

Ex-Tajik minister dies in police custody

AFP, Dushanbe

A powerful ex-minister in Tajikistan was killed in a shoot-out, the interior ministry of the Central Asian country said Sunday, one day after saying that he was under arrest.

Former Tajik emergency situations minister Mirzo Zioyev was killed Saturday evening by a group of armed men loyal to a local drug dealer whose surrender he was meant to be negotiating, the interior ministry said in a statement.

"Mirzo Zioyev agreed to voluntarily show his weapons caches and to organize negotiations with the remaining members of these criminal groups with the purpose of their surrender," it said.

"During the execution of this operation by security forces... there was a sudden attack by an armed group, as a result of which Mirzo Zioyev was killed and several government agents were wounded."

On Saturday the ministry said that Zioyev had been arrested in connection with an attack on a police post in the volatile Rasht Valley region, located near the ex-Soviet republic's border with Afghanistan.

The death of Zioyev -- an Islamist commander during Tajikistan's 1990s civil war who was given a seat in the government as part of a peace deal -- comes amid rising tensions in the isolated moun-

tain region.

Government forces swept into the Rasht Valley in May, setting up roadblocks and barring access to journalists as part of what it says are routine annual anti-narcotics operations.

But on a recent visit to the region, locals told AFP that government forces were cordoning off entire mountain villages as part of ongoing battles with armed militant groups.

Zioyev's killing is the second mysterious death of an ex-minister in Tajikistan in the past month.

In June, former interior minister Makhmadnazar Salikhov died of a gunshot wound which police said was self-inflicted, although a witness at the scene alleged he was killed by police.

BDR mutiny

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place their suggestions in the House.

The border force would be modernised, said Faruk who heads a committee for coordinating work of the Prime Minister's Office and the home and defence ministries in the wake of the BDR carnage.

He also said the government would make all out efforts to keep the market stable during the month of Ramadan.

The minister also distributed medals and certificates among the trainees.

Police sue 800 over clash at Bhasani University

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Police yesterday filed a case against 800 unidentified people including students following the clash at Maulana Bhasani University of Science and Technology (MBUST) among students, locals and police on Saturday.

Sub-Inspector Salahuddin Hira filed the case with Tangail Sadar Police Station on charge of attacking the law enforcers.

Superintendent of Police at Tangail Mizanur Rahman told The Daily Star that police team would remain deployed on the campus for an indefinite period to ensure security.

Meanwhile, a five-member probe committee, headed by Motiur Rahman, chairman of Computer Science and Technology Department, was formed to investigate the incident. The committee has been asked to submit report as soon as possible.

The probe body was formed at an emergency syndicate meeting, presided over by Vice Chancellor Prof M Nurul Islam yesterday.

It was also decided at the meeting that the university should not be reopened until normalcy returns to the campus, sources said.

At least 50 people including students and policemen were injured when MBUST students, locals and policemen locked in a daylong clash over a trifling matter.

Bangladeshis

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been enlisted to help the men whose passports are still in the possession of their employer. The lawyer will help the labourers make claims at the labour court in Abu Dhabi, so they can retain their legal status in the country.

The men at present have no access to any medical care. They also don't have a regular access to electricity and water. The men began noticing that some of the company's projects had stalled in September last year. Around the same time their pay became erratic before it stopped completely.

Some of the men are afraid to leave their living quarters as they fear that they may be arrested for not possessing valid documents, according to the news report.

The United Arab Emirates was one of the countries hit hard by the global recession. According to a poll by The National, one in 10 people in the UAE say they have lost their jobs in the past six months.

Sirajganj town

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corruption or negligence with regard to the work of town protection embankment. "If the officials do it, they will face difficulty," he said.

Abul Hossain urged the officials and residents of the town to work in a united way to overcome the problem.

Talking about the Bangabandhu Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge, he said the bridge is completely out of risk and safe for movement. If the mighty river Jamuna takes a more serious turn, the bridge would not face any threat in the next hundred years, he said.

The minister said that he is not sure if the Water Development Board Director General Abul Kalam Mohammad Azad had actually made the comment.

According to media reports, the DG said the guide embankment of Bangabandhu bridge would come under threat if the hard point gets damaged due to erosion.

Maoists kill

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in the east, the poorest part of India.

Estimates of their numbers nationwide range between 10,000 and 20,000, but little is known about their shadowy leadership, which does not court the media and seldom issues statements.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2006 described the Maoists -- known in India as 'Naxalites' -- as a 'virus' and ranked them along with Islamic militants as a serious threat to the country's internal security.

In a statement to parliament last week, junior home minister Ajay Maken said at least 455 people had been killed in Maoist-triggered violence since January this year with Chhattisgarh alone accounting for 148 deaths.

New Delhi last month slapped a formal ban on the Maoists, officially designating the group as a terrorist organisation.

Sunday's attack comes as police in eastern West Bengal state said paramilitary troops were still struggling to retake hundreds of villages in a 1,000 square kilometre (390 square mile) area under Maoist control -- weeks after launching this security operation.

Move to pay shady

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April. Insiders say the intelligence agency does not own the report and it merely forwarded a document that it had received.

This report from a mysterious source asks the ministry to form a three-member committee, pay compensation to LIPPS and patch up with it for another operation and maintenance (O&M) contract on Dhaka North Power Project (DNPP), which failed to launch, again because of LIPPS graft.

On May 24, the obliging ministry formed a three-member committee headed by a joint secretary to "resolve legal tangles" between LIPPS and RPC for the sake of implementing DNPP.

This committee in line with the report's suggestion is now trying to identify the "guilty" persons involved in financial bungling in RPC "after" the cancellation of operation and maintenance contracts with LIPPS from August 3, 2005.

"This means the persons who tried to restore financial order in RPC after LIPPS was ousted are now being coloured as guilty," comments an RPC high official.

The three-member power ministry committee late last month interviewed the LIPPS chief as well as some RPC officials.

But the energy ministry high-ups are unaware of these developments. A top ministry source expressing his surprise says this is the business of neither intelligence agencies nor the ministry to deal with contracts of a company like RPC.

"The RPC is essentially a private company as its majority shares are held by the Pally Bidyut Samity. Such matters should be dealt with by the RPC board," he adds.

"The government is not liable to pay financial penalties of RPC and it's absolutely not the intelligence agency's job to poke its nose in such matters."

Well-placed sources say RPC is challenging this move by providing the ministry with documents and proof that the verdict of the Singapore arbitration court was "irrelevant" and that the contract with LIPPS was cancelled on "fair" ground.

"In 2007, RPC filed a case with a Dhaka court, which stayed implementation of the Singapore arbitration order. That stay is still in effect. We would now rather move that case and end this chapter," says an RPC top source.

"It was LIPPS that pushed RPC to lose the 70 million euro grant of the German government committed for the 450 megawatt Sagar plant and the third phase Mymensingh power plant," he says.

He adds, "Now the ministry is trying to say that we should patch up with LIPPS and put them back for costly operation and maintenance again."

The report forwarded by the intelligence agency suggests restoring the RPC managing body of April 2005 which was dissolved by an order of the then prime minister.

The RPC is a company floated in 1994 by REB with 51 percent shares held by it and remaining by five solvent Pally Bidyut Samities (PBS), which are also owned by REB.

By 2005, REB offloaded some shares to PBSs and reduced its direct ownership down to 40 percent shares.

Speaking anonymously, another RPC official says: "During 2002-2005, the LIPPS management enjoyed strong connection with Hawa Bhaban and was making RPC sign various unsolicited overpriced contracts."

"In 2005, with the help of some RPC board members the LIPPS chief tried to take over the RPC management by unilaterally offloading REB shares."

"This move prompted the government to intervene and dissolve that body and restore REB stakes in it."

The intelligence agency report claims all the five cases filed against the LIPPS officials have been "quashed".

But RPC officials say the report is not based on facts. The LIPPS chief is still facing trial in a case against him for sabotaging the power plant with a Mymensingh court, they add.

"The RPC has lost in some cases due to lack of attention and poor progress of its lawyers. We should have won the cases. Now we would take the best lawyers to fight against him," says a top official.

ALLEGATIONS OF LIPPS CORRUPTION
The LIPPS was a local com-

pany floated and majority shares held by its German parent company and its local agent -- the retired captain -- with 35 percent shares held by RPC.

But it is now entirely owned by the retired captain.

From the beginning LIPPS acted as RPC's "consultant". It literally controlled all RPC procurement decisions pushing it for various costly and unsolicited contracts till 2005.

For an example, the third phase 70 mw Mymensingh plant, built by Siemens on an unsolicited deal hammered by LIPPS, cost 120 million euros.

In contrast, the basic project cost of the AES Meghnaghat 450 mw plant cost 180 million dollars.

In 1999, LIPPS signed the first O&M contract for the Mymensingh phase-1 and 2. The RPC on June 6, 2004 signed a 25-year O&M contract worth Tk 1,000 crore with LIPPS for the Mymensingh 3rd unit power plant.

The RPC also signed with it a similar 25-year contract for the DNPP at the rate of Tk 28 crore payment per year.

Industry insiders had always pointed out that these contracts are five to six times costlier than O&M contracts for the Meghnaghat 450 mw plant.

"Both the 2004 contracts were signed deviating from a board decision of RPC. The board had decided that the Mymensingh phase 3 O&M contract would be tailored on the basis of a 1999 contract with LIPPS," the source says.

"The 1999 contract dictated Bangladesh laws as the governing law, but the 2004 contract replaced it with English laws," he adds.

This later contract made the scope for arbitration at a Singapore court.

Another unauthorised part in the contract is a line that says, "Before terminating the contract, the owner shall pay the operator euro 15 millions."

"No international O&M contract spells out such penalty on the owner for terminating a contract," the RPC source observes.

"Again both these clauses were used wrongfully at the Singapore court where the RPC representatives actually worked for LIPPS and remained silent. The court verdict was based on these two clauses when there was another clause that actually makes both these clauses invalid," he points out.

He goes on to explain, "The contract for Mymensingh has a clause saying till the 3rd phase plant is commissioned, the 1999 contract with LIPPS will remain effective and valid."

"The Singapore court gave the verdict in late 2006. But the 3rd phase plant was commissioned in July 2007. Therefore, the court gave verdict on the basis of a wrong agreement as the 2004 contract was not effective at that time."

The 1999 contract did not spell out penalty of 15 million euros for its termination. The 1999 contract also does not allow arbitration in Singapore as it holds Bangladesh laws as the governing law.

The LIPPS was ultimately ousted from RPC when it refused to let government officials enter the Mymensingh plant site in August 2005, preventing them from conducting an investigation.

Afterwards two investigation committees were formed comprising REB and RPC officials -- one in March 2006 and another in May 2006.

Both the committees categorically accused the LIPPS chief and some high officials of RPC for financial and contractual bungling. But no action was taken against them.

Following ouster of LIPPS, RPC looks after the Mymensingh plant with its own staffs. The LIPPS was being paid Tk 27 crore in 2004, whereas the same job is now being conducted by RPC at the annual cost of only Tk 5.73 crore.

Contacted for his comment on these developments, Secretary of Power Division Abul Kalam Azad said he joined his position only a month ago and is not aware of all the developments in the ministry.

"I'll look into it," he said. Adviser to the Prime Minister on Energy Dr Towfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, Bir Bikram also noted that he is looking into this matter.

Human chain to stop tree felling in Sitakunda

CU CORRESPONDENT

A human chain was formed in front of Chittagong Press Club yesterday afternoon demanding an end to tree felling at Sitakunda coastal belt.

Non-government organisation Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) organised the human chain in cooperation with development organisations Bela, Nawjowan, Bapa, Sangshaptak, UTSA and Ship Breaking Trade Union Forum in front of Chittagong Press Club in the afternoon.

Speakers in a brief rally after the human chain said that the coastal green belts are now on the verge of destruction since ship breaking industry started developing yards by wiping out coastal forests long ago.

They expressed strong resentment and protest against felling of around 18,000 trees in the coastal areas in a most unethical way in the last few days.

They demanded shifting of the existing ship breaking yards from the coastal area and emphasised afforestation in the denuded coastal areas.

YPSA programme coordinator Mohammad Ali Shahin, Ship Breaking Trade Union forum president Tapan Dutta, Jana Udyog coordinator Sharif Chauhan, social worker Shahidul Islam and cultural personality Akbar Reza among others spoke at the rally.

Stock portfolios

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The central bank has already issued a circular to that effect to the chief executives of all banks.

Salahuddin Ahmed Khan, a stock market expert, said it is a monitoring measure by the central bank.

"However, the portfolio report by the banks should not be made public," said Khan, former chief executive officer of DSE.

If the portfolio reports, especially the composition of the portfolios, are published, it will have unnecessary impact on the market, said Khan, who also teaches finance at Dhaka University.

Recently, DSE in an investigation found that two privately run commercial banks -- AB and IFIC -- made hefty profits from investments in Z category shares of a company with weak fundamentals. The two banks bought about 95 lakh shares of Bextex, which were of the Z category prior to declaring 10 percent bonus share dividend by the company, just following the buying binge of the two banks.

The banks also sold half of their share holdings just after the declaration of the dividend by Bextex, pushing the share price up, and the company straight to the A category.

In the investigation, DSE found that the buying binge of the two banks led to a 'demonstrated upward trend' in share prices and transaction volume of Z category Bextex, as institutional investors play a major role in the market.

General investors got interested in buying the junk shares as they found two financial institutions buying huge quantities of the shares.

DSE submitted its investigation report to the Securities and Exchange Commission, and urged the regulator to take necessary steps based on the findings.

BSF to be asked

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speaking Indians into Bangladesh.

Erection of fences, road construction, and excavations within 150 yards of the border line by India in the name of defence strategy, will also come into discussion, according to the discussion agenda of BDR.

Facilitating development works for prevention of land erosion by rivers is also included in the agenda.

The BSF agenda sent to BDR, emphasise on joint efforts for preventing human trafficking, and extended cooperation in curbing trans-border crimes.

India will also seek Bangladesh's cooperation in construction of its border fence, and in facilitating development works along the border.

"Joint efforts to prevent trans-border crimes like smuggling of narcotics, and formulation of a joint border management plan will also be featured in the discussion," added the BSF agenda.

A statement issued by BDR also said a joint records of discussion (JRD) will be signed by both sides on July 14.

Japan PM's party suffers blow in Tokyo election

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso's ruling party appeared to be heading for defeat yesterday in a Tokyo election seen as a crucial test of his popularity ahead of a nationwide vote, mediareports said.

A drubbing by the opposition, which is seeking to end the ruling bloc's half-century of almost unbroken rule, could raise pressure on Aso from within his own party to quit before general elections must call by September.

The opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) looked set to win the most seats in Sunday's vote for the Tokyo metropolitan assembly, public broadcaster NHK and Kyodo News reported based on their own projections.

With Aso's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its coalition partner New Komeito also facing the possibility of losing their overall majority, the ruling bloc acknowledged its poor performance.

"We have to sincerely face the severe judgement from Tokyo residents," said a senior LDP official, Nobuteru Ishihara.

DPJ leader Yukio Hatoyama said that the opposition camp, which controls the upper house, would submit a motion of no-confidence against Aso "as soon as possible".

"We will urge (Aso) to ask for the people's voice by dissolving the lower house and calling a general election," he said.

Opinion polls suggest the LDP, having lost the upper house in 2007, is likely to lose its large majority in the lower house to the DPJ in the upcoming general election, triggering a major shift in Japan's political landscape.

Public support for Aso, who

House

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The chief of the probe body urged those who disagree with the inherent power of parliament in this regard to read the probe report attentively.

"The probe committee has attached different documents and quotations in support of this ground," Rabbi told reporters after the meeting of parliamentary standing committee on public assurance at the parliament building complex.

Citing example of stripping Indian lawmakers on grounds of moral turpitude in 2005, he said, the then Indian parliament had scrapped its eleven lawmakers on this ground.

Meanwhile, the parliamentary standing committee on public assurance yesterday asked the education ministry to take action against educational institutions that fail to hang portraits of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at their office.

Party Council

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at BNP's central office. The BNP standing committee held a meeting last night at Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office with her in the chair to discuss the issue.

The meeting decided to send a party delegation to the EC on July 16 for discussing holding of the BNP's national council.

Asked when BNP will hold the council, Delwar said they had planned to hold it by December but now the party standing committee would finalise it.

Standing committee members Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Moudud Ahmed, Mahbubur Rahman and RA Gani, party leaders Jamiruddin Sircar, Nazrul Islam Khan, Hannan Shah, TH Khan and Dr Moyeen Khan were present at the meeting.

Delwar said a party council cannot be arranged hurriedly as it needs time and they do not want to hold a council just to approve party constitution. "We want to run the party according to the party constitution through a meaningful council," he added.

Posing a question to Awami League's latest announcement that they would hold council by July 25 deadline set by the EC he said: "On July 4, the ruling party said they needed more time [for holding their council] but what prompted them in the last five days to change their decision?"

"The Election Commission said it would extend the time for holding party councils if major parties demanded, but Awami League's fresh announcement is confusing," said Delwar.

has been in office less than a year, has slumped over a series of ministerial resignations and concern about his stewardship of the economy during Japan's worst recession since World War II.

"This Tokyo election is the beginning of the path to a power change," said Tomoko Amatsui, a 70-year-old office worker who voted for an opposition candidate. "I'm not satisfied with the government. It's time to see a change."

An opinion poll conducted by the Yomiuri Shimbun last weekend showed that 16.9 percent of Tokyo residents surveyed said they would vote for LDP candidates against 29.4 percent supporting opposition candidates.

MONGLA PORT AL men take control of employees' union office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Awami League activists stormed into the Mongla Port Employees' union office on Saturday night and took over its control by declaring a new convening committee of the union.

They forced out president of the union Moktar Hossain Khandakar, general secretary Abdur Razzak Mallick and member Shahidul Islam from the premises.

Later at around 8:30 pm, the AL activists formed a 'new' convening committee with SM Abu Bakar Siddiqui as its convener and Ali Hossain Khan and Kazi Azadul Islam as joint convenors.

The newly formed convening committee brought allegations of corruption and irregularities against the old committee and expelled the previous president Moktar Hossain, general secretary Abdur Razzak Mallick and member Shahidul Islam, a press release said.

Tension is prevailing at Mongla following the incident as rival groups are flexing their muscles, police said.

Leaders of the previous committee termed the illegal occupation of the union office by activists of the ruling party a 'ridiculous' act.

We would not let this sort of vandalism unchallenged, said president of the previous committee Moktar Hossain.

On the other hand, convener of the new committee Abu Bakar Siddiqui while branding leaders of the previous committee as corrupt elements. He said move to get in the union office would be resisted.

Security measures have been stepped up at Mongla as supporters of both groups continued to demonstrations in front of the union office raising provocative slogans against each other.

Construction

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will be constructed at a cost of about Tk 60000 crore. The project will be implemented in three phases. In the first phase, nine jetty-berths will be constructed at a cost of Tk 13000 crore.

The construction of the deep-sea port was an election pledge of the Awami League-led grand alliance.

The shipping ministry has taken the deep-sea port construction as a priority project to develop the entire region as a business hub.

Thirteen percent of the estimated expenditure of the deep-sea port will be taken from the Chittagong seaport.

Chittagong Port Authority Chairman Commodore RU Ahmed said the consultant firm has prepared the draft report on the deep-sea port after hydrographic and other studies.

If developed as a transshipment port like those in Singapore and Colombo, this port will be able to attract the neighbouring countries, he added.

Engineer Muhammad Khademul Bashar, deputy manager of Chittagong port authority and member of a five-member technical committee in aid of consultant firm Pacific Consultants International (Japan) said the study of the deep-sea port had been continued for three years and about a 2500-page draft report was finalised in nine volumes.