

Sonali Bank CBA

FROM PAGE 1 they tracked down Sonali Bank trade union leader BM Bakir, one of the 50 corruption suspects listed by the ACC, from flat 19/B on the fourth floor of Rajuk Staff Quarters at West Malibagh by following a microbus that took Bakir to Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) on February 22.

Bakir, alleged for raking in crores of taka in the last few years using his trade union influence and loyalty to BNP, had slipped through Rab's dragnet on February 22.

Rab also arrested from the flat Bakir's associates Ruhul Amin, a senior officer of Teigaon branch Sonali Bank, and Mohammad Monir, a clerk at Sonali Bank Principal Office at Motijheel, said the press release.

Bakir joined Sonali Bank as a clerk in 1977. He is now a deputy accountant there with a salary of Tk 7,500 per month.

Mystery shrouded his slipping through law enforcers' dragnet as intelligence officials spying on visitors at the ACC office initially admitted to having arrested him at the Matsya Bhaban intersection. Later, they said that he had dodged the security personnel.

While he was coming out of the ACC and attempted to leave the spot on a microbus, an intelligence official stopped Bakir's vehicle. Another intelligence official got into the car and it drove away, said sources.

Although intelligence officials at the ACC confirmed Bakir's arrest, they later said that they were not definite about his arrest.

"Immediately after knowing that Bakir went to ACC office to submit his health statement, a team of Rab 3 headed out for the ACC to arrest him. It took the team 20 to 25 minutes to reach ACC. Bakir managed to flee the scene by that time after submitting his statement," the Rab release said.

Meanwhile, the joint forces rounded up Anis Ahmed, chairman of MGH Group, from near his office at Karwan Bazar on Sunday afternoon. He is known to have close ties with BNP senior joint secretary general Tarique Rahman.

Although the joint forces asked him to come out of the office to have a few words, they did not release him till yesterday evening, said his family members.

Sources said Anis was picked up to be quizzed about the corruption of several influential persons of the immediate past alliance government.

OTHER OPERATIONS

In Sylhet, Mashqu Ahmed, CBA president of Jalalabad Gas, surrendered to the joint forces yesterday. He is also the labour affairs secretary of Sylhet city BNP. He faces allegations of tender manipulations,

Electric fault fire

FROM PAGE 1 at BSEC building on order from Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed.

The authorities could not identify reasons until filing of the report at 9:00 pm while firefighters did not want to make any comment until their inquiry ends.

According to witnesses and employees, the fire might have been originated from one of the two offices-- Bengal Carpet or Jamuna Oil Company Ltd-- located on the first floor and later engulfed the whole building.

"I first noticed smoke at Jamuna Oil Company. We switched off the main electricity line when it started to engulf the area," Mohiuddin, a peon of Nationwide Communication Ltd, a private firm on the first floor, said.

However, according to Sadhon, an employee of the Bangla daily Amar Desh, the fire originated from Bengal Carpet office.

According to Major Siddique, who visited the building after the fire was extinguished, the fire engulfed the floors due to a number of IPS used by different offices.

Hafiz Ibrahim

FROM PAGE 16 earlier statement, Ibrahim made a startling claim that he and his wife own 12 and 30 bhori of gold ornaments respectively, worth Tk 12,000 and Tk 20,000.

The former lawmaker showed less amount of wealth in his second statement than his previous one as well. In the first wealth statement, Ibrahim claimed that his wife owns properties worth Tk 10.25 crore whereas in the second statement this amount is shown as Tk 9.50 crore. He showed Tk 6.80 crore as his total properties worth in the second statement while it was Tk 6.85 crore in the previous one.

In the second statement papers, Ibrahim also left out the amount of his wife's loans taken from different banks, which was stated in the first statement.

Meanwhile, Chairman of Jamuna Group Nurul Islam Babul seems to be the richest person among the 34 people that submitted their wealth statements to the ACC.

His declared amount of wealth is worth about Tk 150 crore. Possessing Tk 105 crore worth of properties, Salman F Rahman followed him in the second place.

corruption and abuse of power.

In Rajshahi, joint forces arrested a close aide to former post and telecommunications minister of the immediate past alliance government Mofiz Uddin. Mofiz is also vice president of Tanore upazila BNP. He is the prime accused in the gang rape case of an 18-year-old girl in Tanore in April 1988.

Mofiz and one Sheesh Mohammad used to maintain contact with militant leaders of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh including Bangla Bhai on behalf of the minister, said sources.

Using the minister's influence, Mofiz was engaged in extortion over recruitment of government staff, smuggling and selling fertiliser on the black market. He had been evading arrest since June 2005 after he was shown as prime accused in the rape case.

In Puthia, police recovered 37 CI sheets from Zia Smriti Sangha at Zamira village of Belpukuria union and arrested president and general secretary of Belghoria union BNP Abdul Aziz and Selina Begum on Sunday night.

In Lalmonirhat, the joint forces seized 84 CI sheets from the house of Altaf Hossain, upazila BNP vice president and also chairman of Gokunda UP, reports our correspondent.

Earlier on Sunday night, joint forces seized 150 CI sheets from Kulaghat UP BNP office.

They seized another 200 sheets from the house of district BNP leader and Kulaghat UP chairman Shahjahan Ali and over 200 CI sheets from upazila BNP leader and Kulaghat UP member Dulal Hossain.

At Barobari, the forces seized 200 more CI sheets from the house of Nazrul Islam, cousin of former state minister Asadul Habib Dulu.

In Khulna, joint forces recovered 70 CI sheets from the house of local Jatityabadi Sramik Dal leader Belahet Hossain at Maheshwarpasha in Daulatpur.

They also seized 11 CI sheets from the possession of Alamgir Bepari, a ward unit general secretary of Jubo Dal.

In Pabna, the forces seized 69 CI sheets from the house of Harunur Rashid at Kachuri on Shujanagar.

In Bogra, Dupchanchia police recovered 11 CI sheets from local Jatityabadi Chhatra Dal office yesterday.

In Manikganj, joint forces arrested chairman of Manikganj municipality and Rupashi Bangla Television Ramjan Ali on Sunday night. He was sent to jail yesterday. Ramjan faces 16 corruption cases.

Six tonnes

FROM PAGE 16 Homes guilty of manufacturing and selling two-pin-sockets by putting stickers of different brands on those. Its manager Mohammad Niaz was arrested and fined Tk 20,000. The court also issued warrant against the owner Abul Kalam Azad.

Faisal Enterprise was found manufacturing new electronic metres from used ones for which they do not have any legal papers. The court issued a warrant against the owner Abdus Sattar.

In the showroom of Elina Metal Industries at Kaptan Bazar, the mobile court found fans of two brands Sharp and Pidy are being sold without BSTI approval. The employees admitted that these are produced at a factory at Kachpur in Sonargaon. The court issued warrant against owner Nurul Islam.

Falu's bail

FROM PAGE 16 lawyers had filed a criminal appeal with the Sessions Judge's Court seeking bail against the rejection order of the lower court on February 4.

The army-led joint forces seized government relief materials from a Falu-owned factory in Savar on February 9.

Following the seizure, Ashulia police filed the case against Falu and several other unnamed officials and employees of the factory.

On February 12, Falu was shown arrested in the case.

According to the prosecution, the joint forces came to know that Falu, owner and chairman of the Dhaka Shanghai Ceramics Factory, built 40 feet wide and 50 feet long structures to accommodate his factory workers with government relief material.

The joint forces dismantled six such structures constructed on the factory premises that were built with corrugated iron (CI) sheets. Six hundred and fifty pieces of CI sheets worth around Tk 4 lakh had the inscription, "Relief materials of Relief and Rehabilitation Department: Not for sale" on them.

The BNP-Jamaat-led alliance government bought the CI sheets manufactured by PHP Arabian Horse Ltd to rehabilitate the poor and distressed through government assistance.

Falu, also owner of private satellite television channels ntv and Rtv and the daily Amar Desh, is now in jail on a 30-day detention. He was charged with anti-state activities, obstructing public safety, and illegally erecting hoardings.

The Bravehearts

FROM PAGE 1 service arrived forty minutes after the fire was detected.

They were seen carrying the injured on their shoulders to a safe place, they were seen helping them down ladders when some were too shocked to move, they were breaking windows and running in to grab people, often seriously injuring themselves in the process. Tainted black with smoke, drenched in water and smeared with blood, the civilian rescuers were invaluable in their efforts until the professionals took over.

When the firemen arrived in force, plumes of smoke were coming out of the first, second and third floor. Often criticised for their lacklustre track record, they stormed the blazing floors and searched for survivors.

While pandemonium was taking place outside, the ten firemen who entered the first, second and third floor, quietly continued to evacuate men and women to give hope in what had become a despondent situation. They kept on working away floor after floor, even till most of the blazes were put out, making their final rescue of three people at 3:15pm on the 10th floor.

Meanwhile, when two men were found stranded on the 9th floor window ledge, firemen tried in vain to use their cranes to reach them, only to find the cranes too short.

However, Major Imran, a commander from the Bangladesh Army, came forward and took the risk of carrying a bamboo ladder on the tiny and precarious platform of the crane so that the two men could be brought down. His strong resolution was only matched by his sturdy grip to hold the ladder in place and get the men down safely. Imran, along with Major Siddique, also led the search mission into the building at 2pm.

At the same time, the lower floors of the building with 7,500 square-foot floor space on each floor, turned into an infernal nightmare.

Around 11:30am Bangladesh Air Force's (BAF) Warrant Officers Aziz and Akbar were flown in on a chopper to evacuate the trapped people from the roof. The evacuation operation became extremely risky due to rooftop antennas and aerials. Aziz was the first to descend on the roof on a rope from the helicopter followed by his colleague Akbar.

The two men then got to work. The fire continued to spread over the whole building it took more than two hours to set up the fire service's only Turntable Ladder (TTL) so it could reach the roof. Aziz, Akbar, an unidentified policeman and a member of the fire brigade organised the toughest evacuation operation of their lives. As Aziz stood on top of the ladder, the team of rescuers instructed the men and women how to use the ladder to get down.

In the first batch Aziz and others helped dozens of men and women get down the tallest ladder in the country that reached the height of around 105 feet.

The toughest challenge for the rescuers on the rooftop came with four-year-old Mzanur Rahman, who had accompanied his mother to the building to meet his uncle. The team tied the child to the back of a volunteer, who was seen descending the ladder.

President

FROM PAGE 1 They also directed the authorities concerned to make arrangement for quick and proper treatment of those injured.

The president directed the authorities concern to strengthen the rescue operation for evacuating the people trapped in the multi-storied building.

He asked the officers and employees of the fire service, civil defence, army, air force and other organisations to face the situation with courage and patience.

The chief adviser directed the home ministry to form a high-powered committee to investigate the cause of the fire at the BSEC Bhaban and also to recommend measures for preventing recurrence of such mishap.

Chiefs of the BNP and Awami League Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina also expressed shock at the loss by inferno.

SC asks govt

FROM PAGE 16 These mistakes contradict the 12-point directives of the SC on judiciary separation. To correct them, the court gave a five-point recommendation.

Besides, the court asked the government to inform the Appellate Division within two weeks about the status of lower court, judges, number of cases and infrastructure of the lower court in order to officially separate the judiciary from the executive.

The court said it needed to know how the judiciary was functioning now.

The full seven-member bench headed by Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassar Hossain was present during the hearing of the case yesterday. The bench fixed March 18 for the next hearing of the case and sought the presence of nine bureaucrats who are facing contempt charges for distorting the SC's 12-point directives.

Counsel for the judiciary separation case Barrister Amir-ul Islam and counsel for the nine bureaucrats TH Khan were present during the hearing.

The government last month promulgated four rules related to judicial service and amended the CrPC earlier this month to complete the legal process of separating the judiciary from the executive.

ACC accepts lqbal's

FROM PAGE 1 The HC has asked the ACC to receive the statement within 24 hours after receipt of its ruling that came in response to a writ petition filed by Dr Iqbal.

The AL leader who is on the ACC list of 50 corruption suspects has sought the court's instructions so that his delegate could turn in the wealth accounts.

Three more ex-AL lawmakers--Mostafa Rashidi Suja, Mirza Azam and Jahangir Kabir Nanak--have filed similar petitions.

They sent their delegates to inform the anti-graft body of the legal moves yesterday. They also offered wealth statements but the commission did not receive those.

The ACC on February 19 asked those on the list to submit wealth statements within 72 hours. For the ones who are not detained, personal appearance was mandatory.

With Iqbal's, the ACC has now received wealth statements of 34 out of the 50.

Meanwhile, 20 fact-finding teams have started scrutinising the wealth statements. They have already found some statements to be at variance with the information they have collected, said sources.

ACC Chairman Lt Gen (retired) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury said, "We will match the statements against the information we have gathered through various agencies."

Discrepancy between the state-

ments and the ACC's information would mean they [the suspects] have lied and cases would be filed against them, said the newly appointed ACC boss.

ACC Director Nasrin Ara Surat Amin yesterday said, "The government will now initiate the process to seize the properties of those who did not produce statements within the time frame."

About receiving Iqbal's statement from his representative after the deadline, she said, "We have received his statement because of the High Court order."

Asked why they have refused statements from representatives of the other three AL men, she said, "As of yesterday, no court order was issued. That's why we didn't receive theirs."

Talking to the reporters, the ACC director said, "Then again we won't be able to seize their properties till the petitions are resolved."

According to the statement, Iqbal owns immovable properties to the value of Tk 17.30 crore and moveable and other properties Tk 27 crore. His liabilities stand at Tk 28 crore.

His wife Dr Momtaz Begum's immovable assets are worth Tk 3.4 crore and moveable Tk 4.58 crore. Of his children, Moin Iqbal's property is valued at Tk 88 lakh, Imran Iqbal's Tk 57 lakh and daughter Nawrin Iqbal's Tk 4.89 crore.

Living horror

FROM PAGE 1 But then the chopper vanished, leaving the trapped in despair.

It was now becoming difficult to breath. Oxygen was getting preciously scant. The burning smell getting stronger by every passing minutes. Ehsanul could hear people clapping with every successful rescue. And his heart sank in the roar. "It was not me who was rescued," he thought with every successful rescue.

About half an hour later, the firemen finally fixed a tall ladder to the roof and people were scrambling to climb down. Paratroopers who had landed on the roof before made them stand in a line. As luck would have it, Ehsanul was at the end of the line.

At 2.50pm, his turn came, finally. Ehsanul clambered down, breathing with difficulty straight to the medical team who clamped an oxygen mask on his face.

Abdul Momen (50), a security man, was waiting outside the room of the chairman of the BSEC. It was around 10.30am and the 'sir' was late today. He was getting bored and unmindful of the screams down stairs. Suddenly, he found smoke rolling inside the room.

Momen jumped up and sprinted towards the stairs. Now he knew why there were all these screams downstairs! But more horror waited for him at the stairs as flames were dancing behind the rolling smoke. He turned back and did what came next to his mind -- he jumped out of the open window of the second floor. Momen is now lying at Dhaka Medical College Hospital with multiple fractures on his hands and

legs.

On the ninth floor, Monir Hossain, Ashok Kumar Jha and Mizan got trapped in one corner of the balcony with the flames just yards behind them. Their skin was singeing and their hair searing in the extreme heat. They could smell their body burning even above the smell of burning computer and paper files.

Their only hope was the ladder being raised from below. But then hope dimmed as the ladder could reach only to the eighth floor. Now there was a gaping 12 feet clear-ance between life and death.

Monir mother, Salma Begum, was watching in horror as the ladder was slowly coming down now, leaving the three trapped for certain death. She screamed on the mobile to Monir.

"Come down! Please come down!" she sounded hysterical. "Come down my son!"

But then the ladder started going up again. This time the rescuer standing on the rescue platform holding a bamboo ladder. The ladder stopped on the eighth floor and the rescuer held out the rickety bamboo structure.

There was no time to think. Monir lowered himself onto the bamboo and started crawling. It trembled dangerously and he could see the pinheads of the crowd watching him. "I cannot slip. I cannot die now!" he muttered and kept crawling. Monir does not know how he reached the steel platform of the ladder. But he knew he had seen the face of certain death.

New anti-terror law

FROM PAGE 1 board to review appeals of persons arrested under the ordinance.

Two sitting judges of the Supreme Court and one joint secretary-level government official will comprise the advisory board, and the government will appoint one of them as its chairman.

The draft says religious communalism means activities of those who indulge in terrorist acts in the name of religion and present themselves as heroes for such activities as well as those who assist in such activities. Spewing hatred against believers of different faiths will also be considered as terrorism.

According to the proposed law, any act that poses a threat to the sovereignty, unity, integrity or security of Bangladesh is a terrorist act. Use of bombs, dynamite, other explosives, inflammable things, firearms, poison, harmful gases or any other chemicals in a way that may injure or kill people to create public panic will also be considered as terrorist acts.

Damaging public or private property, hindering supply of materials essential for people's life, taking any person as hostage, threatening one with death, assaulting one physically or creating public panic by such acts have also been defined as terrorist acts.

Besides, forcing the government to do or abstain from any act is included in the category of terrorist acts.

Damage of equipment used for the country's defence or any equipment used by government organisations will also be treated as a terrorist act.

Moreover, the caretaker government has also initiated amending the Anti-Money Laundering Act 2002.

The immediate past BNP-Jamaat-led alliance government had also taken initiatives to enact anti-terrorism laws and amend the Anti-Money Laundering Act 2002. But it did not succeed due to pressures from some influential quarters within it, sources said.

Allotment of 686 Rajuk plots cancelled

UNB, Dhaka

Housing and public works ministry has postponed the allocation of 686 plots by Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) in the city's five areas.

The ministry postponed the allocation of plots in a notification yesterday.

Of the plots, 48 are in Tongi Industrial Area, 53 in Uttara Residential Area, 534 in Badda Rehabilitation Area, 50 in Banani Residential Area and one is in Nikunja area.

Voter list

FROM PAGE 16 prepared in 2000 as the basis.

"We have discussed the preparation of the voter list and are trying to find ways for preparing a credible voter list. We may seek directives from the Supreme Court if we face difficulties in preparing the voter list taking the voter list prepared in 2000 into consideration," Election Commissioner Sohul Hossain told The Daily Star yesterday.

The EC is yet to decide whether the controversial updated list will be declared void or it will be corrected further.

"We will decide whether the updated list will be declared void or not," the election commissioner said.

Asked whether the EC took any decision regarding the voter list with photographs, Sohul Hossain said the EC has yet to take decision on the matter although there is a general agreement in the EC on preparing the voter list with photographs.

In the past, the EC had always prepared fresh voter list before each parliamentary election. But in preparing the fresh voter list before the ninth parliamentary election, the EC was mired in controversy and its decision to prepare a fresh voter list was challenged. The High Court on January 4 last year disposing two writ petitions asked the EC to revise the existing voter list that was prepared in 2000.

The EC filed appeal against the High Court's directives, but the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court upheld the High Court's judgement.

Nurul Islam

FROM PAGE 16 In June 2004, an anti-corruption officer (Taskforce-1) filed the case with Tejaon Police Station against Islam on charge of violating the Official Secrets Act.

According to first information report (FIR), Islam, while in the PMO, instructed his two staff to prepare 12 CDs with secret state information summaries signed by then prime minister Khaleda Zia in violation of the rules under the Official Secrets Act.

Police have not yet submitted any report to the court, sources concerned said.

Advocate Anisul Huq appeared for the petitioner Islam who is now on bail.

Lack of right

FROM PAGE 1 the government of Japan gave the TTL, the only one they have now, some 17-18 years ago. He claimed the department's attempts to get more TTLs were always ignored.

"We need more TTLs and snorkel fire engines with more capability. Modern snorkel fire engines could reach up to thirty floors," said an inspector of fire service.

The fire department is failing to provide the necessary service in the city due to inadequate firefighting equipment, preparations, manpower, and unplanned and narrow city streets, and scarcity of water sources, fire service officials told The Daily Star a few years ago.

They said due to industrial growth, the likelihood of a chemical fire has increased but the department does not have the equipment to fight chemical fires.

Only a couple of fire stations in the capital have "chemical tender" (a firefighting device loaded with dry powder, carbon-dioxide gas, foam etc to fight chemical fires).

There are only 14 fire stations in the capital, which is inadequate to provide service to the 1530 square kilometre metropolitan city, the officials said. There is only one firefighter for every 30,000 people in the city and the lack of water sources in the city is another drawback, one official said.

He had warned that it would be a mess if a high-rise building caught fire as most buildings have little or no firefighting equipment installed in them and the fire department has very little equipment to deal with fires on high-rise buildings.

Many high-rise buildings in the capital have not installed firefighting equipment, which is mandatory according to the Fire Protection Act 2003.

Cheney asks Pakistan to tackle al-Qaeda

AFP, Islamabad

US Vice President Dick Cheney yesterday paid a surprise visit to Pakistan to urge President Pervez Musharraf to step up the fight against al-Qaeda and Taliban militants along the Afghan border. Cheney's visit, which coincided with a trip to Pakistan by British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett, came amid reports that US aid to Islamabad could be cut if Islamic militants are not hunted down.

Pakistan's military ruler has been seen as a close US ally in the "war on terror" since 2001, but has recently come under mounting pressure from the West amid fears of a threatened spring offensive from the Taliban.

"Cheney expressed US apprehensions of regrouping of al-Qaeda in the tribal areas and called for concerted efforts in countering the threat," an official Pakistani statement said after his two-hour meeting with Musharraf.

The US vice president also communicated "serious US concerns on the intelligence being picked up of an impending Taliban 'spring offensive' against allied forces in Afghanistan," the statement said.

However he also "appreciated Pakistan's pivotal role in the fight against terrorism" and vowed that ties between the two key allies should be strengthened.

Cheney's trip came as the New York Times quoted senior US officials saying Musharraf would get an "unusually tough message" that US aid could be slashed unless al-Qaeda is hunted down more aggressively.

"He's made a number of assurances over the past few months," one official told the paper. "The message we're sending to him now is that the only thing that matters is results."

The Pakistan statement said Musharraf had called on Pakistani, Afghan, Nato and US forces to take "joint responsibility" for stopping illegal crossings along the 2,500-kilometre (1,550 mile) border with Afghanistan.

He also defended a controversial peace deal with Taliban militants in the North Waziristan tribal region that was signed in September.

He said political and administra-

tive efforts in the tribal areas "would help curb al-Qaeda and Taliban activities and avert any Talibanisation in the area."

Cheney's trip was not announced ahead of time for security reasons.

The New York Times said the new Democratic majority in the US Congress was looking at cutting aid and military assistance to Pakistan, the fifth-largest recipient of US foreign aid, unless it does more to take on al-Qaeda.

Musharraf "expressed concern on the proposed discriminatory legislation" in Congress, the Pakistani statement said.

Musharraf's nation was one of only a handful to recognise the Taliban, Islamic militants who took power in Afghanistan in the civil wars after Soviet occupation, as the country's legitimate government before the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

But after those attacks, Musharraf became a key ally of US President George W Bush as the United States invaded Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban for refusing to hand over Osama bin Laden.

The support for the United States has come at a price, however, with Musharraf surviving three assassination attempts in Pakistan, where many people are sympathetic to anti-US sentiment.

Pakistan dismissed US claims earlier this month about new al-Qaeda training camps on its territory as "absurd," and has repeatedly insisted that more than 700 of its soldiers have been killed fighting militants since 2001.

But Musharraf also recently acknowledged that some of his forces may have been turning a "blind eye" to some militant activities.