

Malaysia launches

FROM PAGE 12
"With this crackdown, my friend who has been giving me shelter has told me to leave his house because he fears he may also be arrested. I have no home now. Please help me," he said.

Another Myanmar migrant, Morani, 32, had camped outside the UN agency for the past week with her four-year-old daughter to obtain a letter to prevent arrest or deportation.

"I am afraid of being arrested. We do not have any travel documents. We do not want any travel documents. We do not want any travel documents."

Morani, whose husband works in the plantation sector in northeastern Kelantan state, said they had been in Malaysia for the past 12 years.

Malaysia is deploying tens of thousands of volunteers and officials to hunt down the illegal immigrants.

"We know many of the illegals have gone into hiding," Mahadi Arshad, director general of the 300,000-strong civilian security force volunteers, told AFP.

Mahadi said they would launch their blitz from late Monday. "We know where they are hiding."

Some 35,000 volunteers who have received special training would be involved in the operation along with hundreds of immigration and police officials, he said.

The crackdown would be Malaysia's largest blitz to flush out illegal immigrants in three years. A similar nationwide sweep was carried out in 2002 following the end of a four-month amnesty program.

The operation has been criticised

by human rights groups which say it is open to abuse.

Amnesty International earlier this month urged Malaysia to halt the planned deportation of illegals amid fears some could face execution or torture in their home countries.

Migrants from Myanmar, Nepal and Aceh could be subjected to serious human rights violations if they were sent home in the crackdown, it said.

Before the recent amnesty began on October 29 last year, Malaysia estimated there were more than a million illegal workers in the country, mostly from Indonesia but also from the Philippines, Myanmar, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka.

Nearly 400,000, mostly Indonesians, left without facing any penalty during the first three months of the amnesty, but others have remained, clinging to jobs in the construction, plantation and service industries in the face of unemployment at home. Outside the Indonesian mission, hundreds of illegals were waiting with their luggage for buses to transport them to Port Klang, west of here to board an Indonesian navy ship.

"I came to Malaysia legally but my boss did not pay my salary for seven months. So I decided to run away from the company and worked illegally as a rubber tapper for the past three years," said Rahim, 21, from central Java.

Rajshahi SP helped

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him as the man behind the police failure to nab Bangla Bhai, the country's top most wanted criminal.

Bangla Bhai himself came to Rajshahi along with his militant group to meet the SP at his office on April 24 last year, and local photo-journalists captured the JMB operations commander in frame while he was coming out of the office.

A television channel also aired the interviews of Bangla Bhai and the SP together in its 'exclusive' news.

Sources also quoted the SP as telling Prof Lutfar Rahman, the JMB leader at Bagmara who led the JMB's Rajshahi march on May 23 last year, "I (SP) will be always with your (JMB) movement as I am with now."

Fazle Hossain Badsha, politburo member of the Workers' Party, has also alleged Masud's close link with Bangla Bhai, quoting local people.

Some government high-ups asked higher police authorities a few months back to investigate the allegations following repeated reports by the intelligence branches.

Following the investigation, the special report stated that Bangla Bhai escaped police arrest on various occasions -- even after the order of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia -- due to the 'unwillingness of that very SP'. "He (Mia) let Bangla Bhai get away," it said.

The report also stated that the SP himself confessed to his links with Bangla Bhai before investigating officials and failed to defend the allegations brought against him.

"As he is a rank-holding official, a lenient view might be taken on his admission of guilt," a senior official, forwarding the report to the top level, wrote.

Various sources also told of police administration's inaction during Bangla Bhai's reign of terror. A gram police at Hamirkutsa bazaar in Bagmara village, for example, said he saw policemen beside Bangla's camp, where tortures occurred.

Local people also told this correspondent during his several visits to Bagmara, Raninagar and Atrai upazilas in the last two months that the killings and tortures at the hand of Bangla Bhai and his men occurred in the presence of police and many villagers.

"Bangla tortured outlaws, calling people to witness. Sometimes, police took away the injured persons from Bangla's camp," he said.

The Daily Star spoke with Masud Mia for an hour at his office on Sunday noon when he denied the allegations against him.

Asked about JMB, Mia countered with his own question, "Is JMB any registered organisation? Where did you get that name? People were being killed one after another. Do you hear of any killings now?"

He continued, "Why would I help Bangla Bhai? He is a criminal. You made him the most powerful criminal. So where is he hiding now? It is only you (journalists) who are writ-

Huda irked

FROM PAGE 12
Raising a point of order in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday, the communications minister said that the finance ministry has yet to release any funds in the current fiscal for development works of roads in different districts. He said the dry season between December and March is the appropriate time for the development works.

Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker Shahjahan Chowdhury said the finance ministry usually releases funds during the rainy season when rough weather and rain hamper the development works of roads.

Peacekeepers

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where they will be buried today with full military honour.

The nine soldiers serving as UN peacekeepers in northeastern Ituri region of Congo, a stronghold of several ethnic and political armed militias, were killed at Bangladesh time 2:15pm Friday in one of the bloodiest attacks on a UN peace-keeping mission in recent years.

Of the nine killed, Captain Shahid Ashraf Khan hailed from Kahu upazila of Bogra district, warrant officer Sohrab Hossain Talukdar from Dhuly Gathy of Netrokona, Sergeant Sirajul Haque from Mehendiganj of Barisal and Corporal Ataur Rahman Sarker from Palashbari of Gaibandha.

Leading Seaman Nurul Islam hailed from Monglapot of Bagerhat district, and privates Abdus Salam (1) from Arajee Choraikhola of Nilphamari, Abdus Salam (2) from Charbhongkhari of Manikganj, Zahurul Islam from Shibganj of Bogra and Belal Hossain from Astodrone of Noakhali.

UK CONDOLENCE

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw expressed his deepest condolences for the government of Bangladesh and bereaved families of the nine UN peacekeepers from Bangladesh, reports BSS.

Jack Straw also affirmed the United Kingdom's determination to support the United Nations in ensuring that those responsible for the attack are brought to justice.

British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Anwar Choudhury conveyed the condolences of British Government to Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan.

UNB adds: Awami League President and Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina will pay homage to the mortal remains of the nine Bangladeshi peacekeepers at the Army Stadium today.

Mob beat police

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Gabtali Police Station issued a letter to Yunus, asking him to settle the matter.

Yunus then filed a case against ASI Habib seeking order of non-interference from the local police station.

The court order went in favour of Yunus, but the two brothers along with the police went to grab the land yesterday at 11:00am.

Angry locals surrounded the police, beat them up and snatched away the shotgun and bullets.

Officer-in-Charge of Gabtali Police Station Latifur Rahman admitted the incident of gun snatching.

None was arrested in this connection until yesterday evening.

Lists of promotees

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with the final approval of the president.

Promotion to the two posts will be effective in a day or two if the PMO does not raise any major objection regarding the names of the officials in the lists, said officials concerned.

The government this time instructed the SSB to see the matter of promotion liberally and recommend the names of all the officials who have fulfilled the promotion criteria, they said.

Around 500 senior assistant secretaries and 275-deputy secretaries of different batches have fulfilled the promotion criteria, sources said.

JP to form alliance

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electoral alliance with any major political party."

"The JP is more interested in forming electoral alliance with like-minded political parties," he added.

The former president said the JP will try to secure at least 100 seats in the next general election.

Blaming both the BNP-led coalition government and main opposition Awami League for series of bomb attacks across the country since 1999, he said confrontational politics between the two major parties is hindering the country's development process.

He also criticised enforcing frequent hartals and urged the political parties to find out alternative political programmes to realise their demands.

The Saarc summit should have been held as the government took sufficient security measures, he said.

BNP Joint Secretary and Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah Al Noman, ASM Abdur Rob and JP Presidium Member Rowshan Ershad and JP leader Quazi Zafar Ahmed also addressed the inaugural session of the council.

Two sisters

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Pithua village in Kishoreganj, was living at a rented house in Jolonda for the last four years.

He often used to tease Pakhi Begum, 13, daughter of Nurul Islam Chandu, and also proposed to marry her. But his proposal was turned down.

Police said Bachchu killed Pakhi, a student of class six, and her sister Sumaiya Begum, 2, with a sharp weapon when their parents were not home.

They added that neighbours rushed to the scene, hearing groans of the sisters, and caught Bachchu with the weapon at his hand. They handed him over to police.

Galib's 3 top aides

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Galib's three associates Samad Salafi, Nurul Islam and ASM Azizullah in order to interrogate them in connection with the Brac office robbery case.

The three will be sent to Dhaka for interrogation at JIC.

Salafi, also principal of Ahab-sponsored Al Markajul Islami's Salafi Dakhl Madrasa, Nurul Islam, a lecturer of Islamic studies at Gangni Degree College in Meherpur and Azizullah, librarian of Atrai Degree College in Mohonpur in Rajshahi, were sent to Gopalganj from the Rajshahi Central Jail yesterday morning.

"They are likely to reach Gopalganj by 8:00pm and we, if possible, will seek the remand today to send them to JIC for interrogation," Gopalganj Superintendent of Police Mirza Abdullal Baki told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon.

A large contingent of police from Rajshahi and Gopalganj escorted the three to Gopalganj after the Rajshahi jail authorities handed over them to police.

On Saturday and Sunday, a Rajshahi metropolitan magistrate court issued custody warrants against them following the Kotallipara Brac office robbery case along with six other cases filed in Bogra, Naogaon, Sirajganj and Gaibandha.

The Kotallipara case was filed after seven militants, led by Selim Uddin of Bondor in Narayanganj, were held while fleeing from a Kotallipara Brac office robbery in Gopalganj on January 17. They later admitted to police and a magistrate that they were members of Ahle Hadith Jubo Shangha run by Galib.

They also admitted to working underground for Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

Trained in Afghanistan, as well as at Cox's Bazar, Myanmar and Arakan, they are experts in using guns and making bombs, they also admitted.

Meanwhile, a team of law enforcers has been interrogating Galib in Dhaka since Sunday, in connection with a case filed after the recovery of a large cache of explosives from Chalksduhu village in Gabtoli upazila in Bogra on January 16.

On Saturday night, a Bogra court placed Galib on a 10-day remand as

police sought a 12-day remand to interrogate him in connection with the recovery of explosives and bomb-making circuits, fuse, switch and tape.

Police will seek fresh remand of the militant leader in two cases filed after a bomb attack on a jatra show at Laxmikola village in Bogra's Shahjahanpur on January 14 that killed one person and injured 40.

Law enforcers arrested Galib, chief of Ahle Hadith Andolon Bangladesh and Arabic teacher at the Rajshahi University, his second-in-command and Ahab Nayebe Amir Samad Salafi, general secretary Nurul Islam and organising secretary Azizullah from Naodapara in Rajshahi on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, an investigation has been underway since Thursday to ascertain how a private television channel secretly taped a video interview of Galib with assistance from a sub-inspector while Galib was kept at Rajshahi metropolitan court custody after his arrest. The policemen expected to be questioned in this regard include officer-in-charge (OC) of Rajpara Police Station (PS) Fayezer Rahman, OC of Boalia PS Ahmed Ali, court inspector Rezaul Karim, sub-inspector Alamgir Hossain, havildars Ilias and Siddik, constables Abdul Halim, Abdul Hamid, Rustom and Qamrul.

"The government felt embarrassed as Galib told the TV channel that the government arrested them for international pressure," said a source in local police.

After interrogating a number of policemen, senior officials of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP) said actions might be taken against responsible persons.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, RMP Deputy Commissioner Rawshan Ara said: "We've already completed process for issuance of the explanation letters. We will send those in a day or two."

Refusing to elaborate, she said, "It is completely our departmental issue. It is not necessarily that they would be punished for the interview."

Local police officials, however, said they initiated investigation on instruction from the home ministry.

Donors

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should not interfere with how the internal political management of a country operates. On one side they talk about democracy and on the other they will interfere with the politicsthis is not desirable," Saifur told journalists at the Zia International Airport yesterday morning.

"The donors should limit their advice to economic management," he quipped.

"How could they hold a meeting on Bangladesh without our participation? I will ask this question to Patel," Saifur pointed out, adding, "I will also tell them that we are not obligated to the donors. Our obligation to them is relevant only to the level loans they have given us."

"Bangladesh is a democratic country. The people have elected the government. How the government will run is decided by the parliament, which represents the people," he noted.

On the question of Bangladesh's cancellation of the annual development forum meeting with the donors, Saifur said, "We had decided to hold this meeting every alternate year following a discussion with the World Bank."

The forum, which last met 10 months ago, no longer promises financial allegations, Saifur noted, but merely discusses the government's commitments.

"We have made a lot of promises in the last meeting which can not be fulfilled in just 10 months. This needs time. That is why we decided for a biennial meeting instead of annual one," Saifur quipped.

Saifur will participate in a WB seminar on integrating global initiatives into coherent country programmes on Tuesday and Wednesday. Sources said that Saifur will also meet European Union ministers and leaders in London and Paris to create a positive impression on Bangladesh.

JS sessions

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House at 5:30pm when there were 85 lawmakers.

But after the Magreb break, the session again suffered a quorum crisis and the House sat with 52 members and 15 minutes behind schedule.

On Sunday, the House started half an hour late and with 50 lawmakers.

On February 10, the parliament session suffered the worst quorum crisis, compelling the speaker to adjourn the House after two abortive attempts to start the sitting.

Interestingly, except for the February 10 sitting, no member drew the chair's attention to the prevalent quorum crisis. As per the Rules of Procedure, the speaker adjourns the House for lack of quorum only when a member draws his attention.

Against this backdrop, the ruling party attempted to ensure the presence of its lawmakers in the House and convened a meeting of the whips on Sunday, but only three of the seven whips were present at the meeting.

Though most of the whips were present in the House yesterday, they failed to bring other lawmakers.

Amid the quorum crisis, the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday witnessed a dull day. The question-answer session began with the absence of the member who was scheduled to place the first question.

Water project

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cost of Tk 954 crore, unduly focussed on comfort of officials and hiring consultants and out-of-proportion equipment.

The original project sought 62 photocopyers, 510 personal computers, 123 air conditioners, 102 slide projectors, 102 fax machines, 416 motor vehicles while it was designed to employ 508 officials and staff.

After the report, the project underwent revisions and the cost was slashed to Tk 879 crore from the original Tk 954 crore.

But a new component for flood rehabilitation schemes was included in the project, which required a block allocation of Tk 181 crore. Of this, Tk 120 crore will be funded by the World Bank (WB) and the rest by the government.

The Ecneq now slashed allocation for this component to Tk 120 crore with the entire funds to come from the WB. The funds cannot be used as block allocation, the Ecneq decided.

Sunday's meeting also slashed the proposed cost for hiring consultants for the project to Tk 40 crore from Tk 98 crore.

It also rejected proposals seeking Tk 18 crore for construction of a building for the project and Tk 10 crore for a study under it.

The WDB also sought Tk 20 crore for motor vehicles, Tk 32 crore for training and Tk 10 crore for various equipment. Two thirds of these costs have been slashed, meeting sources said.

On the allocation of Tk 60 crore for agriculture assistance service, Ecneq asked the water board to discuss the matter with the Agriculture Ministry and decide how the funds will be utilised.

The WB will provide Tk 618 crore, the Netherlands Tk 125 crore and the government the rest amount for the project.

Delhi agrees

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such proposal as yet, the sources pointed out.

Similar proposals to increase export-import with Nepal and Bhutan should also be framed for discussion with India so that Bangladesh can pinpoint how and where it wants a corridor through India.

On these proposals, Dhaka will have final understanding with New Delhi and sign a bilateral agreement before signing a tri-nation gas pipeline agreement.

Dhaka will just lag behind unless it can present such proposals at the coming tri-nation gas pipeline meeting, the sources said.

If all goes well, practical work for the gas pipeline might start after a year, they thought.

Back in January, at the minister-level meeting on tri-nation pipeline in Myanmar, Bangladesh and India had also agreed on the corridor access to Nepal and Bhutan and the need for steps to reduce trade gap. State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharrar Hossain on his return from that meeting had categorically said Dhaka would not sign the tri-nation agreement unless New Delhi signed the bilateral treaty with Bangladesh.

But cancellation of the Saarc summit gave rise to doubts on whether this understanding will continue.

At last week's meeting, the six-member Indian delegation was not open to these proposals on the first day. But they eventually agreed as Bangladesh pointed out this pipeline would mainly benefit India and that why Bangladesh would agree to give it (India) pipeline access unless it got similar benefits.

The Indian team also distributed a paper suggesting it wanted rail transit through Bangladesh and another paper showing the status of Indo-Bangladesh relations. The Indian side also went on saying Nepal does not have enough hydropower to sell.

"In this negotiation over the tri-nation pipeline, Bangladesh's

concern was to ensure a balance between the three countries. This is why Bangladesh insisted on involving an international consortium to set up the gas pipeline," one source said.

As per the proposal, the transnational pipeline will begin from Myanmar to transmit gas to India's Tripura and then enter Bangladesh in the east and pass through the west to West Bengal of India.

Under this plan, Tripura will pump gas in the pipeline that will transmit it to West Bengal through Bangladesh. This makes Myanmar a weak party in the deal.

If Myanmar has no gas, the pipeline will continue to serve India as long as it goes through Bangladesh. This is why the project needs a balanced approach and involvement of an international consortium, sources mentioned.

Besides, it will make it easy for Bangladesh to ask for due wheeling charge from a company than from a nation like India.

The three nations agreed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in March or April. Under this MoU, a tri-nation project committee will be set up for a detailed technical report.

The project committee will be given six months to review and recommend various tariffs, the places through which the pipeline will pass and various types of detailed agreements. The agreements would include sales and purchase, use of Bangladesh land, and with Gas Transmission Company Ltd (GTCL) for its sole rights to operate the pipeline inside Bangladesh.

Although the pipeline was conceived eight years ago, Myanmar had in recent times started hammering on the idea. The Myanmar government then invited Bangladesh and India to sit on energy issues in Yangon in early January. The minister-level meeting ended with a positive note.

110 killed in Iraq

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mortar shells to cause "the maximum number of victims", said police forensics chief Thamer Sulthan.

"This criminal act targeted citizens who did not have any ties to the army and police and who have chosen to live in peace," said Walid Janabi, governor of Babil province of which Hillia is the capital.

Deputy governor Hassun Ali Hassun called it "the most odious crime ever committed in the town." The attackers had killed "innocent civilians who wanted jobs and shopkeepers trying to survive," he said.

A fire officer on the scene told AFP that his colleagues had found the hands of the suicide bomber attached to the steering wheel of the vehicle and a burned copy of the Koran in the wreckage.

The bombing was the worst attack in Iraq in a year.

Bomb attacks against Shias in Karbala and Baghdad killed more than 180 people in March 2004, while 105 people were killed in the northern city of Arbil in February 2004 in suicide bombings targeting Kurdish political parties.

The latest attack came as the Iraqi government was expected to shed light on the arrest of Saddam's half-brother amid speculation he was handed over by Syria where he had taken shelter.

In other violence, four US soldiers were killed in separate attacks, including one in Baghdad checkpoint, the US army said yesterday.

Two Iraqi soldiers were killed in a gun battle south of the restive city of Samarra, while an Iraqi soldier and translator died in a mortar attack near Dhululiyah, north of Baghdad, Iraqi security officials said.

A civilian was killed and two were wounded during a small arms attack on a police station in Baquba, the US military and Iraqi witnesses said.

The US military on Sunday announced the death in Iraq of three more of its soldiers, as insurgents shot dead five Iraqi policemen and at least five other people were killed in a bomb attack.

Police also found the bodies of eight people, one of them a headless woman with a note attached denouncing her as a spy, six of them Iraqi soldiers and the eighth a businessman who was working with US troops.

The latest unrest came as one of the groups blamed for many attacks mocked claims by Iraqi security chiefs that the noose was tightening around its leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the country's most wanted man.

Two American soldiers were killed in a bomb and gunfire attack in Baghdad on Saturday, the US army said.

And a US marine was killed in action Saturday in the violence-plagued province of Babil, south of the capital, the military said.

On Sunday, a bomb ripped through the town hall in Hama al-Aili, near the main northern city of Mosul, killing at least five people and wounding three, Iraqi security officials said.

According to the US military, there were eight dead and two wounded in the attack, 20km south of Mosul, where US troops and

insurgents have battled since November.

In Mosul itself, four police officers patrolling in the west of the city were shot dead by unknown attackers firing from a car, a police commander said.

Another policeman was killed and one wounded when their patrol came under fire in the Amerli area, some 180km north of Baghdad, police said.

South of Baghdad, the bodies of five Iraqis wearing army uniform were found late Saturday, said a doctor at the hospital in the city of Kut where the corpses were taken.

"The five bodies had no identification papers and were discovered with their throats slashed" in a car in al-Suwayra, the doctor said.

Police found the body of a headless woman in the western Al-Adl district of Baghdad.

"A piece of paper, with the word spy written on it, was found near the body of the woman dressed in a black robe," a policeman said.

A soldier's body was found in the Siniyah area, some 200km north of the capital, while the bullet-riddled corpse of a businessman who worked with US forces was found in an area 120km north of Baghdad. (AFP, AP)

Four children

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The plaintiff in the case accused Chittaranjan and his family of ransacking and looting his house following a dispute over land on Gopal Singha Lane in Nandan Kanan in the city.

Kotwali police arrested Minoti and Sagar and sent them to jail immediately after the case was filed with Kotwali Police Station. They were released on bail on February 16.

Metropolitan Magistrate Ali Noor granted them bail.

JS body

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The high-powered parliamentary body on privileges headed by the speaker at a meeting in last month formed the two-member sub-committee and asked it to place the recommendations in two months.

Chief Whip Khondakar Delwar Hossain, convener of the sub-committee, had convened the meeting. It was scheduled to be held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhawan at 11:00am yesterday. But waiting for BNP lawmaker Mizanur Rahman Minu, the other member of the committee, for about one and half hours, he postponed the meeting at about 12:30pm, sources said.

Besides, Prime Minister's Parliamentary Affairs Advisor Salauddin Quader Chowdhury and Awami League lawmaker Sheikh Fazul Karim Selim, who were tasked with making suggestions for the sub-committee, did not turn up for the meeting.

The sub-committee, however, would sit soon, sources said.