

## Grisly tales of fortune seekers

FROM PAGE 20  
appear to stretch from Bangladesh to Africa.

"Four of our group were not asked any questions at Zia International Airport before boarding a plane for Dubai en route to Casablanca. Instead, we were taken to an Emirates flight and shown a great deal of respect. Our broker, Roman, escorted us up to the boarding lounge," said Sohrab, one of the victims, who comes from Shonagazi of Feni district.

Sohrab told The Daily Star that as they were transit passengers, they did not have to face any immigration during the journey.

"But when we reached our last leg of air travel at Bamako, the capital of Mali, a Pakistani broker named Jaman Khan received us at the tarmac of the plane. He just asked us whether we were from Bangladesh and people sent by Roman," Sohrab said.

"Our identification confirmed, Jaman led us to a car parked outside the airport without proceeding through

immigration. Interestingly, an official of the airport exchanged a few words with Jaman and signalled us to proceed," Sohrab described.

Although transit to Africa was easy, the true ordeal of the journey began when the group crossed the Sahara desert from a small city called Gao. "By now our group had 48 people including citizens of India and Pakistan," Sohrab said.

"We crossed miles after miles in two small cars through the desert, ignoring a scorching desert with a temperature of over 54 degrees Celsius. The journey was extremely arduous, as there was virtually no road," he said.

The Bangladeshi job seekers spent night after night in the desert, almost eight days with virtually no food and water. "We passed day after day with just a few drops of water to drink," Nazrul said.

It was the Mauritanian police who probably saved their lives. The police arrested the group and charged them

with illegally entering the country. They were later sentenced to five and a half months of imprisonment.

During their incarceration, the workers contacted Roman, the broker, several times, informing him of their situation. Although he promised to help them, he never did, according to Sohrab. He also threatened them that they would never return home if they disclosed his name.

The young men pleaded with the Mauritanian police for their release and repatriation, but had to serve the entirety of their sentence. They finally returned to Dhaka on March 17 of this year with the help of the International Organisation for Migrants (IOM), which helped secure their release.

Since returning home, the young victims have given details about the broker to the police. The Special Branch of police has now been asked to submit an investigative report and take punitive action against the racket. Police are now interrogating eleven people in connection with the case.

## IMF starts annual

FROM PAGE 20  
The IMF also wants to know the government's plans for implementing the recommendations of the sixth National Pay Commission (NPC) and for changing the size of the administration including staff recruitment in a number of areas.

Sources said the government plans to implement the NPC recommendations to increase the staff wage by a maximum of 90 percent in three phases in three years. But, it will not raise the wage structure fully as was recommended.

A six-member IMF Article 4 mission lead by Nissanka Weerasinghe, adviser to IMF Asia Pacific Department, will be visiting Dhaka on March 28 to April 9 to gather the answers to these 50 questions sent to the government earlier this month.

The answers will be incorporated in the IMF mission's financial evaluation report on Bangladesh, which will then be used as an updated annual international reference on the country.

The IMF in particular wants to know the government's gas export policy. The issue that had been hammered by US oil company Unocal, specially after it had struck gas in Bibiyana field, died down following a national committee

## Cops get 15 more days to probe Galib

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,  
Rajshahi

A Rajshahi metropolitan magistrate court yesterday granted police 15 more days to complete their investigation of militant linchpin Dr Asadullah Al Galib and his three associates.

Magistrate Yusuf Ali granted the time after Aslam Iqbal, officer-in-charge of Shah Mokhund police station, pleaded that police need to perform additional interrogations in other districts to learn more about the militants' suspected involvement in seven anti-state activities.

Shah Mokhund police arrested Islamic outfit Ahab chief Dr Asadullah Al Galib and his three associates Abdus Samad Salafi, Nurul Islam and ASM Azzizullah - on early February 23 under Section 54. Police were granted the first 15-day period to investigate Galib on March 10.

## Gang shoots at cops, takes away leader

BDNEWS, N'ganj

Hooligans yesterday snatched away a listed top criminal after shooting a police team, leaving four law-enforcers injured in Arahazar upazila in Narayanganj.

The injured are ASI Amir Hossain, constables Monir and Kabir and another policeman, whose name could not be known immediately.

A six-member police team arrested notorious criminal AK Khan, accused of about two dozen criminal charges, including several killings and robberies, in Panchkhali Bazar, said police.

When the team was taking Khan to Arahazar Police Station, his accomplices opened fire on it, they added.

The law-enforcers returned fire but could not resist the onslaught, the police claimed.

Most of the males in the locality have fled the area fearing police reprisal. Additional police have been deployed.

## Privatisation

FROM PAGE 20  
To fulfil the IMF's condition for the \$70 million fourth tranche of Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) loan, the government last year started its homework for privatising the 33-year-old nationalised bank by hiring a British consultant firm, GBRW.

In December, the GBRW concluded that this bank, due to its strong brand name and a large nation-wide network of branches, would be able to attract private investors. The GBRW suggested the bank needs a Tk 3,000 crore capital to cover its existing losses.

But, the government's move was stalled, as it is not in a position to pump in so much money to privatisate the bank, sources said. And this position was assured by an IMF mission in February. The IMF also suspended the \$70 million tranche for this reason.

report against gas export. Unocal is now developing Bibiyana field for the Bangladeshi market, which is facing gas crisis forecasted to become very acute by 2015.

Sources said the top policymakers have decided to shelve the issue until further major gas discovery is made.

The IMF, which in the recent past advocated in favour of fresh petroleum price hike, wants to know the extent and the timing of all adjustments to gasoline, petroleum, diesel and kerosene prices in the current fiscal.

The fund also wants to know the developments in the garments and textiles sectors, focussing on the monthly pace of order flows and opening of letters of credit, and the investments to increase production capacity.

The government has to furnish the IMF with its assessment of the initial impacts of the MFA-quota phase-out on garments exports, employment and GDP growth.

The IMF also wants to know about the inflation, the prospects for this year's crops, the envisaged support prices and the government's intervention strategy.

On tax administration, the IMF wants to know what steps have been taken to ensure a standard and transparent tax procedure, including those about the delinquent taxpayers and imposing penalty for late tax payments.

It also wants to learn the status of the move to establish merit-based pay allowances for staff in the Large Taxpayers Unit (LTU).

The IMF mission will review the stalled disbursement of IMF's fourth tranche of Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) loan. This loan has remained stalled from January, as the government could not fulfil some IMF conditions including the privatisation of Rupali Bank.

Earlier this week, the finance ministry in a letter to the Privatisation Commission directed it to initiate the privatisation process of the bank.

## Kibria sisters

FROM PAGE 1  
leader, also participated in the protest styled as 'Blue For Peace' and announced that they would continue with the peaceful movement until the killers are brought to book.

"We are getting spontaneous response from the common people to our ongoing protests," Asma said during the hunger strike that began at 3:30pm with a large number of police guarding the venue.

Justice KM Sobhan and AL President Member Sajeda Chowdhury broke the fast of the strikers by offering water to drink.

Kibria's sisters - Shirin Islam, Suraiya Hossain, Sharifa Mosabir, Ashrafi Siddique, Shafiq Rahman and Fauzia Shahed - in a joint statement this week by the High Court.

The other six defendants were given fines.

The charges arose out of newspaper reports questioning the educational qualifications of a high court judge.

The reporter said the judge had tampered with the results of his law examinations.

"Judges should be able to defend themselves like any other individual in cases of defamation but they should not hide behind archaic laws that prevent the press from informing the public," the statement quoted the organisation as saying in a letter to Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed.

Sajeda Chowdhury said the defeated forces of the Liberation War are taking revenge by killing pro-liberation people. "We have to build up a united resistance against the anti-liberation elements," she said.

Pro Shamsuzzaman Khan, former director general of the National Museum, Mahila League leaders Asharfunnisa Mosharrif, Neela Balchowdhury and Juba Mahila League leader Apu Ukil also joined the programme.

Meanwhile, leaders of Sylhet Awami Parishad in Dhaka announced to observe another hunger strike at city's Muktangon on April 8.

## Noab worried

FROM PAGE 1  
increase of the cost of newspaper production and adversely affecting the industry, the Noab members observed at a meeting on Tuesday.

They also discussed matters relating to the newspaper industry at length, a press release signed by Noab President Mahbubul Alam said yesterday.

Noab will continue its efforts towards resolving these and other problems facing the newspaper industry, which was chosen to bat first.

There was no respite for the bowlers after that, on a flat track on which Inzamam had chosen to bat first.

Noab will continue its efforts

## Main political parties

FROM PAGE 1  
decided to issue registration to six parties. It is considering the applications of another 27 parties. But it could not issue the registration certificate to the six and settle the cases of the other parties.

Officials at the EC said the EC is now in a dilemma about whether or not to provide the 33 parties with the registration certificates. If they are provided with the certificate, they can claim any symbol for the next general elections.

If any minor political party claims the popular electoral symbol like 'sheaf of paddy' or 'boat', it will put the EC in trouble, as the symbols are used by the two major parties, BNP and Awami League, both are still unregistered.

According to the rules, any registered political party has the privilege of choosing any electoral symbol. Besides, the rules permit only the registered parties to use the state-owned media to broadcast their electoral pledges.

Around 70 to 80 political parties contested the previous parliamentary elections but most of them failed to secure any seat.

The EC had wanted to make registration compulsory for all parties but the major parties opposed the provision forcing the EC to make it optional before the 2001 elections, EC officials said.

"If we could have made the rule mandatory for all parties, then the scenario would have been different," Election Commissioner AK Mohammad Ali told The Daily Star, referring to the rules introduced in India.

In India, political parties are registered with the EC under a law. Registered parties are granted recognition at the state and national levels by the EC on the basis of their poll performance at general elections.

"We have nothing to do if the major parties do not show interest in the process of registration with the Election Commission," Mohammad Ali said.

A total of 35 political parties have so far applied to the EC for registration, most of them are known as minor political parties. Awami League, BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami and other leading parties did not even apply.

However, all the three factions of Jatiya Party had applied for registration before the last parliamentary polls aiming to get the electoral symbol 'plough'. As the issue was later settled by the High Court, they lost interest in the registration process.

The EC has formally granted registration to six political parties, three factions of Jatiya Party, Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (Bksal), Bangladesh Islami Front (Jalil), and Bangladesh Lekhafat Andolok.

The registration process of 27 parties is underway. These are People Action Party, Bangladesh Labour Party, Bangladesh Jalali Party, Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, Liberal Party Bangladesh, Hafizul Andolok.

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