Opposing Ershad's move to join the four-party alliance, Quader said people now want a change in power as the alliance has completely failed to run the country.

He said if Ershad joins the ruling alliance he will lose his popularity and the party will be affected seriously as people do not want JP to

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Govt seems reluctant to dig into militant cases

Investigators fail to track down anything new about JMB and other outfits

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

The government investigation so far has failed to unearth much about the patrons, network and strength of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) other than that the banned outfit's objective, which it announced in leaflets, was to establish Islamic rule.

More alarmingly, the investigators stay aloof from probing the activities of other extremist organisations including Harkatul Jihad al Islam (Huji), Jagrata Muslim Janata, Bangladesh (JMJB),

Shahadat-al-Hiqma and Ahle Hadith Andolon. The first three organisations have been banned by the government.

The government high-ups, intelligence officials and the investigators on different occasions had said that the mystery would be unravelled once the JMB top brass are captured.

But they have failed to make a headway even in four months after the arrests of JMB chief Abdur Rahman, his deputy Siddiqul Islam alias Bangla Bhai and some other top leaders.

"The detained JMB leaders have not disclosed anything other than that they had carried out the attacks to establish Islamic rule. What can we do if they don't give away any new information," a top-level investigator who had quizzed the JMB leaders told The Daily Star, seeking anonymity.

Asked whether their still not having significant leads can be termed a failure in conducting the investigation, he declined to comment.

No investigator would say

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Saifur finally to allocate fund for EC

UNB, Dhaka

In a complete "U-turn" to his earlier stand, Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday said he would allocate fresh fund for the Election Commission (EC) - whatever amount it will require for updating the voter list.

"Money has to be given to conduct the election... allocation is also available in the budget for the purpose," he told a group of journalists at Zia International Airport on his return from Iran in the morning.

On July 18, Saifur refused to allocate fresh fund for updating the voter list when the EC officials met him.

The finance minister had insisted on the accountability for

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Jamaat angered, warns of election debacle

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami, a key ally of the ruling BNP, yesterday expressed dissatisfaction at the recent move of the government high-ups to include Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) in the four-party alliance without consulting them, sources said.

A meeting of Majlis-e-Shura, highest policy-making body of the party, bitterly criticised the government initiative and observed that the JP's joining the coalition could have adverse effect on the election results, a source among the party high-ups said.

Speaking at the meeting held at Jamaat central office, a senior leader said, "As all of you know...condition of most of the BNP ministers at their constituencies is miserable. Now if JP joins us then it will make problem for our candidates too in Sylhet, Mymensingh and northern part of the country."

"If we should sacrifice the Choudhagram (Comilla-12) seat for JP leader Kazi Zafar Ahmed then it will surely bring disaster for the coalition. Because he is never going to win the election," the source quoted the leader as saying.

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'BNP out to salvage sinking ship'

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League (AL) yesterday termed the ruling BNP's negotiations with Ershad an attempt to keep its sinking ship afloat.

The AL reaction came following Thursday night's meeting between Ershad and BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman and State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil MP said the meeting between the BNP leaders and Ershad is the manifestation of a "last-ditch attempt by a falling government to keep afloat its sinking ship."

"Ershad has not yet given his decision. Let us see what happens... Many events will take place ahead of the elections," Jalil said.

AL presidium member Amir Hossain Amu said after being isolated and rejected by the people, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is "knocking at different doors to salvage her sinking ship."

If Ershad at all joins the ruling alliance, it will not help Khaleda Zia, he said.

Another presidium member Tofail Ahmed does not think Ershad will finally join the four-party alliance as the deposed

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Record \$1.8b export growth

MONJUR MAHMUD

Bangladesh saw a record \$ 1.8 billion export growth raising the total to around \$10.5 billion last fiscal year despite a substantial fall in prices of products in the global market.

"Export had the highest ever surge in fiscal 2005-06, fetching around \$1.8 billion more than in the previous year," said a source in the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

Export earning also exceeded the target of \$10.16 billion last fiscal year and was the highest so far, according to preliminary EPB estimates.

In fiscal 2004-05, the country earned \$8.65 billion from export. However, the government drew flak from exporters for what they

said was setting an ambitious target in the quota free era when Bangladesh's largest export earner readymade garment (RMG) sector was stumbling due to stiff competition with China, India and other rivals. This sector earns about 75 percent of the total export earning.

But safeguard measures against Chinese exports and increased investment helped local entrepreneurs to export more to US and EU markets, exporters explained.

"Safeguard measures imposed by the US against Chinese products until 2008 have contributed to raising Bangladesh's exports there," said Anisul Huq, former president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

Besides, investment in the RMG sector increased substantially

resulting in higher export, he explained.

Local exporters however pointed out that prices of products plummeted substantially in the global market, and they had to sell more goods last fiscal year to get the same amount they earned a year back.

According to an EPB analysis, unit price of Bangladeshi woven products dipped by nearly four per cent while knitwear saw a 1.45 per cent fall.

"Quota phase-out has badly affected the RMG sector, and cutting and manufacturing (CM) charge plummeted by as high as 50 per cent in just one year," said Anisul Huq.

Citing an example, he said factory owners received CM charge

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Media report on land grabbing by Bangladeshis incorrect: India

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India yesterday said the news run by a section of Indian media about Bangladeshi nationals grabbing Indian land was "incorrect".

The news said Bangladesh nationals, backed by Bangladesh army, uprooted boundary pillars along the Indo-Bangladesh border in two districts of Assam grabbing 500 acres of Indian territory.

"The Border Security Force (BSF) is on high alert and no fresh adverse possession or illegal occupation of Indian land has been reported in any section," Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee said in a suo moto statement in the Lok Sabha yesterday.

He said no Indian population or border outpost had been moved from the international border.

The newspaper reports had alleged Bangladeshi nationals

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Announcement

Today's edition of The Daily Star includes a two-page supplement on "Citizens Dialogue on National Election 2007" held in Mymensingh on April 29 on pages 12 & 21.



PHOTO: STAR

Fire at a gas pipeline that cracked during installation of an underground sewerage line by Dhaka Wasa at Segun Bagicha in the capital continued burning for the last seven days, posing risk of a disaster.

Israel mobilises more reservists

Warplanes pound Lebanon as truce calls mount

AFP, Beirut

Israeli planes blasted south Lebanon for a 17th day on Friday while the military mobilised thousands more reservists for the battle that the Jewish state's main backers, the United States and Britain, are to discuss at the White House.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, under pressure over his support for Washington's apparently unequivocal backing for Israel, is to seek a United Nations Security Council resolution "as early as possible next week" to defuse the Middle East conflict, his spokesman said.

The use of a Scottish airport as a staging post for US planes to carry bunker-busting bombs for Israel

brought renewed pressure on Blair, with his Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett saying she was "not happy" about it.

British officials told London newspapers that more stopovers at Prestwick airport for arms deliveries were in the pipeline with government blessing.

"It is a right we have always granted," an official in Blair's office was quoted as saying.

With international pressure mounting for a halt to the fighting, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice -- in Malaysia for an Asian foreign ministers' meeting -- was mulling plans to return to the Middle East.

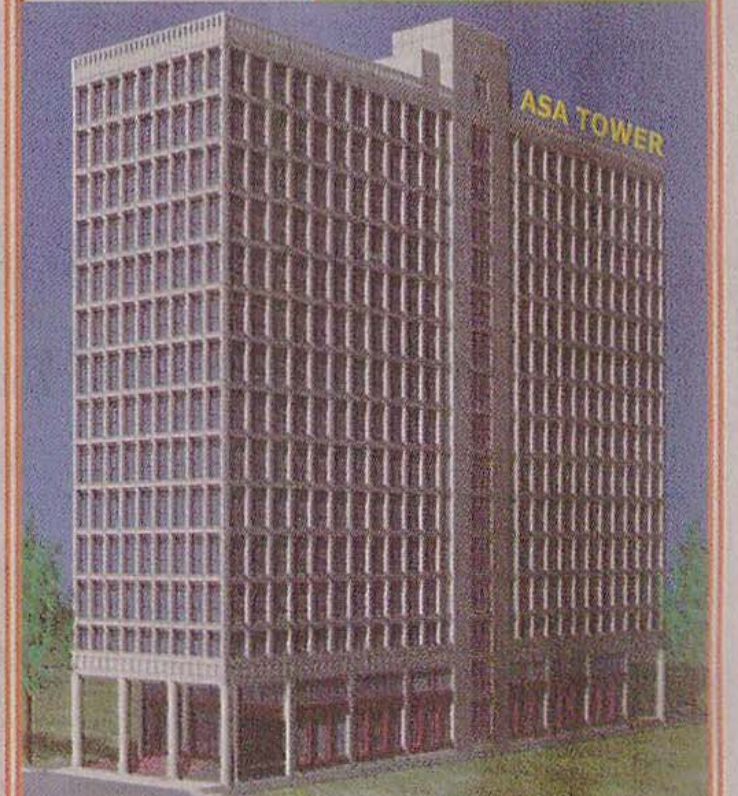
But despite Asian and European

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ASA CENTRAL OFFICE NOW IN ASA TOWER

It is for general information that ASA, the renowned Microfinance Institution (MFI), has shifted its Central Office to its own building 'ASA Tower' at Shyamoli, Dhaka. The Central Office is located in the 13th and 14th floors of the 15 storied building. All are requested to communicate, if necessary to the new address from 29th July 2006.

Old Address	New Address
ASA, Central Office 1/2, Block-A Asad Avenue Road Mohammadpur Dhaka-1207 Bangladesh.	ASA, Central Office ASA Tower (13th and 14th Floors) 23/3, Block-B, Khilji Road Shyamoli, Mohammadpur Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh. Tel: 9116375, 8110934, 8110935 8119828, 8151113 Fax: 88-02-8111175, 9121861 E-mail: asabd@dhaka.net Website: //www.asabd.org



ASA Central Office, ASA Tower, 23/3, Block-B Khilji Road, Shyamoli, Mohammadpur, Dhaka-1207 Bangladesh. Phone: 9116375, 8119828, 8110934, 8110935 Fax: 880-2-9121861, E-mail: asabd@dhaka.net



PHOTO: Q SAKAMAKI

Barefoot workers walk amid scrap scattered at a Sitakunda ship-breaking yard where safety rules are hardly maintained.

Powerful syndicate rules ship-breaking

Death toll rises as scrapping goes on without detoxification

MORSHED ALI KHAN, back from Ctg

The entire ship-breaking sector of Sitakunda in Chittagong, which directly and indirectly involves over a quarter of a million people, is under the grip of a powerful syndicate that blatantly defies environmental, labour and maritime laws.

The syndicate of owners of 20 yard, known as 'the 13 players' is so powerful that they enjoy 'undeclared immunity' from official actions in cases of negligent homicide, flouting labour and maritime laws and polluting the land and sea.

The ship-breaking sector in Sitakunda, that meets 80 per cent of the country's demand for steel, earning the exchequer annual revenue of over Tk 800 crore, has not been recognised by the govern-

ment as an industry. The government does not want to commit itself to a sector riddled with so many anomalies, according to an official source in Chittagong.

There is a strict unofficial embargo on information regarding accidents and human casualties in the ship breaking yards. But it is estimated that over the last three decades, over 1,000 workers have died and over 10,000 others were injured and suffered partial or permanent disabilities in accidents in the yards.

The death toll rises every week due to increasingly hazardous ships arriving to be scrapped without going through proper detoxification, as required by the international maritime laws. Young Power

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