

Govt seems reluctant

FROM PAGE 1
anything officially on the latest developments in the investigation. But speaking of the record, some investigators said they tried to draw out information from the JMB leaders about their foreign links and source of funds and local political patrons, but to no effect.

"They keep saying that they don't have any foreign link or financier. They say ushor (contribution from crop yields) and contribution by members and well-wishers are their main source of funds," said an investigator.

On funding by two British Muslim leaders, the investigators quoted the militant leaders as saying that they had received 10,000 pounds from two Britons thanks to personal contact. They denied having any other foreign links.

Asked what could be the interest of the foreigners in financing the JMB, the investigator replied that the JMB leaders did not say anything on this.

The investigators did not proceed further to dig into the matter.

Although Abdur Rahman had received firearms training in Afghanistan and Pakistan and is believed to have established a network there, the investigators say they did not find anything like that.

"Apart from their having training abroad, which they themselves have admitted, we didn't find anything suggesting they had foreign links," said an investigator.

The newspapers in 2004 carried detailed reports on the militants being sheltered by ruling coalition leaders and lawmakers especially when Rahman and Bangla Bhai were running an open vigilante campaign in the northern region, the investigators then too did not find any existence of political patrons.

But the militant kingpins themselves had threatened in open courts to divulge the names of their political patrons, saying it will "expose their hidden faces".

An investigator said, "They speak so only when they are in public. But they don't say anything of that sort during interrogation."

The investigators so far have succeeded only in extracting information about the militant dens, whereabouts of some leaders and their involvement in some previous attacks.

Besides, they [investigators] could not yet detect the entire JMB network in the country.

"They in fact didn't have any well-organised network. They are good at motivating people to join them and that's how they had recruited people wherever possible," said the investigator.

But the successful operation of synchronised blasts in 63 districts on August 17 last year speaks volumes of the JMB's organisational strength.

In an interview with The Daily Star in May 2004, Rahman and Bangla Bhai themselves had claimed to have over 10,000 fulltime activists, 1 lakh part-timers and innumerable well-wishers across the country. They also said they would then spend up to Tk 7 lakh on them a month.

Road march

FROM PAGE 1
kilometres to reach the Central Shaheed Minar. Chittagong City Corporation Mayor and City AL President ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury inaugurated the march at Wasa Intersection at 4:00 pm and it ended at Old Rail Station at 6:30 pm.

Thousands of 14-party loyalists and general people from different city wards participated in the march followed by a big rally on the Shaheed Minar premises. Mohiuddin Chowdhury chaired it.

The road march in Sylhet also passed off peacefully. About a thousand opposition activists, leaders and supporters joined the march that started from the city's Court Point area, reports our Sylhet correspondent.

The participants walked about seven kilometres to reach North Surma Bus Terminal at Kumargaon and held a rally there with district AL chief ANM Shafique in the chair. AL central leader AMA Muhit, former lawmaker Syeda Zebunnesa Haque and other leaders of the 14-party addressed the rally.

Security was tightened in the areas.

In Khulna, the road march began from Rupsha Ferry Ghat and passed through Moilapota and Shibbari intersections. A rally was held later in front of the AL office.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) leaders Hasanul Huq Inu and Shirin

JMB threat

FROM PAGE 16
vendors, day labourers, rickshaw-pullers and beggars.

A senior official of KMP told The Daily Star that watch teams are keeping vigil and they are tracking movements of people they suspect to be militants and extremists.

Security measures at important places including the railway station and bus stops have been heightened.

The KMP officer also said a special operation is underway to arrest 313 listed extremists, 40-murder suspects, 10 extortionists and eight muggers. Most of them are activists of different political parties and operatives of underground organisations, he added.

"We are also trying to arrest the founder of Purba Banglar Communist Party (BCP) Janajuddha faction. We have information that he came to Khulna recently and held a secret meeting with his cadres at Khalishpur in Khulna city," KMP Commissioner Khan Saeed Hasan said.

Some investigators on condition of anonymity told The Daily Star that apart from these, they have obtained some significant information that cannot be disclosed due to government prohibition. "It is rather safe to say we haven't got any other information," said an investigator.

Meantime, the government and the investigators seem to be the least concerned to probe the activities of other extremist organisations but the government maintains that the intelligence and law enforcement agencies are keeping a constant watch on the militants.

However, there are no instructions from the government for investigation into extremist activities inside the country, even into those of banned HuJI, JMJB and Shahadat-al-Hiqma.

While banning the JMB, JMJB, HuJI and Shahadat-al-Hiqma, the government accused them of carrying out terrorist activities. But the investigators said they have no evidence to suggest that JMJB, HuJI, Shahadat-al-Hiqma or any other organisation are involved in militant activities.

"How can we term an organisation militant or go for rounding up its activists until we have any proof of their involvement?" asked an investigator.

Captured JMB Majlish-e-Shura member Khaled Saifullah, who received training in Afghanistan, was a former leader of the HuJI. But the investigators find it a personal case of Khaled, saying that the JMB did not have any connection with HuJI.

Although several hundred people had received training and fought as Mujahideens against the former Soviet Union forces in Afghanistan and later for Talibans and operated overtly on return to Bangladesh, investigators do not have any list of them or their whereabouts.

The HuJI Bangladesh high command includes Shaikhul Hadith Allama Azizul Haq, also chief of a faction of ruling alliance partner Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish second-in-command Muhammad Habibur Rahman of Sylhet, Ataur Rahman Khan of Kishoreganj, Sultan Jaok of Chittagong, Abdul Mannan of Faridpur and Habibullah of Noakhali.

All of them are associated with different Islamic organisations and madrasas, and one of them, Ataur Rahman Khan, was elected a lawmaker on BNP ticket in 1991 from Kishoreganj-3.

In an interview a few years back, Habibur Rahman disclosed those names, with whom he had travelled to Afghanistan via Pakistan in 1988, visited some Taliban militant camps and met al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Export growth

FROM PAGE 16
dozen pants from US buyers last year but they are now getting \$6 to \$7 for it.

Export volume of woven products rose by 18 per cent but earning from it by 13 per cent while the volume of knitwear export shot up by 36 per cent but earning from it by 34 per cent during July-May period of fiscal 2005-06.

The US remained the single largest destination for Bangladeshi goods fetching around \$3 billion in 2005-06. Around 52 per cent of the total earning came from the EU countries.

Apart from RMG, export of some other items including textile fabrics, home textiles, petroleum byproducts, frozen food, leather and bicycle helped the country earn more last year.

"Backward linkage industries have helped knitwear grow at a faster rate and it will continue to grow for at least a couple of years," said one exporter. "We need to develop our own backward linkage units to add local value and survive in the global market by reducing lead-time."

Moreover, demands for Bangladeshi traditional export items like jute goods and raw jute are again on the rise, and the country earned more than \$500 million from export of those last fiscal year.

Jamaat

FROM PAGE 1
Number of leaders like Kazi Zafar are there (in JP), who could cause an election debacle for the ruling coalition, he added.

Shura members at yesterday's meeting discussed mainly the closed-door talks between Ershad and Tarique Rahman. They grumbled that the BNP high command did not have any discussion with Jamaat about the move to have JP on board.

Blasting BNP's policy on Ershad, they said no one trusts Ershad. Besides, Jamaat is stronger than JP in Sylhet and Mymensingh region and even in greater Rangpur including Gaibandha and Dinajpur. So, if JP joins the coalition it could spell disaster for four-party alliance in the next election, they noted.

Ruhul Amin Hawlader, general secretary of JP, told The Daily Star yesterday, "It is simply not possible for a party to win election without JP and we believe that our party is more popular than Jamaat, though they do have a strong organisation."

"Our joining the ruling coalition is now only a matter of time," he said.

"The prime minister will take the final decision. I think Jamaat has nothing to fear," Kazi Firoj Rashid, senior leader and political secretary of Ershad, told The Daily Star.

Export growth

FROM PAGE 16
dozen pants from US buyers last year but they are now getting \$6 to \$7 for it.

Export volume of woven products rose by 18 per cent but earning from it by 13 per cent while the volume of knitwear export shot up by 36 per cent but earning from it by 34 per cent during July-May period of fiscal 2005-06.

The US remained the single largest destination for Bangladeshi goods fetching around \$3 billion in 2005-06. Around 52 per cent of the total earning came from the EU countries.

Apart from RMG, export of some other items including textile fabrics, home textiles, petroleum byproducts, frozen food, leather and bicycle helped the country earn more last year.

"Backward linkage industries have helped knitwear grow at a faster rate and it will continue to grow for at least a couple of years," said one exporter. "We need to develop our own backward linkage units to add local value and survive in the global market by reducing lead-time."

Moreover, demands for Bangladeshi traditional export items like jute goods and raw jute are again on the rise, and the country earned more than \$500 million from export of those last fiscal year.

Jamaat

FROM PAGE 1
Number of leaders like Kazi Zafar are there (in JP), who could cause an election debacle for the ruling coalition, he added.

Shura members at yesterday's meeting discussed mainly the closed-door talks between Ershad and Tarique Rahman. They grumbled that the BNP high command did not have any discussion with Jamaat about the move to have JP on board.

Blasting BNP's policy on Ershad, they said no one trusts Ershad. Besides, Jamaat is stronger than JP in Sylhet and Mymensingh region and even in greater Rangpur including Gaibandha and Dinajpur. So, if JP joins the coalition it could spell disaster for four-party alliance in the next election, they noted.

Ruhul Amin Hawlader, general secretary of JP, told The Daily Star yesterday, "It is simply not possible for a party to win election without JP and we believe that our party is more popular than Jamaat, though they do have a strong organisation."

"Our joining the ruling coalition is now only a matter of time," he said.

"The prime minister will take the final decision. I think Jamaat has nothing to fear," Kazi Firoj Rashid, senior leader and political secretary of Ershad, told The Daily Star.

ARF

FROM PAGE 16
chairman. It stressed the urgency of ceasefire in the Middle East. The statement dealt with the Korean nuclear situation, welcoming the convening of inter-Korean talks.

The ARF welcomed the continued engagement of Asean with Myanmar, calling for the lifting of restrictions and effective dialogue with all parties. Other matters dealt with in the meeting included the Iraq situation, terrorism and maritime security.

Earlier, at a breakfast meeting on the Middle East crisis, convened by the foreign minister of Malaysia, Morshed strongly condemned the Israeli aggression and the killing of innocent civilians. He called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire followed by dialogue to resolve the crisis.

He stressed the need for ensuring access for humanitarian assistance to the affected areas. He also condemned the killing of unarmed UN observers.

Apart from Bangladesh and Malaysia, the meeting was attended by foreign ministers of Indonesia and Pakistan. The Iranian foreign minister also attended on a special invitation.

The ministers issued a strong statement condemning Israeli action and called for immediate ceasefire.

On the sidelines, Morshed held a separate meeting with his Chinese counterpart and discussed bilateral and other issues of mutual concern.

The Chinese foreign minister thanked Bangladesh for her initiative for granting Saarc observer status to China.

Morshed also held a meeting with the foreign minister of the Philippines.

GM Quader

FROM PAGE 1
join the alliance.

Quader said the ruling BNP is putting pressure on Ershad to join the four-party alliance. "Such pressure is unethical," said Quader, also the younger brother of Ershad.

He said they want all cases against Ershad to be withdrawn so that he could do politics in a free environment.

When asked, Quader said the majority MPs of the JP have conveyed their message to Ershad, saying that they want to join the opposition alliance.

Medical board

FROM PAGE 16
According to the advice of the physicians, he returned to the Bangabhaban on June 24.

President Iajuddin was flown to Singapore on May 24 and had a successful cardiac surgery at Mount Elizabeth Hospital on May 26.

Powerful syndicate

FROM PAGE 1
In Social Action (YPSA), the only NGO working for the rights of the workers in the ship-breaking yards, in a survey revealed that on an average, one worker dies every week and another is injured every day at the scrapyards.

According to official sources, almost all the hazardous vessels, particularly oil tankers arriving at Chittagong port, contain highly hazardous substances and hidden gas chambers. It is very common to find the dying vessels laden with asbestos, oil sludge, lead, cadmium, arsenic, biocides and even radioactive substances.

It is the duty of the Department of Explosives inspectors to examine each ship and issue a certificate called 'Safe for Man Entry'. But sources in Chittagong said the owners have their own way of obtaining these certificates through 'package deals'.

Shamsul Alam, inspector of explosives Chittagong circle, denied allegations of package deals and said there was no way of overlooking deadly gases. When asked how two workers, Foreman Jahangir and Cutter Kalam, were asphyxiated to death on July 12 after entering a compartment of the MT Liano, certified and beached for scrapping at the yard of Intraport Marine Limited, the inspector showed the certificate, which clearly said that the particular compartment where the two workers died was 'not safe for heat work'. The certificate was only valid until the ship was beached.

"We issued the beaching permission but it was the responsibility of the owners to have the vessel inspected again by us. They simply ignored our certificate and let the workers inside," said Shamsul Alam.

Zafar Alam, president of the Bangladesh Ship Breakers Association, blamed the government for the 'undesirable situation' in the ship-scrapping sector and said they have to operate under extreme odds.

"We have now and again asked the government to help us build infrastructure but nothing has happened, we have no recognition or guarantee of labour, even we had to buy the land for the access roads into our yards, we enjoy no tax-holidays or any other support from the state," Zafar Alam said.

Alam alleged the International Labour Organisation and the Ministry of Labour and Employment were recently given Tk 8 crore by UNDP to train labourers and to create awareness among them.

"We wanted them to spend the money on training, development of sanitation, building a hospital, buying ambulances and installation of tube-wells but they never bothered to listen to us. Instead, they spent more than Tk 4 crore on consultancy, foreign trips, well-furnished offices, vehicles and conferences in expensive hotels," Alam added.

According to sources close to the ship-scrapping trade, the 'industry' has grown 'without any policy or monitoring' simply as per the wishes of the owners. Annually, over 150 ocean-going vessels, weighing between 10,000 to 500,000 tons are brought to Chittagong for scrapping.

In addition to a vast array of other items, up to 1.8 million tons of steel are retrieved from these ships annually, providing instant raw materials for re-rolling industries, small ship building and for the booming construction sector.

In the most painstaking process of dismantling a huge ship piece by piece, around 35,000 mostly unskilled labourers toil day and night with bare hands in the most rudimentary way, where safety measures for them are virtually non-existent.

The most blatant defiance of the law in the 20 ship-breaking yards over an area of 10 kilometres along the Bay of Bengal, takes place with these labourers. None of the yards maintain any registration of labour and owners decline to accept liabilities over their injuries or deaths.

Labourers from Barisal, Bogra, Rangpur, Magura, Jamalpur, Gaibandha and other impoverished districts of the country work in the yards, sharing cramped accommodations in the neighbourhood.

In most cases, they have no access to potable water, sanitations or medical facilities.

Interestingly, the yard owners never have any formal contracts with the labourers. Any attempt to form a Trade Union is dealt with harshly. For instance, in 1998 some workers went on a strike after forming a Trade Union under the banner of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal. But the owners and middlemen in the area ruthlessly quelled the movement by beating up the leaders and filing false cases against them. According to sources, the owners are happy to readily find influential local middlemen known as contractors

Schoolboys

FROM PAGE 16
reacted strongly at the ARO's actions since the students involved are missing their classes and they are not even updating the voter list properly by going door-to-door.

Jessore district election officer has been informed of these irregularities by the ARO.

DU student

FROM PAGE 16
around 6:00am and recovered the body, which was hanging with a scarf tied to an iron pipeline of the bathroom on the 3rd floor.

Khadiza had a very brilliant academic background with positions in the SSC and HSC merit lists under the Rajshahi Board, hall authorities said.

After autopsy, the body was sent to her parental home yesterday.

controlling the labour markets.

"The yard manager calls up one of the contractors and tells him what has to be done. The contractor, in turn, fixes a price with the manager and gets the required number of labourers to do the job for about Tk 10 an hour," said a clerk at a yard, requesting anonymity. He added that in the whole process of labour recruitment there are no liabilities whatsoever on the part of the owners.

According to insiders, when a fatal accident occurs, the first job for the officials is to take all measures to suppress the information. The local police station files an unnatural death (UD) case, as in the case of other accidental deaths or suicides. The thana nirbahi officer (TNO), who also enjoys magistracy power by right of his position, readily issues a certificate exempting the body from post mortem. The body is then sent to the family somewhere in the north of the country on a rooftop of a bus accompanied by one or two fellow labourers living in the same region. The family receives a meagre handout of cash ranging between Tk 5,000 and Tk 10,000 and the body of their loved one.

The yards remain totally off limits to journalists or NGO workers and thus information on accidents inside the compounds is never made available to the outside world. For instance, this correspondent was denied entrance to six ship-scrapping yards before he was allowed in by one of the yards.

According to a local journalist, news of a fatal accident that involves one or two workers' death hardly ever reaches the outside world.

The owners of the ship scrapping yards are in trouble when news of accidents is leaked to the press. Public pressure compels the owner to compensate the victims properly. The president of the Bangladesh Ship Breakers Association claimed ship breakers always paid the victim's family more than anyone else did.

"The labour law requires the owners to pay the victim's family Tk 30,000 but we pay Tk 100,000," said the president.

Zhantu Kumar Mazumder, field organiser of the YPSA, said the most difficult part of his work is to get information from the yards.

Faced with such difficult situation YPSA has formed three watch forums in Sitakunda area. In the three forums local journalists, students and selected members of the society have been incorporated separately. Some ship-breaking workers were also included in the forums.

"We are already benefiting from the forums, the members are actively helping us in getting information on accidents and also building pressure on the employers for medical facilities and compensation," Zhantu said.

But the members of the forums and journalists in Chittagong were baffled recently when a worker at the Harun Steel reported to the forum he had witnessed two charred bodies inside a ship around midnight on July 6.

Since July 6, members of the watch forums, journalists and YPSA officials frantically tried to find out the identities of the two ill-fated workers. It was not until July 15 that a local Bangla daily, Dainik Azadi, reported about the alleged deaths of the two men on July 6. The two workers were identified as Mohammad Malek, 32, and Mohammad Mizan, 28, but none could say where the bodies were sent.

One arrested

FROM PAGE 16
The housewife did not allow her to go to toilet as she would need since she has been working at the house for two months, the minor girl said, adding, "Finding no other way, I defecated outside the toilet."

Chameli used to beat her now and then for mistakes, she said.

Doctors said Salma would take at least three weeks to heal the wounds.

Hafizur Rahman told police that he knew nothing about yesterday's incident while police said he was at home when the incident took place.

Hafizur, however, admitted that the housewife used to 'correct' the domestic help when she committed faults.

Security talks

FROM PAGE 16
Security Council and made it public," North Korean delegation spokesman Chung Sung-Ill said.

"Unless the United States lifts its sanctions on us, we will never, ever attend the six-party talks or other types of talks involving the six nations," he said.

North Korea said it was also considering withdrawing from the Asean Regional Forum, one of the few diplomatic gatherings it attends.

Asian nations tried to salvage something from the negotiations, saying that the 10-way talks were a one-off and that the six-party discussions should continue.

China, which was angered when close ally Pyongyang's ignored its appeals to halt the missile tests, called for all sides to "increase contact" to breathe life back into the process.

Chinese Foreign Minister Li Xiaoxing met his North Korean counterpart Paek Nam-Sun on Friday and later told reporters that the North was "willing to go back to the six-party talks but had conditions."

"We met for over an hour. We had discussions on a wide range of topics. The content was rich," he said, adding that Paek had agreed on a need to continue the talks.

Japanese Foreign Minister Tarō Aso said, "China told us he (Li) tried to bring Paek to the meeting of 10 nations to the last minute."

BNP programme

FROM PAGE 16
across the country.

The opposition's six-day march, which started on July 25, aims to mobilise people in the street agitation to force the BNP-Jamaat coalition government bring reforms in the caretaker government and in the election commission (EC).

Secretary General of BNP Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan called upon the leaders and activists of the party and its front organisations "to make the programmes successful", a press release issued on Thursday said.

Biman

FROM PAGE 16
League rule, the New York flight used to operate on Dhaka-Delhi-Brussels-New York route incurring a loss of Tk 50 lakh per flight. Mir Nasir, former state minister for tourism and civil aviation, rerouted the flight through Dubai instead of Delhi and as a result Biman's operational loss on this route came down to Tk 22 lakh per flight but increases in the price of jet fuel raised the loss to Tk 35 lakh in April. The loss currently stands at Tk 52 lakh per flight.

Three-decade old DC-10s in Biman's 13-strong fleet, which usually operate on Dhaka-New York route, were grounded at least thrice in the last six months in Brussels and New York for various mechanical faults. Late last year, the US Federal Aviation did not allow a Biman aircraft to depart from John F Kennedy Airport without fixing 17 faults found in it.

Sinking ship

FROM PAGE 1
a difficult time.

"Let's see what decision he [Ershad] takes once the caretaker government takes over," he said.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil MP said the meeting between Ershad and BNP leaders 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.

Terming Ershad as 'unfaithful and political rubbish', Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President (JSD) Hasanul Huq Inu said Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's current effort is "a last try at keeping afloat the ship that has already developed a crack."

"It has also proved Khaleda Zia has become weak in the face of the 14-party combine's movement. She wants to face the election by forming alliance with Ershad," Inu said adding, "But it won't be possible for her to win the elections by taking Ershad into her alliance."

Khaleda's hobnobbing with Ershad also proves that she can no longer trust Jamaat-e-Islami, her main partner in the government, the JSD president said.

Saifur

FROM PAGE 1
spending of earlier fund before allocation of fresh fund.

Referring to his earlier refusal to allocate fresh funds, he said he wanted to know what happened to the previous fund as the EC authorities had sought huge sum of money further.

"We believe in democracy and without going to election, there will be no democracy. Money will be given to hold the next election," he said.

He, however, said the spending of Tk 42 crore out of Tk 64 crore allocated in favour of the EC will be scrutinised by the comptroller and auditor general (CAG) in the light of the High Court verdict.

The finance minister left Dhaka for Tehran on July 23 to attend the meeting of Bangladesh-Iran Joint Economic Commission held on July 24-25.

Pointing to the outcome of the meeting, Saifur said Iran has agreed to export crude oil to Bangladesh on deferred payment for three months time.

Bangladesh and Iran agreed to enhance collaboration in all designated sectors of cooperation, including trade, investment, fisheries, railways, information technology and tourism, the minister said.

"We have signed Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) which will help increase the bilateral trade," he said, adding that the bilateral trade between the two countries is now US\$ 70 million.

He said the volume of trade is very little although it remains overwhelmingly in favour of Bangladesh. He hoped that the PTA would help grow the bilateral trade to US\$ 200 million.

The finance minister said Iran has shown its keen interest to extend its technical support for power, petroleum, construction and pharmaceuticals sectors.

Iran also offered BMRE of the Eastern Oil Refinery in Chittagong and would like to set up another oil refinery plant in Bangladesh, he said.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed to encourage cooperation in the field of tourism between Bangladesh and Iran.