

WB allegation

FROM PAGE 20
The Awami League-led government has given top priority to the project that will cost \$2.9 billion (nearly Tk 24,000 crore).

In April last year, the WB agreed to provide the government a loan of \$1.2-billion for the project, while the ADB pledged \$610 million, Japan International Cooperation Agency \$400 million and Islamic Development Bank \$140 million. And the government would provide the remaining \$600 million.

But in September last year, the Washington-based lender raised allegation of corruption in appointing a Canadian consulting firm for the project. The WB, the coordinator of donors for the project, later suspended its funding over the allegation.

Muhith said no work in the project other than land acquisition and rehabilitation had been done, and not even a single complaint was lodged over the acquisition. "So, how could there be corruption in it?" questioned the finance minister. He said the Anti-Corruption Commission probed the allegations but found no evidence of graft. "The ACC interviewed 61 parties and found no corruption."

On Malaysia's willingness to fund the project, Muhith said all the deals in this regard will be signed by October.

"We are waiting for a proposal from Malaysia. The final decision will be made by June once we find the proposal acceptable," he said.

Quoting the visiting ADB official, the minister said the Manila-based lender is willing to fund the project even if the WB backs off.

Muhith also sought \$300 million from the ADB as budget support by the year end or by June, 2013 to ease the pressure of rising budgetary expenditure.

Railway

FROM PAGE 20
After the prime minister returns home [from Doha], a powerful committee will be formed to probe the irregularities, he said.

The rail authorities planned to recruit 7,200 class-III and -IV employees. Some 1,400 have already been recruited. The recruitment procedure has been suspended following a cash haul on April 9 involving the then railway minister's assistant personal secretary Omar Faruk Talukder, his driver and two railway officials.

The scandal led to the resignation of ruling Awami League leader Suranjit Sengupta as railway minister.

Asked whether he would be able to break the cycle of corruption in the railway, Obaidul said he would try if given enough time. "I don't think I will discharge the additional responsibility of the railway ministry for a long period," he told reporters.

He was given the charge of the railway ministry when the railway's recruitment process became questionable.

The communications minister said he had been working hard though the gains were small. "I will work sincerely, ensuring transparency. And I want to make a good start for the railway," he headed.

A separate committee will be formed to gather information about railway's land and properties and how much of them have already been taken by grabbers.

"I am surprised to know that thousands of acres of railway's lands were grabbed. The situation is grave in Feni and Chittagong," he said adding that in many places, people were trying to grab rail lines.

Earlier in the day, Quader held a meeting with senior railway officials at Railway Bhaban when they discussed issues, including manpower crisis and various development projects.

Railway Secretary Fazle Elahi, Director General Abu Taher and the general managers of railway's east and west zones attended the meeting.

Men to live

FROM PAGE 20
between the sexes peaked at nearly six years in the 1970s.

Life expectancy is going up all round, but the rates for men are increasing faster.

Plummeting smoking rates in men are thought to explain a lot of the change.

Prof Mayhew, a professor of statistics at Cass Business School, analysed life expectancy data in England and Wales. He was working out how long 30-year-old could expect to live.

His findings show men languishing far behind for decades, but now starting to get closer to women. If current trends continue, Prof Mayhew predicts, both sexes could, on average, be living to the age of 87 in 2030.

He said, "What's interesting at the moment is that in the last 20 years or so, male life expectancy at 30 has jumped by about six years and if it jumps by the same amount in the next 20 years it will converge with female life expectancy."

The reason could be down to men living a healthier lifestyle. "One of the main reasons, I think, is the trend in the prevalence of smoking. Smoking took off after 1920 in the male population and at its high about 80 percent of males smoked."

"This was reflected in more divergence in the life expectancy, so by the time you get to about 1970 it was at its peak - the difference in life expectancy was about 5.7 years."

Other factors are thought to be safer, more office-based, jobs. Millions of men used to work in hazardous occupations such as coal mining. Healthcare has meant more men live longer as well. People with heart disease, which is more common in men, can expect to live much longer than they did a few decades

ago.

By contrast, women started smoking later than men. Rates of lung cancer are still increasing in women, but are falling fast in men.

A boy and a girl born on the same day will still not have the same life expectancies, as the study looked only at people who had already reached 30. Boys are more likely to die in their first year of life and are more likely to take up dangerous sports or be involved in fatal accidents.

It means that women could still have the edge for sometime to come.

Prof David Leon, from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said, "In virtually all countries in the world, women do have a slight advantage."

However, he said the gap was definitely closing in some countries.

Countries with lower levels of life expectancy, such as in sub-Saharan Africa, showed very little difference between the genders. This was due to the prevalence of infectious diseases which "are not picky about men and women", he said.

In countries that had defeated most infectious diseases, such as in Eastern Europe, "there is a much bigger difference, mostly dominated by lifestyle factors".

At one point in the 1990s, the gap between life expectancies in Russia reached 13 years. Prof Leon said it was an "absolutely massive" difference in a "very gendered society".

In his third class of countries, such as the UK, the gap in life expectancies is starting to narrow.

He said, "Men are getting a bit better behaved and women are adopting male life expectancies."

Tk 70 lakh

FROM PAGE 1
minister.

On the night of April 9, the amount was first being carried on the private car of Mridha, the suspended railway general manager (east). The money was then moved to Faruq's microbus at the capital's Dhanmondi-3, ACC's primary investigation has found.

Ever since the railwaygate scandal involving the recovery of Tk 70 lakh broke late that night, Faruq has all along claimed the money was his. Mridha, on the other hand, repeatedly claimed he had no knowledge of any money being carried in the vehicle.

To verify their claims, the ACC yesterday decided to summon Mridha's driver Mokhesur Rahman who had driven the private car up to Dhanmondi.

The anti-graft body will send Mokhesur, a government employee, a notice today, asking him to appear before the ACC officials on April 25, ACC officials told The Daily Star yesterday.

Border force members seized the money after Faruq's driver Ali Azam Khan drove the microbus into Pilkhana headquarters in the capital around 11:30pm on April 9. Apart from Faruq and Mridha, another top railway official Enamul Huq was in the microbus.

Reportedly, the money is part of the bribe taken from railway job seekers, and the microbus was headed for Suranjit's Jigatola residence.

It may be mentioned that Faruq deposited Tk 70 lakh in his Mercantile Bank's Dhanmondi branch account on April 11.

The railwaygate scandal has cost Suranjit Sengupta his railway job. Barely five months into taking over as railway minister, he announced his resignation on April 16 taking "full responsibility" for the scam.

The cash haul drew huge flak from different quarters, prompting the ACC, railway ministry and railway to open separate investigations into the source of the money and the alleged recruitment business in the railway.

The ACC formed a three-member committee to look into the source of the money, the reported recruitment trade and the wealth of Faruq, Mridha and Enamul.

ACC officials told this paper yesterday they had gathered that Mridha came to Dhaka from Chittagong

with the money in the morning of April 9.

"He [Mridha] started from his residence at Kamalapur Railway Officers' Quarters for the minister's Jigatola house along with his driver Mokhesur Rahman and [suspended] Dhaka division security commandant Enamul.

"On the way to the minister's house, the GM stopped at his father-in-law's residence at Dhanmondi-3 around 10:00pm where Faruq and his microbus driver Azam joined in. From there Mridha and Enamul boarded the microbus with the money, and Mridha asked his driver to return home," said an ACC official.

Two ACC officials close to the ongoing investigation said they would interrogate Mridha's driver to cross-check some information such as from where the money was picked up in Mridha's car and then moved to Faruq's microbus.

This correspondent called Mridha over the cell phone several times and sent a text message requesting his comment on the matter, but he neither received the calls nor responded to the message.

On Saturday, Mridha, Faruq and Enamul appeared before the ACC investigators and gave their statements.

Following his appearance before the probe team, Faruq told reporters that the Tk 70 lakh recovered from his vehicle was his personal money.

On the same day, Mridha and Enamul claimed to journalists that they had no knowledge that there was money in the vehicle.

Faruq in his written statement to the ACC claimed that of the Tk 70 lakh, he had earned Tk 45 lakh through practicing law and got the rest Tk 25 lakh from his expatriate brother-in-law, who gave him the amount by exchanging foreign currencies.

The commission, however, did not accept his explanation and asked him to provide proof of both the claims.

On April 11, Enamul in an interview with The Daily Star claimed he had accompanied Mridha as he was asked to.

"As my boss [Mridha] asked me to accompany him to the minister's house, I followed the order," Enamul said, "We went to a house at Dhanmondi-3 by the GM's car. We then left the car and got on the microbus of the APS [Faruq]."

Sylhet violence

FROM PAGE 1
hours, also saw the agitators set fire to the upazila parishad building and lay siege to the local police station.

Of the dead, Monwar Hossain, 30, was an activist of Jubo Dal, while the identity of the other could not yet be known, said police.

Bishwanath is part of the constituency (Sylhet-2) of former BNP lawmaker Ilias Ali, who along with his car driver disappeared in the early hours of April 18 from the capital's Banani area.

Meanwhile, the main opposition BNP yesterday declared a third consecutive dawn-to-dusk hartal for today in protest over the disappearance of Ilias and his driver.

"The government is staging a drama over the Ilias issue. It must stop the drama and return Ilias to us," Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, acting secretary general of BNP, told a press conference at the party's central office in the capital's Nayapaltan yesterday afternoon.

He said, "Since the government has abducted Ilias, the agitation will continue until it returns him."

Fakhru said 371 people including party Vice-Chairman Selima Rahman were arrested, and 795 more were injured in attacks by law enforcers and ruling party men yesterday.

Hours after the announcement of the fresh hartal, three buses were torched in the capital's Nayapaltan, Matsya Bhaban intersection and Abdullahpur in Uttara, said police.

BNP MULLS ULTIMATUM
The BNP might issue an ultimatum to the government today to rescue Ilias Ali.

The party's National Standing Committee decided this in a meeting at BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office yesterday evening.

Meeting sources said Khaleda will announce the ultimatum and the next course of agitation programme at a press conference this evening.

VIOLENCE IN BISHWANATH
Police and witnesses said several thousand people armed with bamboo sticks and local weapons from about eight villages including Ramdhana of Alongkari union, the home of Ilias Ali, marched towards the upazila complex around 2:00pm.

The clash ensued when the law enforcers intercepted the agitating mob in front of the building.

The riot turned the area into a battlefield as police fired blank shots, rubber bullets and tear gas shells to disperse

the mob.

The villagers, in retaliation, pelted police with brickbats and stones. They also attempted to set afire the Bishwanath Police Station.

At one stage, police recovered the bullet-hit body of Monwar from the spot while the other succumbed to his injuries at MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Later the authorities called in Border Guard Bangladesh to help police and Rapid Action Battalion to control the situation.

HARTAL IN CAPITAL

Police, like the recent hartal days, cordoned off the BNP's central office since 6:00am.

Heavy contingents of law enforcers were deployed on the city streets to maintain law and order.

Police said they detained 41 pickets from the city during chase and counter-chase with pro-hartal activists.

Opposition activists vandalised four vehicles at different areas and hurled a few handmade bombs.

A minibus was torched in Chankharpool area around 7:30am.

Ten women leaders and activists of BNP including Selima Rahman were picked up from the capital's Gulshan area when they tried to bring out a procession.

Several BNP lawmakers brought out a procession and held two rallies on the parliament premises in the morning.

In Mohakhali, Bangladesh Chhatra League activists along with law enforcers chased and dispersed a procession brought out by the activists of Govt Titumir College union of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal at Wireless Gate around 9:20am.

Chhatra League men brought out an anti-hartal procession with books and notebooks in their hands demanding an end to the strike.

Miscreants hurled a molotov cocktail in Motijheel area around 1:30pm and vandalised a BRTC bus.

Police also detained three people from in front of the BNP central office and two more from the Central Shaheed Minar premises.

A number of city service buses, CNG-run three-wheelers and motorcycles plied the major streets, while the private transports stayed off the roads. Rickshaws, as usual in hartal days, dominated the thoroughfares of the capital.

No inter-district buses left the city terminals since the morning. The train and launch services, however, remained normal.

All educational institutions and shopping malls on the major roads remained closed.

Sohel Taj resigns

FROM PAGE 1

minister as she did not accept his resignation, apparently prompting him to leave his parliament membership.

Two days before Hasina's comment, Sohel Taj demanded that the government issue a gazette notification on his resignation as state minister, as he thinks his dignity and the image of the government as well as the prime minister were tarnished for not doing so.

He also said the government must take back around Tk 40 lakh deposited in his account as remuneration and allowances for the post.

The resignation of this young politician, who was elected from Gazipur-4 constituency in 2001 and 2008 national polls, came as a shock to Awami League leaders and workers and ordinary people.

Many believe his quitting as MP would create further crisis for the government, which is already grappling with some critical issues including continuous agitation by the main opposition BNP.

In his resignation letter to Speaker Abdul Hamid, Sohel Taj said, "My constituency is 197, Gazipur-4 (Kapasia). I submit my resignation letter to you under section 67 (2) of the Constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh."

In an open letter to his constituents as well as the countrymen, he said, "I have resigned from the posts of MP and state minister on justified grounds."

Abu Kawser, assistant personal secretary of Sohel

Taj, who is currently living in the US, submitted the resignation to the Speaker's office around 10:25 am.

Mohammad Shamim, an official, received the letter, Kawser told The Daily Star.

Sohel Taj was present on 88 out of 288 working days of this parliament's sessions.

Deputy Speaker Col (ret'd) Shawkat Ali termed Sohel's resignation sad.

"If an MP feels that he cannot discharge his responsibilities with dignity, he can resign from parliament. But it's not necessary that other lawmakers will follow suit," he said, talking to reporters at his residence on the Jatiya Sangsad premises in the afternoon.

The Daily Star yesterday also talked to Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury and Railways Minister Obaidul Quader to know the government reaction.

Matia, also an AL presidency member, said Sohel thought he was not duly serving the people of his constituency and this could be the reason for his resignation.

The minister, however, dismissed that the government would be in crisis following his resignation. "Our leader, the prime minister, did not lack sympathy for the family members of the four national leaders [including Tajuddin]."

Quader, also a presidium member of AL, said it was not good news for him. The formal reaction would come from the government after Sheikh Hasina returns from

Our correspondents from Sylhet, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Bogra and Sirajganj have reported incidents of minor violence during hartal hours.

In Gazipur, a mobile court sentenced three people to a jail term of seven days each for picketing.

SELIMA LANDS IN JAIL

A Dhaka court yesterday sent 10 people including BNP Vice-Chairman Selima Rahman to jail after Gulshan police produced them before the court showing them arrested under section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Bikash Kumar Saha passed the order.

Contacted, counsel of the accused advocate Masud Ahmed Talukder said police secretly produced his clients before the court around 7:30pm and the court sent them to jail without granting them (lawyers) the opportunity to move any bail petition.

GOVT PRESS NOTE

A press note issued late this evening said law enforcers are continuing all out efforts based on the information from reliable sources, reports BSS.

The government has taken effective steps to rescue the former BNP parliamentarian Ilias Ali in view of his disappearance on the night of April 17.

Ilias Ali's wife has already provided sincere cooperation to the members of law enforcing agencies in rescuing her husband, the press note said.

The government regrets that despite sincere efforts of the administration to rescue Ilias Ali, the main opposition instead of cooperating with the government is continuously calling hartal to incite the people and causing sufferings to them.

At the same time, it is observed that unfortunately a section of the press is printing stories that are completely imaginary and baseless. Such stories include ideas that there are a number of terms and conditions on which the rescue of Ilias Ali contingent has created confusion and hatred in the minds of the people.

These kind of fabricated stories hinder the actual rescue operation and exposing the mystery of the missing person.

The government appeals to all to refrain from making imaginary stories, hartals and arson that are causing sufferings to the people.

The press note urged the people to extend all out cooperation to maintain law and order as well as to accelerate the rescue effort.

Views divided

FROM PAGE 1
between the government and BNP over Ilias, Luna yesterday only said, "There is no hope from anyone. I want my husband back at any cost."

Ilias Ali, BNP organising secretary and former lawmaker, along with his car driver went missing in the early hours of April 18.

The main opposition party has accused the government of abducting Ilias while Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina described the incident as a drama.

On Saturday, following its joint drive with police at Pubail in Gazipur, Rab said they took Ilias' wife with them during the operation.

But Luna, who met Khaleda Zia after the drive, said she did not go anywhere with Rab.

BNP insiders said hearing about the drive, a group of party leaders met the chairperson and said it was not a right decision for Luna to go with Rab. She should have informed the party first about her decision so that it could get involved in the rescue process.

Khaleda agreed with them and expressed her displeasure to Luna when she met her.

The party insiders further said another group of leaders met Khaleda on Sunday night and convinced her that Luna took the right decision since rescuing Ilias is the first priority for her and for the party as well. A message was communicated to Luna that the party would stand by her in any situation.

Talking to the media at her residence yesterday, Luna said she was not afraid of anyone exerting pressure on her. "Who'll put pressure on me and why? I have no time to listen to anyone's statements. I just want my husband back."

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, a senior BNP leader said some leaders were busy trying to use the incident for their political gains.

Meanwhile, Khaleda did not visit Ilias' family yesterday although sources at her office had informed the media earlier that she would visit the family in the evening.

BNP standing committee member Rafiqul Islam Mia met the wife and children of Ilias, and said the party would do its best to ensure that Ilias returned to them.

Contacted, State Minister for Home Shamsul Haque

Hartal

FROM PAGE 20
"The economy of the country is heading towards uncertainty as the businesses are being adversely affected by political strikes," said AK Azad, president of FBCCI.

Hartal is not the solution, he said, "We want political leaders to figure out an alternative so that the economy of the country is not hampered."

Amjad Khan Chowdhury, president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said businesses suffer as goods transportation as well as the domestic market is seriously disturbed on hartal days.

He said he could not transport dairy milk to the capital from the northern region of the country for hartal.

Readymade garments sector, the main foreign currency earner, has also expressed deep concern over the continuation of hartal.

In a statement yesterday, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturer and Exporters Association (BGMEA) said they could not transport goods up to Chittagong port for export due to hartal. As a result, they would have to count discount for delayed shipment or send their consignments by air, which was very expensive.

With inadequate supply of power and gas, and weak infrastructure, the prolonged hartal would only add to the suffering of the readymade garment sector, which was already going through a tough time for the ongoing financial meltdown in two important export destinations, the EU and the US, said the statement.

Tuku yesterday said investigation into the incident was still on, and when it ends, the outcome will be made public.

Commander M Sohail, director of Rapid Action Battalion's legal and media wing, said, "From the beginning, we are investigating the incident with utmost sincerity but we need more time to complete the task."

Kazi Mainul, investigation officer for the general diary filed after Ilias' missing, said they yesterday submitted a second report to a Dhaka court, describing their efforts to rescue Ilias.

Land grabbers

FROM PAGE 20
the occupants were asleep. There were, however, no casualties reported.

Belonging to Lubin Baske, Joshef Tudu, Nagen Tudu, Sutar Murmu and Robin Murmu, the dwellings were burnt to ashes, as there was no water body nearby to douse the flames, said Sohel Rana, an NGO official, after visiting the spot -- a piece of khas land where 35 indigenous families have been living for the last six months.

Lubin Baske sensed the fire first and alerted the others.

He said, "The arsonists were still standing there after setting the houses ablaze."

Sutar Murmu has filed a case with Tanore Police Station, accusing three -- Korban Ali, Mojibul Islam and Anarul Islam -- of the arson attack.

Six months back, the local lawmaker arranged for the indigenous families to live on the khas land, as they had no place to live. He also assured them that the land would be allotted in their favour.

Since then, Korban and his men have been relentless in their attempts to evict the families and grab the land.

According to the case statement, Korban and his gang damaged 11 houses to scare the indigenous families away from the land in January.

Korban had also threatened to burn down their houses if they did not leave the land voluntarily, he added.

Contacted, Korban denied the allegation and claimed the indigenous people had torched their own houses to frame him up.

Abul Hashem, officer-in-charge of Tanore Police Station, said they had been trying to arrest the perpetrators.

Dhaka, Delhi

FROM PAGE 20
complications in the relationship between Bangladesh and India.

All pending issues, including sharing of the Teesta water, exchange of enclaves and 6.5-kilometre undemarcated border, will be discussed during the visits, said the officials.

Pranab Mukherjee, who will fly to Dhaka attending the ADB meeting in Manila, will call on Sheikh Hasina, his counterpart AMA Muhith, and Dipu Moni. On May 6, he is scheduled to join the closing ceremony of the year-long celebration of Rabindranath Tagore's 150th birth anniversary here.

Dipu Moni during her India visit will attend the closing ceremony in New Delhi at 6:30pm on May 7 and hold extensive meetings with her Indian counterpart SM Krishna.

Diplomatic sources said Pranab will convey to Bangladesh that India is hopeful of overcoming complexities that came in the way of implementing two key decisions -- the Teesta water sharing agreement and ratification of the deal on exchanging adversely possessed lands and enclaves, and land boundary demarcation.

Meanwhile, our New Delhi correspondent yesterday reported that after Pranab and Dipu Moni's visits, Speaker of Indian Parliament Meira Kumar is expected to come to Dhaka on a five-day visit from May 23 on an invitation from her Bangladeshi counterpart Abdul Hamid.

Indian officials are billing this visit as a cultural diplomacy initiative. Kumar, a former foreign service officer, will attend the joint inauguration of