

Top 'Huji man' Salam held

FROM PAGE 1 Kazi Azizul Huq, an IDP adviser, told The Daily Star last night, "The three individuals called him out of his house saying they needed to talk to him. His mobile phone remained switched off since then."

Born in Sherpur, Abdus Salam, went to Afghanistan in the early 80s and returned in 1989. He studied in Kowmi madrasa in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

According to sources, some Afghan War veterans led by Abdus Salam officially launched Huji through a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club on April 30, 1992. The organisation actually originated in Afghanistan in 1987.

Bangladesh government banned the organisation in October 2005 and the USA blacklisted it June last year. But Huji leaders claimed that they had dissolved the organisation in 1998 and later formed IDP during the caretaker government's regime.

IDP had applied to the Election Commission (EC) for registration in November 2008 but the EC decided to reject its registration application for not meeting the registration criteria.

According to sources, two of Salam's party leaders, Maulana Abu Taher and Arif Hasan, are accused in a case filed in connection with the grenade attack on an Awami League (AL) rally on August

21, 2004. They are now in jail. His two other party leaders Maulana Monir and Hafiz Idris, who were arrested for their involvement in various militant activities, have jumped bail.

Three other leaders Maulana Sheikh Farid, Maulana Abdul Hai and Mufti Shafiqur Rahman are accused in the Ramna batamul blast case and are now absconding.

The Huji leaders and activists went underground as the erstwhile Awami League government cracked down on them following an attack on eminent departed poet Shamsur Rahman and an assassination attempt on Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina at the AL rally.

Losers blame local BNP

FROM PAGE 16 Many local leaders did not want to take any risks as they were planning to contest in the upazila elections, which were held after the parliamentary elections, the defeated candidates said in their reports submitted to BNP high command.

The field-level leaders' suggestions include severing ties with Jamaat-e-Islami, excluding corrupt leaders from party committees, forming committees through elections and picking leaders with good image.

The team last night urged the standing committee to expel leaders known to be corrupt and has links with criminals. The standing committee also discussed the Jamaat issue seriously but could not complete the discussion.

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Sources said recommendations made by the party's field-level leaders came up for discussion at the standing committee meeting held at Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office. She chaired

Vital Pac

FROM PAGE 16 Officials at the Parliament Secretariat said seniority as lawmakers and their party position got priority in allocation of offices to chiefs of parliamentary committees this time. And importance of the committees was not considered.

Contacted, Pac chief and Awami League lawmaker KH Rashiduzzaman said he could not make preparations to convene any meeting of the House body as he cannot attend his office.

"It might take one more week to make the office ready for use," he said. Rashiduzzaman, a first-time lawmaker, said he had requested the speaker to allocate an office in the parliament building but he did not get it.

Parliament Secretariat officials said Pac needs relatively spacious rooms for its office as some officials from the comptroller and auditor general's (CAG) office also work there to assist the functioning of Pac.

The House on February 18 constituted the 15-member Pac. Meanwhile, due to non-functioning of Pac for over two years since the dissolution of eighth parliament on October 27, 2007, the number of unresolved audit reports involving crores of taka are increasing.

Since 1972, over 850 audit reports involving thousands of crores of taka were placed before successive parliaments but only 206 of those were discussed. In the last eighth parliament, 64 audit reports on 19 ministries were discussed.

PM for united

FROM PAGE 1 Kant Sharma met her at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in the morning.

Hasina said poverty is the main enemy of South Asian countries and the terrorists have no religion and boundary. They discussed various matters for strengthening bond among the South Asian nations and expressed satisfaction as democratic governments are in power in all the countries.

Sharma greeted Hasina for the Awami League-led grand alliance's massive victory in the December 29 polls and for her assumption of office as the prime minister. He expressed deep shock at the death of army officers in the February 25-26 Pikhana carnage and prayed for salvation of the departed soul.

Sharma also highly praised the PM's wisdom and foresightedness in resolving the BDR crisis quickly and peacefully. PM's Secretary Mollah Wahiduzzaman and Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad were present.

RAMNA BLAST

Charge framing not held for prosecution's time petition

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday could not frame charges against Harkatul Jihad (Huji) chief Mufti Abdul Hannan and 13 other Huji operatives in connection with the Ramna Batamul blast cases sustaining time petitions by the prosecution lawyers.

Judge ANM Bashir Ullah of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court fixed April 16 for next hearing date and directed the jail authorities to produce all the accused in custody. Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Advocate Abdullah Abu submitted the petitions saying though he had made submissions on charge framing against the accused he would make further incorporations on the issue. So, he prayed for adjournment of the order on charge framing.

Earlier, the defence lawyers had also made submissions saying their clients had been implicated in the cases as part of a conspiracy to harass them. So, they prayed for discharging the accused from the charges.

The bomb blasts at Ramna, Batamul took place during Pahela Baishakh celebrations on April 14 in 2001 resulting in 10 deaths and mass injuries. Mufti Hannan, Arif Hassan Sumon, Shahadat Ullah Jewel, Maulana Abu Taher and Maulana Abdur Rouf, now in jail, were produced before the court while Akbar, now on bail, was present during the hearing.

Former deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu's brother Maulana Tajuddin, Maulana Sabbir alias Abdul Hannan, Maulana Shaokat Osman alias Sheikh Farid, Jahangir Alam Badar, Selim Howlader, Mufti Shafiqur Rahman, Maulana Yahya and Mufti Abdul Hye remain fugitives since the cases were filed.

Criminal Investigation Department submitted charge sheets against the accused to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka on November 29 last year.

800 acres

FROM PAGE 16 now totally disappeared. He added they are trying to recover 13 of the city's 52 canals but could not succeed so far.

He underscored the need for long-term planning and said otherwise it is not possible to save water resources of the country.

Prof Muzaffer said different housing companies are launching housing projects on flood flow and sub-flood flow zones which should stop. Suggesting shifting industries from the city to reduce water pollution, he said although there are industrial estates of BISIC at district and upazila levels many industries have been developed in unplanned way in the city.

Vice-chancellor of Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology Prof Dr M Fazlul Bari said although there are rules and laws to use water resources properly and to save them, there is lack of proper implementation.

Director General of Bangladesh Water Development Board Abul Kalam Mohammad Azad said they are working hard to ensure equal distribution of water and its management. To ensure transparency in the work of WDB a strong taskforce was formed by the water resources ministry, he said.

Former secretary SM Al Husaini said getting water has to be ensured through short-, middle- and long-term planning. Executive Director of TIB Iftekharruzaman, Dr AQM Mahbub of Dhaka University and Chief Engineer of Dhaka City Corporation Ashfaqul Islam, among others, spoke at the roundtable.

Faruk Khan

FROM PAGE 1 "After an analysis of the information gleaned from different sources, it seemed to me that militants were involved. Besides, I have visited the crime scene and talked to many people," explained the minister.

The same day FBCCI President Annisul Huq said "too much talk about militant activities would only tarnish the country's image".

Earlier on March 16, Law Minister Shafiqur Ahmed said until the enquiry reports are available, no one should be accused of involvement in the Pikhana bloodbath.

Soon after being assigned by the government to coordinate the work of probe committees, Faruk Khan said Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) had a hand in the BDR massacre.

Speaking to reporters on March 12, he said, "We have gathered that a number of jawans arrested in the mutiny case were involved in JMB somehow or other. I won't give more details as that might alert others having links to the mass killings."

A couple of days later, the minister said, "We have some evidence that several militant organisations had role in the bloody revolt." He, however, did not elaborate on the proof.

Then he told reporters in Gopalganj that they had found

some more proof of "various types of organisations' involvement in the BDR carnage".

"However, we won't disclose anything until we reach a stage when we can prove those beyond doubt," he added.

At a pre-budget meeting with the National Board of Revenue yesterday afternoon, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry President Annisul Huq said, "Too much talk about militant activities would only tarnish the country's image and prompt others to brand Bangladesh as a militant state."

"These days, we see militants lurk in every jungle," he said adding, "We need to be careful while talking militancy. Two of our directors have already faced visa problems due to this."

Anisul said he heard that the militant issue might have something to do with the Malaysia government's cancellation of 55,000 work visas to Bangladeshis. "We don't want to believe that though."

The FBCCI boss observed that if unnecessary discussions about militants continue people going abroad would have difficulty obtaining visas. And this may affect the economy as well.

Minister craves

FROM PAGE 1 Usually, the transport directorate under the establishment ministry supplies vehicles for the ministers. Its concerns include maintenance of the cars and supply of fuel for them.

According to an establishment ministry official, a minister can use a vehicle belonging to a department under his ministry. But that does not mean a vehicle can be bought for that purpose bypassing the establishment ministry.

In an advertisement published in a national daily on March 18, RHD invited formal offers to supply an inspection vehicle for official use by the communications minister.

The last date for buying tender is April 15. Bids are to be accepted till 12 noon the following day and opened the same day. Placed by Rafiqul Islam, executive engineer of RHD procurement and storage division, the tender ad says the vehicle shall be "brand new, latest model, year of manufacture not before July 2008, and designed according to latest technology. The interior shall be stylish and elegant look (sic)".

The communications

minister has already got a Nissan compact from the transport pool. As per government rules, a minister cannot have more than one official vehicle.

A high official of the transport pool said ministers, state ministers and others of similar ranks are entitled to a vehicle with at least 1600cc engine.

During the BNP-Jamaat alliance rule, the cabinet approved rules that for official tours outside the capital, a minister can take high-powered all-wheel drive from a department under his ministry.

In that case, the government will provide fuel.

The communications minister could not be reached for comments. The information officer of his ministry said the vehicle that RHD has assigned for use by the minister was bought in 1999. Since that car is deemed too old to be used in long tours, the department has opted to buy a new car.

He also claimed RHD has followed transparent and proper procedure in obtaining approval for the purchase.

Source, cause

FROM PAGE 1 could use the fireproof lift at the complex, they might have survived.

The security guards who were on duty that day were 'withdrawn' before the fire broke out, giving rise to a speculation whether the fire was an outcome of any sabotage just two weeks after the massacre at the Pikhana BDR headquarters, they report said.

Seven people were killed and 20 others injured in the fire that broke out on a top floor of the 20-storey building on March 13.

The committee also suggested that the home ministry conduct a comprehensive probe by an investigation agency like Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to find out the cause and source of the fire.

They also put forward a 19-point recommendation for checking recurrence of such incidents in the future.

The report said there was a faint possibility that the fire was caused by electrical short-circuit.

"The probe committee did not get necessary cooperation from the Bashundhara authorities," State Minister for Home Tanjim Ahmed Sohel Taj told journalists at the home ministry conference room after a meeting with the committee members.

He said the committee made suggestion for further investigation into the incident, as some matters remain unclear. The delay in calling the fire fighters obviously raises some questions," said Sohel Taj.

"We might conduct another probe by investigation agencies, if necessary," said the state minister. "Bashundhara is one of the leading business organisations. They might have enmity with other organisations or people or internal conflicts which has created doubts in our mind about the fire," said Joint Secretary of the ministry Iqbal Khan Chowdhury, who headed the probe body.

The committee's recommendations include compliance with fire-fighting guidelines and building codes in construction of high-rise buildings, organising fire drill every two months, modernisation of the fire brigade and civil

CBA leaders

FROM PAGE 1 the CUFL jetty early April 2, 2004.

The five were quizzed at CID Chittagong divisional headquarters at Dampara Police Line.

The former CBA leaders of CUFL are president Sultanul Azim, general secretary Harunur Rashid and leaders Babul Mia, Sirajul Islam and Mohammad Hanif.

They told investigators that CUFL officials in charge at that time failed to prevent the offloading of the deadly arms and ammunition.

They also blamed the former CUFL officials for not forming any probe committee to investigate the matter, said Muniruzzaman Chowdhury, investigation officer of the arms case filed in connection with the seizure, quoting the CBA leaders.

As April 1, 2004 was a Thursday, most of the CUFL workers and employees left office after 1:30pm, said the former CBA leaders.

Only those required for the round-clock production at the factory were there. The CBA office was closed that Thursday afternoon, they claimed.

Rice turns

FROM PAGE 1 said market sources.

Nizam Uddin, general secretary of Badamtoli and Babubazar Rice Wholesalers Association, told The Daily Star that the traders started to sell rice and paddy in the markets from their stock as government announced to sell rice at a subsidised price.

Another leader of the association said the price of rice should be fixed on the basis of production cost otherwise the production will decrease in the future.

Abul Kashem, a retailer of Comilla Traders at city's Karwan Bazar, said retailers are incurring loss as the prices of rice are decreasing day by day.

He said the prices of fine rice came down by Tk 7-8 per kg in last one year while the prices of coarse rice dropped by Tk 12-15 per kg.

Citing examples of fertiliser price fall, retailers of Karwan Bazar and other markets said the government's announcement to decrease rice price has also a psychological effect on the market.

Pias Costa, director general of the food directorate, told The Daily Star that about 12.3 lakh tonnes of rice and wheat are in the government godowns.

He also said about five lakh tonnes of rice and wheat of the total storage will be distributed for different government programmes, including vulnerable group feeding (VGF) and food rationing for the garment workers, by April. This also worked behind the present price fall of rice.

Journos

FROM PAGE 16 region's nations make up nearly half of CPJ's index," said the report, released in Manila to mark the fourth anniversary of the murder of Marlene Esperat, a local journalist killed for reporting on official corruption.

Iraq, Sierra Leone and Somalia topped the list for the second year running, with a total of 103 journalists killed since 1999.

But the CPJ said there had been a surge of violence in Sri Lanka, including the fatal stabbing of a television cameraman, as the government battles the separatist Tamil Tiger rebels.

Journalists in Pakistan meanwhile are under threat from militant and criminal religious organisations, while political groups frequently attack media workers in Nepal, it said.

"We're distressed to see justice worsen in places such as Sri Lanka and Pakistan," said Joel Simon, CPJ's executive director. "Our findings indicate that the failure to solve journalists' murders perpetuates further violence against the press."

BNP to meet EC

FROM PAGE 16 Jamiruddin Sircar.

Party sources said the appeal to the EC is part of the party's effort to shield Jamiruddin's image as a BNP contestant of Bogra-6 constituency in the by-elections.

"Led by MK Anwar, a BNP team will call at the EC tomorrow [Tuesday] to discuss the issue," BNP Joint Secretary Nazrul Islam Khan told The Daily Star last night.

"We will ask the commission to make sure that no one influences the upcoming by-elections on April 2," said the BNP spokesperson.

Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Faroque told The Daily Star that they would apply to the EC so that it instructs the all-party parliamentary committee to cease its investigation till the by-elections.

Once the probe committee starts investigating, it might dig out some financial anomalies of the former speaker and

against this backdrop, it would be difficult for him to win the elections in Bogra-6 where he is an outsider, said several BNP leaders.

On Sunday BNP rejected the probe body claiming the investigation against Jamiruddin Sircar would not be fair.

Speaker Abdul Hamid constituted the all-party parliamentary probe body on March 19 making a history. Speaker asked the committee to submit its report within one month from the beginning of its enquiry.

Meanwhile, the probe committee is yet to start its investigation. "I will start the probe after receiving a formal letter from the speaker," said Fazle Rabbi Mia, the head of the committee.

Asked about BNP's initiative to postpone the probe, Rabbi said he was not aware of that. "I will proceed according to the law," he added.

Video-audio

FROM PAGE 1 members of BDR jawans demonstrated for several hours in front of the BDR headquarters gate-1 demanding they be allowed to visit the jawans.

However, Faruk said that they have decided not allow family members visit jawans at Pikhana anymore. He said family members would only be allowed to make visits under special circumstances.

Talking about the progress of investigations, the commerce minister said the investigators so far identified 714 suspects and of them 482 are under arrest.

Among the arrestees, 80 persons, who were placed on remands, gave their confessional statements before investigators under Section-161 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPc).

"So far 56 crime scenes have been discovered. Crime scenes and evidence of crime are being discovered almost every day," he said, adding, "The investigators have been screening all 7,000 BDR members inside Pikhana so that real culprits are identified and the innocent are not harassed."

The commerce minister said the FBI team, which left Dhaka yesterday morning, expressed satisfaction over Bangladeshi investigators' probe efforts.

He said another FBI team would come to Dhaka three weeks later.

Replying to a question, the commerce minister said the FBI and Scotland Yard teams helped Bangladeshi investigators identify criminals with fingerprints and sweat. They also helped identify BDR jawans, who had masked their faces, in the footage, the ministers said.

Faruk said 1,800 BDR men have not reported to their stations. "Actually, not all of them are guilty... they did not join due to fears while some are absconding with arms and ammunition."

A total of 95 BDR carnage suspects were shown arrested yesterday and sent to jail. US Ambassador James Moriarty after meeting Faruk Khan, foreign ministers Dipu Moni, and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Adviser Tarique Siddique on Sunday noted that the scale of the investigation suggests that it could take a considerable amount of time to complete.

Saarc Summit

FROM PAGE 1 The summit of the eight-nation South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (Saarc) grouping was scheduled to be held in the island nation in September this year as decided at the 15th Saarc Summit in Sri Lanka in 2008.

Diplomatic sources said the Maldives Foreign Minister Ahmed Shaheed at a meeting of Saarc Council of Ministers in Colombo recently expressed its incapability to arrange the summit as the country is seriously affected by the economic meltdown.

The meeting requested the Maldives to set up a new schedule before October. But the Minister said the Maldives, dependent on tourism industry, would not be able to hold the summit after October, as it is the peak season for tourists of the island nation.

It may be mentioned that the Maldives earlier expressed its inability to arrange the 15th

1,600 workers

FROM PAGE 1 management of the company to shut its factory. Frequent 'labour unrests' also put squeezes on the fully export-oriented company, he said.

Labour unrest broke out at the factory at least five times over the last three years. The latest bout of trouble came a few days ago, in which angry workers had physically assaulted some factory officials, speeding up the decision for a shutdown, Towfiq said.

Sunshine Knitwear paid out all worker arrears yesterday. The workers were notified on February 17 about the shutdown of the factory.

The factory, set up in 1996, has the reputation of timely pay, the official said. "So the chaos by a handful of workers is unjustified," he said.

The factory management has no immediate plan to restart it although the other units of the company will stay in operation.

Rafiqul Islam, a joint secretary of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, who deals with labour issues, said the final payday passed off without clashes.

Asked, Nazma Akter, president of Sammilito Garment Sramik Federation, said the management had informed the workers earlier about the closure of the factory.

IMF pledges

FROM PAGE 1 after office yesterday. Kishore, also executive director of IMF, observed that the current economic recession is "the ever biggest after the Second World War."

The IMF official greeted Hasina on her assumption of the office of prime minister and highly praised the PM's wisdom and farsightedness in resolving the BDR crisis quickly and peacefully.

They discussed various other economic issues of national, regional and international importance.

PM's Secretary Mollah Wahiduzzaman and Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad were present.

Trial opens

FROM PAGE 16 on his behalf so far, the judge asked Kasab whether he could afford to pay for a lawyer.

As Kasab remained silent, the judge asked whether he would like a lawyer paid for by the government. Kasab gave his consent. Shortly thereafter, the two other Lashkar-e-Taiba activists who are co-accused in the case, Fahim Ansari and Sabahuddin Mohammed, were also presented before the special judge through a video link.