

Abducted Brac staff Mahmudur

FROM PAGE 1

Shahidul Haq, father of Akhter Ali, said, "We are really concerned about my son's fate."

Members of both families would go to the Brac office in Dhaka today in the hope of getting information about the latest developments.

Brac officials and Afghan authorities were making joint efforts to locate the two Brac employees, said officials in Dhaka yesterday.

They said telecommunication with Ghanzi province remains snapped for the last few days and this prevented them from having information of the latest developments regarding the kidnapping.

"Akhter and Shahjahan were abducted at gunpoint by four men from Brac Afghanistan's Moi Mobarok branch office in Ghanzi City," said a Brac press release yesterday. They went to the office according to their regular office visit schedule.

The gunmen severely beat up manager of the branch office Hasmatullah, an Afghan national, said the press release issued by Zia Hashan, manager of Brac media affairs.

Akhter and Shahjahan have been working as area managers for the last three years in Ghazni, south-west of Afghan capital Kabul. Akhter hails from Ahmedpur of Boalia upazila in Rajshahi while Shahjahan is from Alamnagar under Gopalpur upazila in Tangail.

This is the third time Bangladeshi Brac officials have become victims of atrocities in Afghanistan. One Brac official was shot dead and another was kidnapped in September last year.

Afghan interior minister Hanif Atmar assured Brac officials of assistance when they contacted him and sought his cooperation Thursday night.

Brac Afghanistan authorities informed the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development of the matter.

The Brac press release said a high-level team was sent to Ghazni from its Afghanistan head office in Kabul to gather information and to liaise with the Afghan authorities, including the governor and chief security officer of Ghazni province, to expedite their release.

Senior Brac officials will also meet Afghan Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development Ehsan Zia today.

Zillur

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December 18, Sheikh Hasina must be released and allowed to participate in the elections," he said.

When a delegation of Habiganj Awami League came to meet him, the AL leader urged the party men to keep their unity intact, saying that if all remain united, then the government will be bound to set Sheikh Hasina free.

He asked the government to defer the upazila elections for one month.

Form central body

FROM PAGE 1

"It is difficult for BSTI alone to ensure food safety. The institution tests hundreds of products -- food and non-food -- of their first batches only. Any next batches of the same products may be adulterated," said Dr Shakil Ahmed, assistant professor of Paediatrics, at Salimullah Medical College.

He stressed that there should be a body that will monitor all food items in markets. The existing drug administration could be brought under the proposed body with two wings -- one for food and the other for drugs, he added.

Regular physical inspection of various sales outlets is a very important quality control measure, said Barrister Tureen Afroz.

Noting that small fines for food adulteration under the current legal system do not deter the perpetrators from committing the offences, she recommended maximum punishment to them considering the widespread health hazard due to food adulteration.

The expert on legal affairs and consumer complaints who works for a UNIDO

Programme said the BSTI says it does not have a modern laboratory and testing facilities to come up with reliable results, and has to depend on other laboratories.

The question of reliability equally applies to other laboratories as well, she remarked.

She also suggested establishing a risk assessment research institute to study possible dangers of various food items, including baby milk, even before import.

The laws regarding testing of food items before import and during re-packing should be reviewed, she said.

BRAC University Vice Chancellor Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, who moderated the

Brac officials in the press release claimed that they have been communicating with the families of Akhter and Shahjahan to keep them informed of the latest situation and to provide all necessary support.

Our Kusthia correspondent reports: Akhter's family, who were living in Stadiumpara in the town, went to Dhaka Friday.

Akhter is married to Shamsunnahar and is the father of 11-year-old Nishat Anjum Ovishe. He moved to Afghanistan in November, 2005. He visited his family in April this year and was supposed to come home next month.

Ashraf Ali Palash, younger brother of Akhter, said that he talked to Kabul-based Brac official Akhteruzzaman over telephone. He told me that the abducted officials are still alive and they might be released soon," said Palash.

Brac, the largest NGO in the world, has a huge network in Afghanistan with over 251 offices in the 24 provinces of the country. Around 4,300 Afghans and Bangladeshis are working there. Around 200 of them are Bangladeshis.

Since 2002, Brac has been working in Afghanistan with programmes like micro-credit for the poor and in sectors like health, education and empowerment of women.

The Taliban, which controlled Afghanistan until it was ousted by a US invasion in 2001, has been behind a string of abductions of Afghan and foreign nationals in the war-torn country. The Taliban have tried to use hostages to barter with the government. They have killed a number of hostages.

Fresh milk

FROM PAGE 1

eight. Though they found melamine in those brands, they just let the culprits go. And how could they be so sure there is no melamine in the other brands?" said Badrul Hossain.

It was around 4:00pm. The farm-workers were busy washing the floor. Some were feeding the cows. Milking will start soon.

The farm authorities have put up a new signboard that reads, "Nobody is allowed to buy more than one litre at a time."

The demand for liquid milk is increasing every day. The farm sold more than 200 litres in the morning and another 200 litres that afternoon.

Some people even show up just after the morning prayers to queue up at the gate of the farm, which starts selling milk at 8:00am.

The owner of the farm located in Nimali does not want publicity at all.

"If you write the name and location of our farm, more people will come here. We are already struggling to meet the existing demand," he said.

"We used to produce sweetmeats and yogurt with this milk. But now we are giving maximum priority on selling milk as it is very necessary for our young ones," the owner said requesting to remain unnamed.

20 injured

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the shibir cadres out of the campus. During the clash, the Shibir cadres also hurled bricks on the stage of Udichi Shilpi Goshti, a cultural organisation that was holding its first convention on the campus.

Meanwhile, Udichi President Prof Zatin Sarkar and General Secretary Mahmud Selim in a statement yesterday demanded punishment to the Shibir cadres involved in the attack on its convention at JNU campus.

Bangladesh Chhatra Union (BCU) in a statement also condemned the attack and demanded punishment to the Shibir cadres responsible.

Dr Shaddeen Malik, director of the School of Law at BRAC University, also spoke.

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Tackling militancy

FROM PAGE 1

the country unless anyone commits terror activities like JMB and Huji did," commented Rab Additional Director General Col Gulzar Uddin Ahmed, who is one of the key-men behind anti-militancy drives.

The government has so far banned four Islamist militant organisations -- JMB, Huji, Jagra Muslim Janata Bangladesh and Shahadat-eal-Hikma.

The sources say apart from the four, the 29 listed outfits include the Bangladesh chapter of international organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh, 10 of whose leaders and activists were arrested in Rajshahi on September 18 and freed on bail on September 30.

Hizb ut-Tahrir is a worldwide controversial organisation, which is banned in many European and Middle Eastern countries and also in neighbouring Pakistan.

Islamic Democratic Party (IDP), a political party recently formed by leaders of banned Huji who had fought in Afghanistan against former Soviet forces and had linked to al-Qaeda and Taliban forces, is also on the updated list.

As the drive against Huji remains limited only to detained Mufti Hannan-led faction, the other key Huji leaders, who founded the outfit, have floated the political party and are continuing open activities.

The other listed outfits are Hizb-ut-Towhid, Allah Dal, Islami Samaj, al Harat al Islamia, Jama'at ul Faliya, Towhidi Janata, Biswa Islami Front, Jama'at ul Sadat, Shahadat-e-Nobuat, Jama'at-e-Yahia al Turat, Joysh-e-Mohammad, Hujbul Mahadi, Kalemar Dawat, Islami Dawati Kafela, al Islam Martyrs Brigade, Dawat-e-Islam, Tanjim, Hizb-e-Abu Omar, and Jadid al-Qaeda Bangladesh.

Law enforcers say they have listed these organisations on the basis of different agencies' reports that these organisations share same ideologies and the ultimate goal of establishing rule of Islam in Bangladesh through jihad or turning the country into a Khalafat state.

"There is a strong possibility that the organisations might get involved in militant activities anytime. So, we're closely watching their activities," a source told The Daily Star.

Another source in a law-enforcement agency said leaders and activists belonging to some of the listed organisations could have strong link with the banned militant organisations like JMB and Huji. They are just using different names to dodge the eyes of the investigators, the source suspects.

The sources add law-enforcers suspect they might use different names not only to evade arrest but also to recruit more people under different banners and thus achieve the same goal.

The suspected organisations are also establishing a countrywide network under different banners while collecting fund from home and abroad. Taking up of different names also allows them to continue with the same types of activities uninterrupted in case any of it falls in trouble.

"We've collected names of different listed organisations through various means, but still we couldn't trace their leaders and activists and dens of many organisations as those are not well known and they don't have open activities," the source adds.

Giving an instance, the source says they have listed Jadid al-Qaeda after they recovered its leaflets on the scene of serial bomb blasts at

AL, BNP

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the government spokesman said after the talks, "The electionmobile has got on the election highway."

But two days after the talks the two major political parties expressed concerns as they had not seen any government step towards implementing the agreements.

AL and BNP have taken clear stands that they will boycott the election if their chiefs are not allowed to contest in the poll, but the government has yet to clear its position on the matter.

Hossain Zillur at an event in Chittagong yesterday said leaderships of Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina in their respective parties are politically established, but their participation in the upcoming poll depends on some legal matters.

"They are inspiring and leading their parties. So, that is a big thing, their leaderships are beyond any question," he said.

"We have told you earlier that there is a legal process through which you will get exact answers to your specific question," he said when asked whether Hasina and Khaleda will be allowed to contest in the upcoming election.

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain at an event in the capital yesterday threatened that BNP will boycott the election if its Chairperson Khaleda Zia is not allowed to contest.

He said, "The electionmobile is still roaming the alleyways, as the government has yet to meet our seven-point demand."

"We want to get on the election highway, but you have put up a barricade at the entrance," Delwar quipped while addressing a rally organised by Sabujbagh thana unit of BNP in the city.

"How have you got on the election highway without meeting our demands?" he threw a question at the government from the rally.

BNP Standing Committee Member Tanvir Ahmed Siddiky in another event in the city yesterday said they will consider their demands being met if six out of the seven are met.

He demanded implementation of the consensual agreements before announcing the detailed election schedule on November 2.

Amin

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assured Yasmin of giving legal support against Amin.

Tuli's brother Salauddin Pappu, who filed a case against six people including Amin, said the five other accused were also involved in the murder indirectly.

Amar Desh

FROM PAGE 1

six others said they appeared before the Metropolitan Magistrate's Court-8 on October 13 to take part in the hearing on a petition for discharging the editor and five other journalists from the defamation case filed by Mahmudur Rahman.

The affidavit said The Daily Star published a report headlined "Forces search for 41 political bigwigs: will disclose their names, ask them to surrender" on February 5, 2007.

The lawyers said The Daily Star published the report based on information from different government sources. They went on to say that two advisers also confirmed that law enforcers were hunting for suspected corrupts.

They neither gave any statements to the court blaming the two advisers nor did The Daily Star report contain any such things. The affidavit said, "Ashraf-ul-Alam and others told the court (at the time) that cases were filed against 39 people out of the 41 mentioned in The Daily Star report and that many of them were convicted."

It added, "A corruption case against Mahmudur Rahman was filed with Motijheel Police Station on September 30, 2007. The Daily Star lawyers also mentioned in the court that Mahmudur Rahman was offloaded from a plane while going abroad."

Note We have published a rejoinder and a counter rejoinder by lawyers from both the newspapers and decided not to carry such out-of-the-court seemingly endless arguments anymore.

Cultural activists FROM PAGE 1

Five states of Bauls (folk singers) were removed from the intersection roundabout. Eminent cultural personality Aly Zaker said some people are using religion as a tool to achieve their political and other interests. He urged people to fight against fundamentalist forces for an environment conducive to arts and culture.

Dhaka University Prof Intiaz Ahmed quoting verses 12-13 of Surah Sabah from the holy Quran said Islam does not obstruct building sculptures or painting images but it prohibits worshipping them.

Eminent theatre personality Mamunur Rashid, actor Shahidul Islam Shachchu, Group Theatre Federation Secretary General Jhuna Chowdhury, eminent singers Krishnakoli, Anusheh and Arup Rahi also spoke at the meeting.

The speakers at the meeting also called for greater unity among cultural activists of the country.

Meanwhile, Jaganna th University unit of Samajtantrik Chhatra Front formed a human chain on campus demanding reinstatement of the Baul sculptures and arrest of Islami Oikya Jote Chairman Mufti Fazul Haque Amini and Mufti Noor Hossain Nurani for their involvement in the removal of the sculptures.

Kendria Khelaghar Asar in a statement yesterday demanded reinstatement of the sculptures.

Cremation

FROM PAGE 16

The UNO asked the land office to investigate the allegations and submit report to him, they said.

But the land office is yet to submit the report.

The indigenous families also alleged that the influential people have managed fake documents and are trying to evict them from their 3.42 acres of khas land and 3.43 acres of khas pond they leased from the authorities concerned at Borambari village of Niamatpur upazila.

They also alleged that instead of taking actions against the influential people the police are harassing the indigenous people.

Lahanti Aka Forum President Ranjit Orao, Banglapal Sardar, Bhulu Mahto, Noresh Kurji, Romesh Tropo, Fulchan Orao, Mongol Orao, Tuku Hasda and Bimol Mirmur were also present.

War criminals

FROM PAGE 1

said the war criminals must be put on trial in an impartial tribunal in which the United Nations would be involved. He said documents regarding trial of war criminals are being prepared and soon they would be published.

President of Awami League Pabna district unit Samsur Rahman Sharif Dilu chaired the meeting. Sector Commanders' Forum leaders Major General (ret'd) KM Shafiqullah, Lt Col (ret'd) Abu Osman Chowdhury and Lt Gen (ret'd) Harun-ar-Rashid also spoke at the meeting.

Shafiqullah said, "The war criminals who are also the anti-liberation war forces do not believe in the Liberation War." He said ignoring the Liberation War is in effect ignoring our constitution.

He said Bangabandhu did not pardon 11,000 war criminals and he even enacted a law to punish them.

Harun-ar-Rashid said, "We are just going through a tough time. The war criminals have assaulted freedom fighters recently and a freedom fighter was killed in Chhapaingaranj."

Citizens also demanded reforms, he said, adding, "Taking all these into consideration, the government tried to implement the suggestions."

Kamalapur, Chittagong and Sylhet railway stations on May 1 last year claiming responsibilities. Investigators have not yet traced the men behind Jadid al-Qaeda though they started investigation since the attacks.

The sources say some of the organisations were operating their activities openly years ago, but many of them have stopped open activities following the anti-militant crackdown in 2005.

The cease in their open activities has left investigators in difficulties to track them, the sources add.

A top militancy investigator said they have yet to find out any first-hand evidence regarding those organisations' involvement in militancy. They are just continuing their campaigns, which they call 'dawat', to recruit members.

"There are many groups but how can we investigate their activities as they work inside mosques and madrasas? It could be easier for us to detect and monitor their activities if they met at hotels or other places," he said.

For the last few years Hizb-ut-Towhid has been carrying out secret operations in the name of 'dawat' in different parts of the country, especially in the southern region.

In some cases police also arrested some activists of different Islamic organisations during their suspicious activities.

For instance, law enforcers arrested a few Hizb-ut-Towhid activists in Bhola in early September for their suspicious movement.

Superintendent of Police of Bhola GM Azizur Rahman told The Daily Star over phone that Hizb-ut-Towhid has recently started its activities in the district.

"We're closely monitoring their activities. The nature of their activities in Bhola suggests the organisation might have some activities similar to those of banned militant organisations," Azizur observed.

He said the outfit seems suspicious as Hizb-ut-Towhid's activities have similarity with the activities and groundwork of banned militant organisations.

Earlier, law-enforcement agencies detained a number of thugs of the Islamic organisation from Barisal, Chandpur and Sakthira.

Besides, Hizb-ut-Towhid operatives have been carrying out their activities in full swing in Patuakhali where they even have a temporary camp set up at the residence of an assistant teacher of a girls' high school in Mirzaganj upazila.

The organisations' activities surfaced early this year when some of its operatives were seen distributing books and leaflets propagating Islamist militancy among students of the school.

Hizb-ut-Towhid in its different publications being distributed among its targets is trying to teach them that jihad or military programme or armed struggle is a must to establish the rule of Islam.

The organisation campaigns for armed struggle using the verses of the holy Quran. "... [if anyone] leaves jihad or armed struggle, they shall not be accepted to Allah as a mومن [devout]," reads a publication of Hizb-ut-Towhid titled "Islam er Prokrito Salah" [Real Salah of Islam].

In the book Hizb-ut-Towhid says the Muslims as a whole are a military nation. The whole nation is a military force, each and every Muslim [man and woman] is a soldier, a Mujahade and a warrior.

"The training of this military force is called Salah," the book reads.

"As long as the government allows such campaigns or activities and does not prohibit such propaganda, we cannot consider it as an offence," observes a top-level official of a law-enforcement agency.

Feudal mentality

FROM PAGE 1

in the parties has not come to the extent it should have," Prof Muzaffer said in an interview with The Daily Star.

"Since the feudal mentality in our politics is very strong, I do not think the political culture can easily be changed," he said.

The government has succeeded 90 percent in its move to hold parliamentary elections and 50 percent in fighting corruption but all of the 'citizens' demands for reforms have not been fulfilled, said the former Dhaka University professor.

On the Election Commission's (EC) attempt to bring changes to political culture, he said the EC has tried its best by setting conditions for parties' registration and code of conduct for candidates.

"The impact will be seen after the elections, not now. I do not think the political culture has changed much," he added.

Prof Muzaffer supported the proposal for independent auditor for auditing political parties' funding and expenditure to ensure financial transparency.

He criticised the EC's failure to take steps against candidates and political parties for not submitting expenditure statements during the 2001 elections. He, however, expressed hope that accountable management of political parties would begin if the Representative of the People Order (RPO) and independent auditing can be implemented.

Key Taliban-held

FROM PAGE 1

Loisam and showed fortified trenches, a tunnel network, caves and houses allegedly used by the militants to fight pitched battles with Pakistani forces.

It is some of the fiercest fighting between Pakistani forces and Islamist militants since former military ruler Pervez Musharraf joined the US-led "war on terror" in 2001.

"More than 1,500 militants have been killed during the operation and security forces have gained major successes," Khan said, updating a toll given during a similar visit about a month ago.

Security forces have captured more than 300 foreign militants, mainly from Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, in the operation, he said.

Forty-two army troops and 31 Frontier Corps personnel "embraced martyrdom," in the operation, Khan said, adding that 172 troops and 95 Frontier Corps men were wounded.

But he added that the operation "could go for several months before the area is completely cleared of militants."

Pakistan's tribal belt became a safe haven for hundreds of al-Qaeda and Taliban extremists who fled the US-led toppling of Afghanistan's hardline Taliban regime in late 2001 and have since set up training camps.

Many militants had gathered in Bajaur in recent months after being driven out of other Pakistani tribal regions, especially North and South Waziristan hundreds of kilometres (miles) to the south.

While Pakistani forces have been concentrating on Bajaur, most of a recent spate of suspected US missile attacks on Pakistan have

Democrats on track

FROM PAGE 16

Republicans' last foothold in power. In reality, Ensign noted this week that even if Democrats merely draw close to 60 seats, they will find it easier to pick up a Republican or two on individual bills and move ahead with portions of their agenda that might otherwise be stalled.

Democrats are overwhelmingly favored to pick up seats in Virginia, New Mexico and Colorado where Republicans are retiring.

Additionally, GOP Sens. John Sununu of New Hampshire, Norm Coleman of Minnesota and Gordon Smith of Oregon are in jeopardy. So, too, Alaska Sen. Ted Stevens, whose fate may rest on the outcome of his corruption trial, now in the hands of a jury in a courthouse a few blocks from the Capitol.

Even if they win all four of those races a tall order Democrats would be two seats shy of 60 and looking South to get them.

In the House, Democrats are so flush with cash that they have spent nearly \$1 million to capture a seat centered on Maryland's Eastern Shore that has been in Republican hands for two decades.

It is one of 27 races where the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has spent \$1 million or more a total that the counterpart Republican group has yet to match anywhere.

"We've had to hold most of our resources for the final two weeks and that's beginning to make a difference," said Rep. Tom Cole of Oklahoma, chairman of the GOP House committee.

Cole declined to make an overall prediction. "A lot depends on what happens presidentially in the next 10 days. We're very closely tied with John McCain and we got a lot of open seats and a strong financial disadvantage," he said. He predicted the party's Republican presidential candidate would mount a strong finish and help other candidates on the ballot.

Still, the party's campaign committee recently pulled back from plans to advertise on behalf of incumbents in Michigan, Florida, Colorado and Minnesota who face competitive challenges.

For its part, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee recently invested in a race in the Lincoln, Neb., area held by Republican Rep. Lee Terry. Obama has a dozen or more paid staff as well as volunteers there hoping to win one electoral vote.

Democrats express confidence they will pick up at least two and possibly three Republican-held New York seats where incumbents decided against running again and at least one each in Illinois, Virginia, Ohio, New Mexico and Arizona. There are additional opportunities in at least a half-dozen other states.

Republican incumbents in greatest jeopardy include Reps. Don Young in Alaska, Tom Feeney and Ric Keller in Florida, Joe Knollenberg and Tim Walberg in Michigan, Marilyn Musgrave in Colorado, Jon Porter in Nevada and Robin Hayes in North Carolina.

Among the few Democrats in close races are Reps. Nick Lampson in Texas, who is in a solidly Republican district; Tim Mahoney in Florida, who recently admitted to having two extramarital affairs; Carol Shea-Porter in New Hampshire and Paul Kanjorski in Pennsylvania.

Focus on Waziristan

FROM PAGE 1

He will meet Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, Foreign Adviser Iftikhar Ahmed Chowdhury and CEC ATM Shamsul Huda tomorrow.

A release from the Commonwealth Secretariat said these meetings are expected to cover ongoing collaboration between Bangladesh and the Commonwealth in various fields.

Sharma will also discuss the preparations being made for general elections to be held on December 18, designed to restore representative governance in the country, as well as progress in reform of the democratic institutions.

He will give a talk on "The Commonwealth-current priorities, future directions" at Bangladesh Enterprise Institute.

The Commonwealth Secretary General will also hold a pre-departure press conference at Sonargaon Hotel Monday evening.

C'wealth

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