

Financiers target

FROM PAGE 20
Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) sources said the WB had submitted its 3rd report on the graft allegations in the bridge project to the ACC in the middle of this month. The WB Dhaka office had directly delivered the report to the ACC chairman.

ACC Chairman Ghulam Rahman yesterday told the media, "According to the information we have received so far from different sources, including the World Bank, we found that there had been a conspiracy to commit corruption...some people tried to take advantage."

The four-member ACC team formed to investigate the WB allegations of corruption in the project was expected to submit its report on December 3, said Rahman, adding that legal actions against the accused would be taken after the report submission.

The anti-graft commission yesterday interrogated three officials of the Bridges Division and two others in connection with the corruption allegations. The outcome of the interrogation could not be known.

The three Bridges Division officials quizzed are: Senior Assistant Engineer Rajab Ali, Deputy Director (finance and accounts) Moniruzzaman, and former additional chief engineer Md Zafar Ullah.

Prof Abu Siddique of engineering department at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, and Sanowar Ali, a member of National Housing Authority, were also interrogated.

The ACC enquiry began in September last year.

Sources in the ACC said whatever today's Manila meeting decided would depend on the report of the WB's external panel and Integrity Vice Presidency (INT) as to whether the investigation into the graft allegations were being carried out fairly.

Luis Moreno Ocampo, chair of the external panel of the WB and former chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, along with officials of WB's INT would start a meeting with the ACC in Dhaka on December 2 to learn about the progress of the graft probe, said ACC officials.

Finance ministry officials said the WB would decide whether to finance the project further and de-link the investigation and implementation process based on the panel's report on the progress of the ACC investigation.

Sources said the WB INT wanted the ACC to file a First Information Report (FIR) with a police station during the first stage of the anti-graft commission's investigation.

On October 14, the WB external panel arrived in Dhaka and it was scheduled to give the global lender a primary report within a month. But sources said the report was not prepared, as the FIR was notified.

About this, an ACC official said they had not filed the FIR due to lack of adequate evidence, but they would file an FIR very soon, as they had got substantial information in the 3rd report of the WB.

In the beginning of this

year, the WB had given a report to the government on corruption in the appointment of a consulting firm for the project while another report last year on graft in the main bridge project.

The WB had suspended its credit deal in September last year, raising graft allegation. In June this year, the bank cancelled the agreement saying it had proof of a "corruption conspiracy" involving some Bangladeshi officials, executive of a Canadian firm and some individuals, whose identities remained a mystery.

On September 20, the WB decided to revive the loan imposing four conditions including fair investigation into the corruption allegations.

After the bank had decided to re-engage, the government began hammering the global lender to give a go-ahead for the implementation of the project.

A finance ministry official said the government wanted the Padma bridge work to resume from where it had stopped.

The WB proposed implementation of the project on a turnkey basis under which full control of the procurement would remain with them.

Meanwhile, the ADB proposed forming of a joint taskforce for procurement related works in the project.

Officials said besides the new procurement arrangement, today's Manila meeting would also discuss various other issues, including the investigation into the graft allegation.

Another factory fire at Ashulia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A fire broke out at a garment factory at Baipail in Ashulia on the outskirts of the capital yesterday evening.

No casualty was reported as the factory, Al-Shahriar Fabrics, remained closed and fire fighters doused the flame within half an hour, said Moktar Hossain, deputy director of Industrial Police.

The fire originated from a semi-pucca maintenance room of the factory around 7:00pm, said Anwar Hossain, senior station officer of the DEPZ Fire Service Station.

On information, six fire fighting units from Dhaka Export Processing Zone Authority and Dhamrai rushed to the spot and brought the blaze under control after half an hour hectic effort.

"The fire could not spread to the adjacent main factory building as the fire fighters doused the flame soon," Anwar said.

Some furniture and electronic accessories inside the maintenance room were burnt to ashes, he said adding that an electric short circuit might have caused the fire.

Soon after the fire was doused, locals staged demonstration blocking the

Nabinagar-Baipail road. Later police dispersed the agitators and brought the situation under control.

The factories across the country remained closed yesterday as the nation was mourning the deaths of 111 workers who had been killed in a devastating fire at a garment factory in Ashulia on Saturday night.

Walmart

FROM PAGE 1
Walmart on the list of its top 29 buyers.

The Daily Star called the group's Managing Director Delwar Hossain on his mobile phone twice yesterday. His assistant answered the phone both times and only said Delwar was at a meeting.

In a statement released on Monday, the US retail giant said Tazreen was no longer authorised to produce merchandise for Walmart. "Our thoughts are with the families of the victims of this tragedy."

"A supplier subcontracted work to this factory without authorisation and in direct violation of our policies. Today, we have terminated the relationship with that supplier," America's biggest retailer said.

"The fact that this occurred," Walmart said, "is extremely troubling to us, and we will continue to work across the apparel industry to improve fire safety education and training in Bangladesh."

A certificate from Walmart's Accredited Production (WRAP), a global certification programme for apparel production in terms of working conditions in a facility, shows Tuba Group's compliance rate as B-level on its website, pointing to its mediocre safety standards.

The WRAP certified the group for one year -- from February 4, 2009 to February 4, 2010. No updated certification is available on its website.

Walmart categorises a factory's compliance as "Green", "Yellow", "Orange" and "Red". A compliance audit of Walmart shows some of the units of Tuba Group, like Tazreen Fashions, had been rated as "yellow" for four consecutive years, according to the website.

"Orange" indicates high risk, "yellow" indicates medium risk and "Green" low risk.

If a factory has the "Orange" category over three assessments for two consecutive years, it automatically goes to "Red", leading to the cancellation of a business deal for a year, the BBC said.

At one stage of the fire, many workers tried to escape through the ground floor of the building. But the thick smoke from yarn and fabrics stored on the floor got in their way.

The managing director of Tuba Group said he had used the ground floor as a warehouse for Tazreen and six other factories.



A worker poses a garment with the logo "ENYCE", a clothing label owned by the US rapper Sean Combs, within burnt out Tazreen Fashions factory. This handout photograph was released yesterday by The Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers Federation and The Bangladesh Center for Workers Solidarity.

PHOTO: AFP

US rap star urged

FROM PAGE 20
Walmart range)," Kalpona Akter, director of the Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity, told AFP.

She said that clothes also made for German discount line KiK, US firm Dickies, True Desire of Sears, Edinburgh Woollen Mill and several other Western brands had been identified in the burnt-out ruins.

ENYCE and Combs, who was formerly known as Puff Daddy, were not immediately available for comment.

But Walmart, European chain C&A and Hong Kong supplier Li & Fung have been among companies confirming they had clothes made at the factory.

"We are sure that Mr Combs will be as shocked as we are to find that his company is implicated in such a horrific tragedy," said Liz Parker of the Clean Clothes Campaign, an Amsterdam-based textile rights group.

"We urge him to use his influence to make sure clothing factories are safe

places for people to work."

Meanwhile, Carrefour and IKEA both issued statements yesterday saying they had had contracts with Tuba Group, the parent company that owns the Tazreen factory, but had not used the plant that burnt down.

The fire at Tazreen Fashion brings the total of workers that have died in factory fires in Bangladesh since 2006 to around 700, according to the group.

Anti-graft body

FROM PAGE 1
Tk 26,000 crore to their personal accounts and later misappropriated the amount.

ACC lawyer Mosharof Hossain Kazal told The Daily Star yesterday, "Following the court order, Destiny's all moveable and immovable properties have been frozen from yesterday."

Destiny Group has 37 concerns, though many of those are on paper only.

The concerns include Destiny Multipurpose Cooperative Society, Destiny

Tree Plantation, multilevel marketing entity Destiny 2000, Best Air, Boishakhi television and newspaper The Dainik Destiny.

The group owns land and buildings in different places of the country.

One of the most valuable is Ananda Cinema Hall at Farmgate. Destiny bought it at Tk 65.65 crore and the property includes 31.5-decimal land and a building, according to documents.

The group has 28.60-decimal land at Kakrail, 101

decimal at Purana Paltan and nearly 10 decimal at Baridhara in the capital. Destiny bought these pieces of land from private parties in 2010-11.

Destiny Group also owns land in Khulna, Barisal, Munshiganj and some other places.

Of the moveable properties, the group has automobiles.

The ACC on July 31 sued 22 officials of Destiny Group for laundering Tk 3,285.26 crore by cheating investors.

A lot left to be desired

FROM PAGE 1
regulations do not have emergency exits. Workers are often compelled to use the same gate for entry and exit, and thus exposed to the risk of stampede in the event of any danger.

Most factories are equipped with modern fire extinguishers. But the equipment either do not work or the plants do not have enough staff trained to operate the extinguishers during emergency, say workers.

Sometimes, garment waste and raw materials are piled on staircases, making it difficult for the workers to pass through, they say.

Such lapses in the safety system came to a head after the nation's deadliest industrial blaze in Ashulia on Saturday.

The Daily Star spoke to 10 garment workers from as many factories in Ashulia and its adjoining areas to know about the working conditions and safety measures in their factories.

The workers asked not to be named for fear of reprisal from their employers.

A sewing machine operator at Ratul Garments in Ashulia said, "Our factory has only one gate for entry and exit. There is no other way to get out in case of any accident."

The 25-year-old worker said whenever the fire alarm goes off, the on-duty supervisors stop them from leaving the building.

"They always say it is nothing serious and that they will check it. The supervisors don't want to halt the production for even a single moment."

His comment was similar to that of the survivors of the Saturday's fire.

Ibrahim Mondol, a sewing machine operator at Tazreen Fashions, said on Monday that he along with a number of others tried to leave the factory when a fire alarm went off at about 6:00pm on Saturday.

But the production manager stopped them and said it was part of a "compliance audit".

"We went back to work on the fourth floor. After a while, I heard loud shouts. As I looked down, I saw a plume of smoke coming out of the staircase."

Ibrahim removed an exhaust fan in the manager's room and squeezed through the opening to get out.

A female worker at Onima Fashion in Jirabo said the factory has two staircases. "There is usually no problem. But if there is any emergency, it is very tough to get out of the building as all workers rush out at the same time."

She said buyers, their representatives and audit teams visit the factory at times but they hardly talk to workers.

A goods inspector at another apparel plant said the factory's main gate is kept shut in case of any accident.

Institute of Architects Bangladesh President Mubasshar Hussain, who went to Tazreen Fashions on Monday, wondered how Rajdhan Unnayan Kartipakkha gave permission for constructing the building without fire exits.

"The factory has three staircases, and they all lead to the ground floor. If there was at least one emergency exit, the death toll would have been much lower."

"How did the government agency concerned allow the factory owner to use the ground floor as warehouse when the workers have to enter and exit through it?" he asked.

Some workers said they sometimes have to work up to 24 hours at a stretch, but they are forced to tell the buyers that they work from 8:00am to 5:00pm every day.

"If any worker tells buyers or their representatives about the actual working condition, he is either dismissed or fined," said a worker.

A few workers said dismissal of workers without notice is common in some garment factories.

Some workers said the working condition in their factories has improved in recent years following pressure from buyers, workers' bodies, and the government, but there is still a lot to be done.

Top criminal

FROM PAGE 20
The felon from Barisal converted to Islam from Christianity in 1995 and took the name Fateh Ali.

Subrata was freed from Dhaka jail on a High Court bail in 2001. As police launched a manhunt, he sneaked into India that year.

Police sources said while hiding in India, he used many names and had been to Nepal and China.

He managed a Nepali citizenship card taking the name Asif Ali Ansari as a resident of Sunsari district.

Though he had been on the run for years, many criminal gangs in Bangladesh had extorted people using his name.

Even the criminal himself threatened many people over the phone from India and Nepal to extort money from them.

His name featured in the 23 most wanted Bangladeshi criminals' list that was handed over to the Indian home department officials in 2008.

He was arrested by Kolkata police on October 13 in the same year, but walked free from jail on bail in September, 2009.

In the same month, Nepal police arrested him at Kakarvita border along India with two members of Kolkata police as the policemen had intruded into Nepal while chasing the criminal.

At night of November 8, Subrata along with a dozen of inmates escaped from a Nepal jail by digging a 12-metre tunnel.

Army winds

FROM PAGE 20

The army declared the withdrawal of its technical team from the construction site of the flyover where 50 people were also injured after three girders fell on a kitchen market on Saturday in the port city.

Col Nayeem Ashraf, coordinator of the rescue team, said, "We have cut the girders into pieces and looked for bodies. Finding none under the rubble on the road, we have decided to end the operation."

However, the locals have been demanding to pump the water out of the nearby Bahaddar Bari pond as they fear that there might have been more bodies under the girder that fell in the pond.

On the locals' demand, Ashraf said four bodies were recovered from the pond during the search operation conducted by the Navy divers, Fire Brigade and local divers.

The divers used special cameras to search under the water and made sure that there were no more bodies in the pond.

Ruhul Amin, deputy director of Fire Service and Civil Defence, Chittagong, said they have only two pumps which can work for up to four hours at a stretch which is not enough to pump the pond.

Humayun Kabir, additional deputy commissioner of Chittagong (ADC-Land), said they found no reason to pump out the pond as no one has claimed for their missing relatives.

The five-member team led by Additional Deputy Commissioner Khaled Mamun Chowdhury in their preliminary probe found security measures for the workers as well as the locals were absent at the construction site and also negligence of the authorities in constructing the flyover.

US planned

FROM PAGE 20
nicknamed 'Project A119,' was never carried out.

However, its planning included calculations by astronomer Carl Sagan, then a young graduate student, of the behavior of dust and gas generated by the blast.

Viewing the nuclear flash from Earth might have intimidated the Soviet Union and boosted US confidence after the launch of Sputnik, physicist Leonard Reiffel told the AP in a 2000 interview.

Reiffel, now 85, directed the inquiry at the former Armour Research Foundation, now part of the Illinois Institute of Technology. He later served as a deputy director at NASA.

Under the scenario, a missile carrying a small nuclear device was to be launched from an undisclosed location and travel 238,000 miles to the moon, where it would be detonated upon impact.

The planners decided it would have to be an atom bomb because a hydrogen bomb would have been too heavy for the missile.

Reiffel said the nation's young space program probably could have carried out the mission by 1959, when the Air Force deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Military officials apparently abandoned the idea because of the danger to people on Earth in case the mission failed.

The scientists also registered concerns about contaminating the moon with radioactive material, Reiffel said.

When contacted by the AP, the US Air Force declined to comment on the project.

Saudi beheads two for murder

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi authorities yesterday beheaded two nationals for murder, including one who stabbed his wife to death and burned her corpse, the interior ministry said.

The beheadings bring to 72 the number of people executed so far this year in the ultra-conservative kingdom, where 79 people were put to death in 2011, according to Amnesty International.

Rape, murder, apostasy, armed robbery and drug trafficking are all punishable by death under its strict version of sharia, or Islamic law.