

Questions left unsolved

FROM PAGE 1
reiterating what they said a year ago—that "significant progress" has been achieved in the investigation.

Ruhul Amin, special superintendent of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police, who is supervising the investigation, claimed a year ago that they were about to complete the investigation and would submit the charge sheet soon.

"We are waiting for a little more information before submitting the charge sheet," he told The Daily Star yesterday but failed to specify the time.

Twenty people were arrested after the attack but 17 of them have been released as the allegation against them had "no merit". The rest three gave statements admitting to their involvement in the attack.

The investigation has so far revolved around the confessional statement of Joz Mia arrested at this village home in Birkot of Senbagh, Noakhali on June 10 last year.

Those he named in his statement as involved in the attack left the country long ago. Khandakar Tanveer Islam Joy, Mokbul Hossain alias Mukul, Mollah Masud, Robin, Shafiqul Islam, Zahidur Rahman and Jisan had been hiding in India since long before the attack took place.

"We have some evidence at our hands now, including the confessional statements and some names as disclosed by the three arrestees. We will have to collect some more evidence to ensure punishment to the accused," said Ruhul Amin.

The investigators seem to wait for these top criminals to return from India as the government is yet to take any initiative to bring home the prime accused including Joy and Mukul.

The government has admitted that it will not be possible to bring to book the culprits before the ruling coalition's term ends.

The investigators said the case will be resolved once they can arrest these absconding criminals. State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar yesterday said he has instructed the law enforcers to prevent the top criminals who have been hiding across the border from slipping into Bangladesh.

QUESTIONS UNANSWERED

The investigators are alleged not to have collected the evidences, including the unexploded grenades, which were vital for the investigation.

Explosive experts of the army detonated two unexploded grenades—one found near the spot and another at the adjacent Gulistan Hawkers' Market—in the dead of night without taking the fingerprints on them. They carried out a similar detonation of another grenade recovered from the Dhaka Central Jail a day after the attack.

Ruhul Amin told The Daily Star yesterday, "We have come to know

that members of Joy's gang attempted to supply the grenade to their men inside the jail. Perhaps they planned to use it when they would appear before the court."

The government, however, never disclosed the information in the past two years.

The Supreme Court Bar Association, which conducted an inquiry into the attack, also blamed the government for destroying evidences.

The mystery behind the quick burial of two unidentified victims on August 22 night has not been resolved.

Although unclaimed bodies are supposed to be kept at the mortuary at least for 72 hours for identification, the police took the bodies away and buried those after a hurried autopsy. The investigators failed to justify the quick burial without identification.

Sources said at least one of the two was a primary suspect.

"We have succeeded to identify one of these two," the CID officer said yesterday but declined to disclose it.

It could not be learnt whether the government took any step in the last two years regarding the law enforcers' failure to ensure security at the AL rally.

According to the controversial confessional statement of Joz Mia, 20-21 people carried out the grenade attacks. But the law enforcers and intelligence agencies failed to capture any of them.

The investigators said grenades are smuggled into the country through several channels. But they have failed to track down who brought in the grenades used for the attack.

Meanwhile, the government one-member judicial inquiry commission of Justice Joynul Abedin linked a foreign enemy with the attack but its report was not made public.

The government is yet to declare whether there were any recommendations in the report and, if any, whether they were implemented.

The judicial inquiry commission claimed to have identified the perpetrators but its head declined to disclose their identity, hinting at the link of foreign enemies apart from the local ones.

"The incident is a naked attack on the independence and sovereignty of the country," Justice Joynul Abedin had told reporters.

Asked if the government will publish the report, Babar said yesterday, "It is not possible for me alone to decide on it. It is a matter of [political] decision."

The minister also opposed the judicial commission's findings about foreign links, saying, "It is difficult to say right at this moment."

Baffled, they gave up

FROM PAGE 1
Afaz Uddin lost his daughter and lone bread earner, Asma could not go back to her husband's house due to loss of her father Hanif Miah who had promised his son-in-law a job as a dowy, and many others are still agonising for the loss of their beloved ones.

Many of the survivors became crippled, lost one or multiple organs or living with splinter wounds. They still shiver in horror remembering the gruesome moments they underwent.

"I barely make my living with my two daughters," sighed Rasheda Akhter Ruma who has to walk on crutches.

Her husband died of cardiac arrest, followed by her two and a half-year-old son, leaving her alone with all the burdens in this harsh world.

Daulatun Nahar, being crippled, lost her teaching job, while her husband was fired from an NGO school as it was exposed that she was involved in a party work and injured in an attack on a political programme.

"I can neither walk much, nor lie on bed, not even sit comfortably for long due to the splinters lodged in my body," said Rumi Islam, recalling the horrendous, bloody incident. She took treatment at home and abroad but physicians failed to remove the splinters from the body.

And such are the cases of Asma Zerim Jhumi, Morshed Kamal, Beauty Nizam, Ratna Akhter Baby and around 200 leaders and activists of Awami League and its front organisations.

"It was a moment of standing between life and death," said city AL leader Morshed Kamal. "Bombs were hurled all around us, but we could not move due to the rush and stampede ... as he waiting to see the end of life," he said.

There are even those who were injured in the stampede after the blasts. Amena suffered badly for quite a long time as 'numerous people' stepped over her body, in the chaos.

On the eve of the second anniversary of the deadly grenade attack in the country that took away 24 lives, Morsheda Mridha was found crying in front of the Patuakhali grave of her only son Mamun, a college student, reports

Local govt bodies

FROM PAGE 16
signatures, Rahima Akhter of Araihaazar UP under Raiganj upazila said.

Selima Begum of Madaripur Paurashava suggested ensuring the women members' attendance in the monthly coordination meeting at the upazila level so that they know the decisions taken.

Speaking as the chief guest at the inaugural session, Speaker of Parliament Jamiruddin Sircar said the women MPs should go to the women members of the local governments, exchange their views and strengthen relationship that will gradually create awareness of their rights to play their due role.

Emphasising decision making capacity of women public representatives, he said one parliamentary seat from each of the 64 districts could be reserved for the women candidates to increase their participation in the direct electoral process.

Jahanara Begum MP said women MPs' meeting with the women members of local councils and listening to their problems may help formulate laws in parliament. Regular meetings with the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs can also help overcome their problems, she said.

Helen Jerin Khan MP and Shirin Jahan, a ward commissioner of Dhaka City Corporation, presented two keynote papers on the relationship between the women MPs and women members of local government institutions, while Sarwari Rahman MP, leader of the Parliamentary Caucus on Gender, chaired the session.

Shahidul Haque Jamal MP, Parliament Secretary ATM Aatur Rahman, Assistant Resident Representative of UNDP Nojibur Rahman, Project Implementation Specialist of SPD Prof ATM Obaidullah also spoke.

Ex-speaker

FROM PAGE 16
constituencies in the 2001 parliamentary elections after he gave ultimatum to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, still hopes to stand in the next parliamentary elections from either of the two constituencies.

Shahjahan

FROM PAGE 1
Indoor Stadium pool.

He, however, turned slow in the last hurdle allowing India's Sandeep Sejwal to win the gold in 1.07.73s.

Shahjahan, who clocked 1.07.99s in the heats, finished the final with a timing of 1.08.08s to win the second silver for Bangladesh in the regional Olympic extravaganza.

His compatriot Niaz Ali finished third to win his second bronze in successive days. Niaz, who clinched the 200m breaststroke bronze on Saturday, finished the 100m in 1.10.34s.

"I started at BKSP in 1997 as a freestyle swimmer but changed to breaststroke in 2000," said Shahjahan.

The two-time 50m breaststroke national champion complained after the event that they have failed to improve personal timings because of the lack of minimum modern facilities like gym equipments.

"India and Sri Lanka get much more facilities than us but the result shows that we are not far behind in competition. If we had better facilities, we could have done better," said the boy from Chapainawabganj.

"We hope to do better in the short distance events and I am confident I will win gold in the 50m," he added.

Nazrul Islam won bronze in men's 50m freestyle while Sabura Khatun finished fifth among six swimmers in the women's 800m freestyle. Munmun Ahmed had the worst performance on the day, becoming last amongst seven competitors in the men's 200m backstroke. The women's 4x100m relay team (Sabura, Dolly, Mahfuza, Afsana) finished fourth among five teams.

Mizanur Rahman was the other Bangladeshi to win a bronze in weightlifting (77kg).

Graft case

FROM PAGE 16
from the City Bank Limited in the name of a fake company AM Traders. Later, he with the connivance of others misappropriated all the money taken from the bank.

An official of the defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) filed a graft case against Zakaria and four others on June 2, 1999. The IO pressed charges against Zakaria and five others on March 15 this year.

The IO also prayed for order of attachment of their moveable properties yesterday.

Two accused Ahmed Fuad Chowdhury and Mohammad Shafiqul Alam are on bail and they were present in the court yesterday.

Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Abdullah Mahmud Hassan appeared for the state while Advocate Sayeed Ahmed Gazi defended the accused.

Rush for record govt

FROM PAGE 1
to the tender. It found that BTBT had pushed out ZTE from the tender process giving it penalty points for lapses in its offer but at the same time, BTBT had not penalised Huawei for having the same lapses.

The review panel in its decision in last July said, "re-tender should be called after making specifications more correctly and clearly. Penalty points should be shown against each item where applicable."

The second telecoms ministry deal is the Tk 99 crore supply of 185 units of radio link for BTBT's rural network, to be awarded to another Chinese company China National Machinery & Equipment Import & Export Corporation (CMEC).

However, documents reveal that the original bid sought 220 units of radio link. CMEC became the lowest bidder but its price was 2.5 times higher than BTBT's budget. On April 28, 2004 BTBT decided to re-tender the project. But that never took place.

Instead, on June 13, 2006, the Chinese vendor directly persuaded the telecoms ministry and BTBT retracted the re-tender. Then BTBT doubled the budget but reduced the total number of radio links to 185 units. The move will make BTBT pay far higher price for a lesser number of equipment.

The third telecoms deal is again set to go to Huawei. All the tender bids for this Tk 26 crore project to supply four units of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) platforms to BTBT were found technically unresponsive by another review panel of the government. On July 24 last, the review committee gave its decision asking to re-tender the project. But the telecoms ministry brushed aside the verdict and forwarded Huawei's proposal to the cabinet committee.

CWASA'S FAULTY DEAL

Another government review panel on July 31 contradicted the LGRD ministry's Tk 64 crore proposal to award a contract to local DCL & Associates for setting up a water treatment plant under Chittagong Wasa. Earlier in March, the Cabinet Purchase Committee also smelt a rat in this deal and rejected it.

The review panel detected gross irregularities in the tender, which was set to award the contract to a bidder quoting a suspiciously low price of Tk 64 crore which is Tk 30 crore lower than the second and third lowest offers.

The review panel of the planning ministry concluded that if the contract is awarded to the so-called lowest bidder, the purpose of the tender will not be properly served. It asked the authorities to negotiate with the second lowest bidder.

Earlier in March, following the purchase committee's rejection, a three-member probe committee was set up with the LGRD secretary as its head. This committee also filed its report in July. Interestingly, the secretary recommended awarding the job to DCL & Associates, while the other two members a Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology professor, and the director general of Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) strongly opposed it.

ADOZEN LAND DEALS
Of a dozen land deals worth Tk 222 crore, 10 schemes involve land development for Uttara Third Phase Residential Town Project at a cost of around Tk 100 crore. Sources said a vested interest group bagged the deals but they are not doing the jobs. Instead, these contractors subcontracted the jobs to third parties at much lower costs.

The eleventh land deal is the Tk 18 crore development work for Purbachal New Town scheme. The twelfth deal is land development at a hefty cost of Tk 104 crore for Jhilmil Residential Project. Three years ago, when the housing ministry floated tender for this job, it attached a condition that the bidder must own a dredger to qualify. The idea was to use the dredger to collect soil from the river near the project for land filling.

Sources said the condition was imposed to award the contract to a particular party as it is not the concern of the authorities how a contractor supplies soil to fill up low lying lands.

Two years back, one bidder was selected to do this job at the rate of Tk 107 for per cubic metre of land development. However this bidder could not use the dredger.

Now the authorities have lifted the condition of using the dredger and

Moyeenuddin, who was the vice-president of Sector10 Welfare Society, restricted plying of trucks from Ashulia to Uttara through the streets of Sector 10, which infuriated some truck owners, said caretaker of the house Raibul Islam.

Following the move, criminals from nearby Rana Bhola area came to his house over a month back and threatened him of dire consequences, he said, adding that a jhut trader of the area was also angry with him as he restricted such business in the residential area.

Unknown criminals slaughtered security guard Mujibur Rahman, 40, sometime between 12:30am to 4:00am yesterday when he was alone in his room at a house on Babar Road in Mohammadpur.

Police recovered the body in the morning.

increased the cost of per cubic metre land filling to Tk 137 from Tk 107, increasing the project cost by Tk 24 crore.

BARAPUKURIA POWER PROJECT

The power ministry proposed a Tk 11 crore deal for one year service from experts of the Chinese company CMEC at the 250 mw coal fired power project in Barapukuria.

Sources said the government already spent nearly 2 million dollars to train its own manpower to run the plant. CMEC's contractual term expired and its experts should have left the country by now. However, sources said the experts are continuing to work at the plant without any approval from higher authorities. The power ministry's proposal is aimed at legitimising the experts' over-stay and the unnecessary payments made to them, while the plant is under-performing and running behind schedule.

The power project was built at a cost of nearly 260 million dollars under supplier's credit costing over 100 million dollars more than other projects of similar size. A brother of an influential parliamentarian of the ruling BNP is the beneficiary of all components of this project as the local agent of many Chinese companies involved there.

OTHER DEALS

Other deals to be tabled today include a Tk 185 crore procurement of 1,00,000 tons of fertiliser, settlement of Tk 30 crore extra financial claims by the contractor of Pakshi Bridge, setting up of the National Institute of Neuro-science at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka at a cost of Tk 37 crore, and Tk 6 crore appointment of a supervision consultant for the Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover.

MRP-NID

The home ministry's Tk 1561 crore proposal for procuring machine-readable passports (MRP), visas and national identity cards (NID) from a German company G&D might also be tabled today. This proposal was rejected on July 17 and the home ministry was asked to re-tender it and to drop the costly NID component from the re-tendering.

But a powerful group — eager to draw commission from G&D by getting the project approved using their influence — succeeded in reviving it through the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). The PMO asked the finance minister to approve the scheme.

The home ministry's proposal says that in the first year of the five-year programme, three million MRPs will be issued. During this phase, the contractor will provide necessary hardware, software, local and foreign manpower, and consumables to the immigration and passport department.

The home ministry adds that the new passports and ID cards will increase acceptability of Bangladeshi passports internationally, which will eventually increase overseas employment, help implementation of the government's national security policy, boost direct revenue earnings, and resolve international pressure on Bangladesh on introduction of such passports etc.

Bangladesh has an international obligation to introduce MRP by 2007. But there is no obligation for the NID scheme. In addition, there is no approval of the prime minister to set up a national registration department which will issue NIDs. In addition, the law required for the NID implementation has yet to be framed.

DAPDAPRI BRIDGE

The purchase committee earlier rejected the Tk 139 crore Dapdapri Bridge project on the Barisal-Patuakhali Road. The purchase committee asked the communications ministry to form a committee to find out why the tendering authorities had selected the second lowest bidder for the construction.

The ministry argued that since the lowest bidder's offer was 30 per cent lower than the estimated project cost and the second lowest bidder's offer was 22 per cent lower, it assumed that lower price offer implies lower quality of work and that is why it picked the second lowest bidder.

Over the next 15 years, an increased size of the population, greater urbanisation and economic growth will present environmental challenges such as increased levels of soil degradation and industrial wastewater, a rise in domestic sewage and hazardous wastes, and a depletion of our water and coastal resources. Increased levels of air and water pollution and the loss of natural habitats — primarily due to deforestation — will also be some of potential negative environmental consequences of Bangladesh's growth over the coming years.

A strategy for better management of our environment will have to be based on collaborative efforts by a determined government, conscious citizens and responsible businesses. All these and many more relevant issues will be deliberated and consulted upon at today's session, says CPD press release.

The outline of the Vision 2021 for Bangladesh has been drafted on the basis of recommendations and aspirations propagated by a large number of people attending the regional civil society dialogues at various places of Bangladesh, which are being organised collaboratively by Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), the Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and Channel-i. The Nagorik Committee 2006 is now going through a process of consultation with expert groups about the draft outline.

The Vision 2021 for Bangladesh will eventually be presented to the next elected government and parliament with a more detailed description of short and medium term strategies.

Meanwhile, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) yesterday staged demonstrations in the capital to protest the August 21 attack. CPB leaders and workers held a rally in front of the party central office where the speakers denounced the government for its failure to bring the culprits to justice.

US congressmen

FROM PAGE 16
This was a high-level reaction from the US side on the eve of second anniversary of the deadly attack on AL rally, which was an attempt to assassinate AL chief Sheikh Hasina and other senior party leaders.

"Despite assurances of a proper investigation of the attack, evidence was not properly preserved and individuals with no connection to the crime were brought forward as false suspects and ultimately released," they said.

They further observed that those responsible appear to have gotten away with impunity.

"Besides, assistance provided at the request of your (Khaleda Zia) government by the United States and other nations was not utilised fully to investigate the attack," the letter said.

The attack subsequently escalated political violence in Bangladesh in both quantity and severity that included killing of former finance minister and AL leader Shah AMS Kibria, emergence of Islamic radical groups, the first suicide bomb attacks in the history of Bangladesh, along with 469 simultaneous bombings across the country in last August, the congressmen said.

Failure of the investigation is symbolic of a serious diminution of rule of law in Bangladesh and it has emboldened lawlessness and allowed Islamic extremist elements to gain ground in Bangladesh, they added.

They also expressed concern over the impact of the failure of the investigation into the attack on the next general elections in Bangladesh.

"With the national election in less than six months and the failure to apprehend suspects and mete out justice in this high profile attack on the head of the opposition party, send a discouraging message to voters for the potential of intimidation and violence in the run up to the election."

The signatories of the letter are Joseph Crowley, Charles Gonzalez, Aleece Hastings, Frank Pallone, Diane E. Watson, Eliot L. Engel, Robert Wexler, GK Butterfield, Corinne Brown, Janice D Schakowsky, Michael Capuano, Barney Frank, Brian Higgins, Sherrod Brown, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Kendrick B Meek, Anthony D Weiner and Al Green.

Voter list updating

FROM PAGE 1
allegations against allowing under-age people to apply have been made in many areas.

The field-level staff starts compiling the information received in applications from today. They are supposed to complete the compilation by August 26.

After that the updated list would be kept on display for public inspection for three days.

HC rule on govt

FROM PAGE 1
remaining seats," the petitioner stated, pointing out a discrepancy here with regard to spending for the elections.

He said the candidate can spend maximum Tk 5 lakh for one constituency. But when one contests from five seats at a time in that case there is no prescribed law regarding the expenditure against these seats. "This has created an inconsistency,"

Mohammad Ali moved the writ petition.

HuJi comeback

FROM PAGE 1
need to examine the reality and the whole situation," Babar told reporters at his office yesterday.

Asked whether the government has any information on more militant organisations' launching political programmes, the state minister said, "There is no scope for any militant organisation to hold political activities."

7th Expert Group

FROM PAGE 16
to have a skilled and a creative workforce; and to become a globally integrated economic and commercial regional hub.

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Lebanon truce

FROM PAGE 1
into the area by helicopter, was defensive and designed to disrupt weapons supplies to Hezbollah from Syria and Iran.

It denied it had violated the UN truce resolution, which allows it to act in self-defense, and accused Hezbollah of a breach of the ceasefire by smuggling weapons.

One Israeli soldier was killed and two wounded when the commandos clashed with Hezbollah guerrillas near the village of Bodai, 26km from the Syrian border.

Hezbollah denied it had suffered any casualties after security sources in Lebanon said three guerrillas were killed.

The Lebanese government vowed to crush any attempt on the Lebanese side of the border to break the truce, saying anyone attacking Israel would be considered a traitor.

"The army will be very tough in dealing with such an issue," Lebanese Defense Minister Elias al-Murr told a news conference.

"Any rocket fired from Lebanon will benefit Israel," he said, suggesting such an incident would provide a pretext for the Jewish state to attack Lebanon.

The minister said he was confident Hezbollah would stick to the truce and not try to rearm.

Murr said the army now controlled the entire border with Syria and would crack down on arms shipments. "There is no flexibility on arms smuggling," he said.

Israeli reconnaissance planes flew over Lebanon on Sunday. Witnesses and Lebanese security sources said high-altitude flights covered virtually the whole country, from its war-torn south to close to the border with Syria in the north and east.

In Jerusalem, Israel's top general conceded his army had failed to destroy Hezbollah during the war, which claimed 1,183 lives in Lebanon and 157 in Israel.

"The feeling of the public is that it was not a knockout blow," Lieutenant General Dan Halutz told the Israeli cabinet, according to a government source.

France said it had asked European Union president Finland to call a meeting of the bloc's member states to discuss Lebanon. A Finnish official said the EU's Political and Security Committee would meet on Wednesday.

Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora inspected damage in Beirut's southern suburbs, a Hezbollah stronghold ravaged by Israeli air strikes.

"This is a crime against humanity committed by Israel here and in other areas of Lebanon," he said in Haret Hreik.

Iran said it was working on an aid package to help rebuild shattered areas of Lebanon, but a senior Foreign Ministry official said nothing had yet been decided.

Hezbollah began last week paying cash compensation to the former occupants of 15,000 destroyed homes and has vowed to

90 killed

FROM PAGE 16
Panjwari has seen major clashes that have left scores of people dead this year with security officials saying they are determined to root out rebel operatives.

A suicide bomb in the town's bazaar on August 3 killed 21 civilians in one of the bloodiest such attacks in the insurgency.

Afghan officials also announced Sunday that six policemen and four Taliban rebels were killed when militants attacked a border police patrol in the western province of Nimroz.

Three policemen and five Taliban were also wounded in the clash Saturday in Delaram district, which has seen several Taliban-linked attacks including against foreign nationals working on road construction projects.

The US-led coalition that helped to topple the Taliban in late 2001 announced on Saturday that four of its soldiers were killed in other clashes that day.