Sonali board refuses

FROM PAGE 1

members even raised question whether there was laxity on the part of the Bangladesh Bank in detecting the Tk 3,606-crore scam, an official of Sonali Bank

The meeting, presided over by bank Chairman Quazi Baharul Islam, blamed a section of dishonest officials of the bank for the embezzlement by Hall-Mark Group and five other companies from the bank's Ruposhi Bangla Hotel branch.

All members of the board and the top officials of the bank were present at the meeting.

Kashem Humayun, a director of Sonali Bank, however, said the central bank was not criticised at the AGM.

He said the board put the blame on a number of bank officials, and gave more emphasis on realising the

A finance ministry representative, who attended the meeting, said the government devised a strategy to recover the loan.

The bank management Group. told the AGM that Hall-Mark had already sent documents to Sonali Bank about mortgaging 46 acres of land

"I am unwell. But I have

been facing cross-

examination day after day. It

is torturous to me. It seems I

have committed a big

offence by appearing [before

the tribunal] to give testi-

mony," commented

Shahriar during cross-

The three-member tribu-

nal headed by Justice ATM

Fazle Kabir with members

Justice Obaidul Hassan and

Judge M Shahinur Islam

recorded the cross-

examination of Shahriar, the

first prosecution witness in

the case against the Jamaat

Mizanul yesterday cross-

examined the 62-year-old

eminent journalist for one

and a half hours and asked

him around 50 questions,

mostly on a violent attack on

the Ahmadiyya Muslim

community in Lahore in

When Mizanul sought

12:15pm for his "physical

illness", Judge Shahinur

Islam asked him, "How

much time do you need [to

complete the cross-

"I would take at least two

At this point, Shahriar

Kabir, executive president of

Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal

Nirmul Committee, made

the comment expressing his

defence to complete his

cross-examination within

next two sessions, and

adjourned the proceedings

The tribunal used to

record the cross-

examination of Shahriar in

the first session, which

stretches between 10:30am

and 1:00pm, due to his phys-

during his two-hour-and-

forty-minute testimony,

Shahriar appealed to the

tribunal to try Jamaat and its

associate bodies alongside

its top leaders for what he

said was their crimes against

humanity during the

On August 30, the defence

cross-examined Shahriar for

two and a quarter hours.

They cross-examined him

again on September 2 for

another two hours and then

The defence has so far

asked him around 250 ques-

tions in 8:15 hours on the

four occasions of cross-

Shahriar was scheduled

to be cross-examined on

September 4 too, but the

tribunal adjourned the

proceeding following the

Relying to a question

yesterday, Shahriar said he

never believes in military

rule or military court and

was against any trial beyond

two and a half hours.

examination.

defence's plea.

the Constitution.

again on September 5 for September

Earlier on August 26

The tribunal asked the

more sessions," replied

secretary general.

Pakistan in 1953.

examination]?'

dissatisfaction.

until September 9.

ical condition.

Liberation War.

Mizanul.

examination.

It's torturous

against the loan. The Group has also proposed to mortgage another 13 acres.

The group has claimed the mortgage will cover about Tk 2,000 crore of the Tk 2,686 crore it has taken in loan.

But Sonali Bank in its primary evaluation estimated the land price at Tk 600 crore, said an official.

Contacted, a central bank official said there had been no laxity in Bangladesh Bank's supervision. The government can investigate whether there had been any negligence by the Bangladesh Bank.

The central bank usually inspects bank branches once a year if the branches lend 80 percent of the total credit of the bank.

As per rules, the Ruposhi Bangla branch does not come under the purview of the yearly inspection, the BB official added, requesting anonymity.

The BB in its 2010 inspection found that Sonali Bank had an outstanding loan of Tk 55 crore. The inspection revealed irregularities in giving loans to Hall-Mark

Sonali Bank was informed about the irregularities at the time. In reply, the bank said steps were

"But it is the reality that

we had to comply with many

decisions taken by the mili-

tary government in the then

Pakistan and Bangladesh

Shahriar said the 12-

member National People's

Inquiry Commission was

formed in 1993 with poet

Sufia Kamal as chairman

and Barrister Shafique

Ahmed as coordinator and

he himself conducted inves-

tigations and helped pre-

pare the commission's

asking several questions

over the violent attack on

Ahmadiyyas in Lahore,

Prosecutor Muklesur

Rahman Badal said, "This is

Opposing the prosecu-

tion's claim, Mizanul said "It

is relevant because the wit-

ness talked about this [in his

and post-attack incidents.

Mizanul asked over 30

On several occasions, the

tribunal asked the defence

to ask relevant questions

and the prosecution witness

told The Daily Star the

defence were conducting

"lengthy cross-examination

as part of their strategy to

delay the case proceeding".

During the cross-

examination, they inten-

tionally asked many ques-

tions which were not rele-

defence counsel Mizanul

Islam said they were cross-

examining the prosecution

witness within the jurisdic-

about Shahriar Kabir's com-

ment, the defence counsel

said, "Allegation of torturing

him [Shahriar Kabir] is

framed seven charges

against Mojaheed in con-

nection with murder, geno-

cide, and hatching conspir-

acy to kill intellectuals dur-

Meanwhile, the tribunal

recorded cross-examination

of Md Hasanuzzaman, sixth

prosecution witness in war

crimes case against another

Jamaat leader Muhammad

In his testimony on

Hasanuzzaman, elder

brother of martyred

Badiuzzaman, said Jamaat

leader Kamaruzzaman and

his accomplices abducted

his brother, who was tor-

tured at a military camp in

Sherpur and was later shot

face cross-examination

indicted Kamaruzzaman

with seven charges in con-

nection with crimes against

humanity committed dur-

ing the Liberation War.

Hasanuzzaman is set to

On June 4, the tribunal

dead on June 30, 1971.

again on September 9.

On June 21, the tribunal

Replying to a question

Refuting the allegations,

vant, he added.

tion of law.

totally baseless."

ing the War.

Kamaruzzaman.

Prosecutor Badal later

to give relevant answers.

testimony].

adjournment of the case at questions about the attack

not relevant to our case."

While Mizanul Islam was

report.

Replying to questions,

too," he observed.

being taken to address the issue, said the central bank official.

He added the BB made fresh inspection in the branch in April this year over allegations that the bank was reluctant to pay acceptance bill.

The primary investigation found that the branch gave Tk 555-crore in loan to Hall-Mark, which is much higher than the group got in

The detailed investigation found that Tk 3,606 crore was lent through irregularities.

No law made

FROM PAGE 1

in any court in respect of anything said, or any votes cast, by them in parliament or in any committees thereof.

And subject to Article 78, the House is supposed to enact a law delineating the privileges of the Jatiya Sangsad, its committees and members.

In the last four decades, the House has passed over 1,100 laws but could not enact a law in light of Article

"We made several attempts to have an act determining the privileges. But every time the moves fell through," said the veteran Awami League lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta.

Workers Party chief Rashed Khan Menon, MP, said the executive wing of the state remains indifferent when it comes to laying down a law on the privileges. "It is a major weakness in the system of our parliamentary democracy."

Arguing the need for the formulation of the privileges act, Suranjit, a former railway minister, said parliament could not function without privileges and so parliaments all over the world had privileges.

"MPs cannot perform freely without privileges. Privileges here do not mean purchasing duty-free cars or holding red passports," he observed.

Jatiya Party lawmaker Mujibul Haque Chunnu said the privileges act was a must and his party would raise the issue in the House.

It may be pointed out that soon after liberation, the government, then headed by Prime Ministe Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, issued the Constituent Assembly Order, 1972, determining the privileges of members of

the then assembly. But once the constitution had been framed, the Constituent Assembly Order was repealed. And Article 78 of the constitution speaks of the enactment of a new law to determine the privileges of the House, its members

and committees. Information available says that in 1980, during the tenure of the second parliament, the then government moved to enact a law to determine the privileges of MPs. The Members of Parliament (Exemption from Preventive Detention) Bill, 1980, was placed in parliament on June 3, 1980.

The bill was sent to the parliamentary standing committee on the law ministry for scrutiny and submission of a report to the House. But the committee did not come up with the scruting report during the tenure of the second parliament, and the bill was not passed.

Before the country's independence, in the Pakistan era, members of the national and provincial assemblies enjoyed some privileges under the Members of the National Assembly (Exemption from Preventive Detention and Personal Appearance) Ordinance, 1963, and the East Pakistan Assembly Members' Privileges Act,

According to the law, no member of the national assembly could be detained under any law relating to preventive detention during its session and for a period of 14 days before and 14 days after its session.

Members of the national and provincial assemblies would not be required to appear in person in any civil or revenue court or before any election tribunal during their sessions and for a certain period before and after that, according to the laws.





city

A combo photo shows Railways Minister Obaidul Quader almost falling on the platform, when he slips on the doorstep of his saloon car when the train he is aboard starts to move. And he escapes injury as people get hold of him in time. Quader was travelling to the capital from Lalmonirhat by an intercity express that stopped at Gaibandha station for a short break. The incident occurred when the minister, standing on the steps, was talking to his party men and locals.

27 banks under BB, ACC scanner

FROM PAGE 1

purchase and acceptance bills issued between 2010 and May this year, the period of the Tk 3,606 crore swindle.

Sources said Mir Md Zainul Abedin Shebly, a deputy director of the commission, last month wrote to the managing directors and chief executives of the banks for the papers.

"Some of the banks have already provided us with the documents," said an ACC official, preferring not to be named.

According to the antigraft body, some clients of the 27 banks have banking records with money illegally borrowed from the Ruposhi Bangla branch by Hall-Mark Group and five other companies.

The banks include stateowned Sonali, Janata, Agrani, Rupali and BASIC banks.

The other twenty-two banks are Shahjalal Islami Bank, Social Islami Bank, Mercantile Bank, National Credit and Commerce Bank Ltd, United Commercial Bank, One Bank, Al Arafah Islami Bank, Jamuna Bank, IFIC, City Bank, Uttara Bank, Prime Bank, State Bank of India, National Bank of Pakistan, Bank Al Falah, Premier Bank, National Bank Ltd, Mutual Trust Bank, BRAC Bank, Islami Bank, Exim Bank and Southeast bank.

A top Sonali Bank official said soon after the Ruposhi Bangla branch lent a huge sum of money to Hall-Mark, it was detected that a number of foreign and local banks had been demanding money from Sonali Bank against acceptance bills.

An issuance of these acceptance letters means the branch confirmed with the 27 banks that its client

Hall-Mark and five other companies had received due supplies from the clients of some branches of those banks against letters of credit (LC) opened earlier, sources said.

pay the money of the delivered goods to Hall-Mark and others within the next 30 days of issuing the acceptance letters. Usually, business clients

of the banks do not wait 30 days for the payment of their delivered goods; they want cash as quickly as possible. So they propose their banks to purchase the acceptance letter.

According to banking provisions, banks give their clients 75 percent of the total amount of acceptance letters, a procedure called purchasing "inland bill" of own clients in exchange of an interest rate.

When a bank transfers the payment after 30 days of issuing their acceptance letters, the bank at the receiving end pays the rest -- 25 percent -- to their client who earlier had sold out the acceptance letter.

The ACC official, on condition of anonymity, said as the Ruposhi Bangla branch issued many such acceptance letters to some branches of 27 banks, the commission decided to look into the matter. Since May, the branch

has already paid \$111 million (more than Tk 800 crore) against foreign bills it had accepted or purchased.

But, against the inland bills purchases, the 27 banks have been demanding money, which the branch is yet to pay, the official said.

A BB official said the central bank had received complaints from different banks that Sonali Bank was

against local export bills. So far, 59 branches of

those banks have claimed their dues against the bills. The central bank will investigate whether officials of those branches And, the branch would were involved in any anom-A BB official said they

had already inquired into some of the branches and found the involvement of state-run Janata Bank and Agrani Bank in the scam. Detailed investigation is going on in other branches. In one case, the Janata

Bank corporate branch opened two accounts in the name of two companies. For both the accounts, Tanvir Mahmud, managing director of Hall-Mark Group, was the introducer.

said funds were transferred to the accounts of these companies, although the branch did not inspect whether the two companies existed.

The BB also carried out a special inspection on the activities of the principal branch of Agrani Bank.

The corresponding banks, which are making claims to the Ruposhi Bangla branch, have a responsibility to see whether the accounts of fake companies were opened with them, the official added.

official said irregularities over purchase and acceptance of local and foreign bills took place inside branches, banks and with other banks.

tor in the country.

The official said the

issues but also wrongdoing over purchase and acceptance bills.

gating not only Hall-Mark

The ACC, too, has asked for documents on all bill purchases against acceptance letters to examine whether there was any other scam involving any other client of the Ruposhi Bangla branch.

BNP reiterates demand for non-party govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will not get a chance even to flee if it fails to restore a nonparty neutral government system to oversee the next general election, said BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday.

"The government knows the time has come for it to quit. I hope their [the government's] good sense will prevail. Otherwise they will have nowhere to escape,' he said while addressing a demonstration at Nayapaltan in the capital.

The Dhaka city unit of BNP-led 18-party alliance organised the programme in protest at the chaotic situation in educational institutions. City BNP convener Sadeque Hossain Khoka presided over the programme.

Fakhrul accused the government of spreading criminal activities to educational institutions and thereby destroying the

"Government has tried to blame Chatra Dal and Shibir [student wings of BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami] for the chaotic situation on campuses in the country but failed," he added.

The BNP leader bitterly criticised Finance Minister AMA Muhith for a recent bank scam, saying he had turned into rubbish for people and it was time to throw him into the dust-

Fakhrul referred to the finance minister's comment that the Tk 4,000 crore Sonali Bank scam is nothing serious.

Before that, people came to know about the corruption of the government's ministers and advisers like Suranjit Sen Gupta, Syed Abul Hossain and Syed Modasser Ali, said Fakhrul, adding, "All of them are thieves."

Buet crisis FROM PAGE 20

university. Nahid assured teachers of the withdrawal of the pro-VC and the two cases filed against faculty members and students. Teachers then agreed to resume academic activities.

But students demanded removal of the VC too, fearing that in his presence at Buet, they would face administrative harassment.

On April 7, Buet Teachers' Association launched an agitation, including work abstention, bringing 16 allegations of corruption against the VC and the pro-VC. But they suspended their agitation temporarily after the prime minister's assurances of fulfilling the demand.

Seeing no progress made on the issue, the teachers again announced non-stop work abstention from July 14. Students and staff of the university this time joined them.

2 advisers talk Teesta, Tipai with Indian ministers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New

Teesta river water-sharing, Tipaimukh power project and implementation of land boundary accord were among a range of bilateral issues which figured in discussions between Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's advisers and four federal Indian ministers here yesterday.

Cooperation in power sector and security also figured when the advisers Gowher Rizvi and Mashiur Rahman met Indian Power Minister M Veerappa Moily

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CONTEMPT PLEA

Matia asked to explain by Sept 19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday directed Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury to explain her position by September 19 on the contempt of court petition filed against her by war crimes accused Muhammad Kamaruzzaman.

It, however, exempted Matia from physically attending the court.

Moving the petition filed on August 29, defence counsel of Kamaruzzaman Ehsan A Siddiq appealed to the tribunal to begin contempt proceedings against her for allegedly making statements disrespecting the courts set up to try crimes against humanity during the 1971

Liberation War. Jamaat-e-Islami leader Kamaruzzaman is now facing seven charges of murder and torture of unarmed civilians in Sherpur district committed during the war.

Awami League presidium member Matia visited Sherpur, the Jamaat leader's home district, on August 7 and 8 and made several statements that "constituted contempt of the honourable tribunal," Ehsan

said. Referring to a report of the Daily Naya Diganta, based on information from Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, he quoted Matia as saying on August 7 in Nalitabari of Sherpur that, "Those who would testify in favour of war criminals would be identified and a resistance movement would be waged against them in

the locality." According to another report of online news portal Barta24.net, Matia the following day at a programme in the same district said, "No witness giving evidence in favour of Kamaruzzaman would be able to return to his/her home as he/she would be beaten up by the

public. Such threats had been issued to deter defence witnesses from appearing before the tribunals and that was a clear obstruction in the trial process and interference in the administra-

Later, the three-member tribunal headed by Chairman Justice ATM Fazle Kabir asked Matia to give an explanation, if she had any, by September 19 and said it would hold a further hearing

tion of justice, Ehsan said.

on the petition that day. Earlier on August 5, Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah filed a similar petition against Deputy Leader of parliament Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury with the second war crimes tribunal. And the court on August 27 asked the Awami League leader to explain her position by

Victorious

FROM PAGE 1 three wickets each.

September 10.

The Bangladesh women

took the field with a target of only 76 runs which was achieved in a rather risky manner, for the loss of eight wickets. The win puts Bangladesh 1-0 up in the series with the second ODI to be played today from 9:30am at the same venue.

not paying their dues Muhith says sorry

FROM PAGE 1 The lawmakers of the ruling AL-led grand alliance blasted Muhith for the second consecutive day vesterday for his comment

and handling of the scam. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was present in parliament.

The issue was first raised by two AL MPs Shahiduzzaman Sarker and Enamul Haque while they were speaking on a private member's resolution to set up development banks in their respective constituencies. They demanded the government take action against persons involved in the Hall-Mark scam.

In response, the finance minister described the prevailing situation and his ministry's action after the revelation of the forgery. "The board of directors

approved a loan of Tk 65 crore to Hall-Mark. Later a forgery syndicate in league with some bank officials embezzled the huge amount of money through issuing LCs," said Muhith adding, the board of directors was not supposed to be aware of the forgery. Senior AL lawmaker

Abul Jalil, who is also the chairman of the board of directors of a private bank, said the finance minister claimed that the money was given to Hall-Mark without the knowledge of the board of directors.

"I am involved with a

bank. I know that it is not possible without the approval of the board of directors," mentioned Jalil. Criticising Muhith's

remarks, he questioned, "How much money needs to be looted to term it a big amount?" People, he said, have reacted sharply to the inci-

dent and it would bring negative results for the grand alliance in the next parliamentary polls. AL legislator Tofail Ahmed said the board of

directors of the Sonali Bank cannot avoid their responsibilities in the matter. Tenure of the chairmen of six state banks has been extended and the chair-

man of the Sonali Bank has been asked to continue in his post until further order, he mentioned. "The chairman should have been removed and the board of directors should be dissolved." Tofail also questioned

why the general manager and two deputy general managers of the bank were not suspended instead of making them officers on special duty (OSDs). AL MP Abdul Matin

talk less. So I will finish my Khasru inquired why the ministry took such a long time to take action although the Bangladesh Bank had informed it about the scam in 2010. "Why have the persons involved in the forgery not yet been arrested?"

Since the Sonali Bank is a state-owned bank, the government is involved in its activities, he added. Jatiya Party MP Mujibul

Haque criticised the finance ministry for making the bank's officials OSDs. He demanded the government probe the matter with neutral per-

Taking the floor again, Muhith said he believed that neither any member of the government nor any official of his ministry was involved in the scam. Defending his ministry's

Bank for the sake of proper investigation. The high officials were made OSDs to make sure that they could not influence the investigation, he

action, he said they did not

dissolve the present board

of directors of the Sonali

TO TALK LESS Finance Minister AMA

MUHITH ADVISED

added.

Muhith yesterday said he has been advised to refrain from making any speech or comment that might "embarrass" the government. "I have been advised to

speech quickly," he said during his seven-minute speech at the launching of BD Venture Ltd at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in the capital. After the event, he did

not even talk to newsmen waiting outside the venue.

A central bank official

Officials also believe private banks might have been used as platforms for the swindling.

Another central bank

And irregularities were behind a number of major scams in the banking sec-

central bank was investi-