

SARADHA CHIT FUND

No terror finance in Bangladesh

Indian minister says probe yet to reveal any such transactions

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The Indian government has appeared to have spoken in different voices as a federal minister told the House that probe so far had not revealed Saradha chit fund money was used to finance terrorism in Bangladesh.

"The investigation has so far not revealed any such transaction where money was routed to Bangladesh to fund terrorist activities," Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh of BJP told the Lok Sabha in a written response yesterday.

This remark contradicts what BJP President Amit Shah alleged at a rally in Kolkata on Sunday that Saradha chit fund money was used in the October 2 Burdwan blast, which is being probed for alleged link with Jama'at-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

"Saradha chit fund money was used in the Burdwan blast. NIA is not being allowed to probe the blast properly. Hurdles are being created. It is being done in order to save Trinamool Congress leaders who are involved in the blast," Shah alleged.

Jitendra Singh's ministerial colleague and eminent singer Babul Supriyo, a BJP lawmaker from West Bengal, expressed surprise over Singh's statement and alleged that Trinamool Congress and its lawmakers had links with terror plot in Bangladesh.

"I came to know about Jitendra Singh's statement a little while back. I need to find out why he said so," Supriyo told reporters.

"West Bengal government was instrumental in destroying evidence that could prove the state government's, Trinamool Congress' or their MPs' connection with the terror plot that is not only West Bengal-centric but also finds its way into Bangladesh and neighbouring countries," Supriyo said.

Jitendra Singh was asked if Indian government had sought details of the probe into Saradha chit fund scam after reports indicated that a part of the money was routed to Bangladesh to fund terror activities. In reply, Singh said the government had not sought details of the probe.

Opposition Congress party leader

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Tears roll down the cheeks of sexagenarian Banesa Begum, whose son Badal Molla, along with 179 other Bangladeshi migrants, has been confined to a building in Najaf city of conflict-torn Iraq without adequate supplies for around seven months. Families of over 50 victims yesterday gathered at the Jatiya Press Club in the capital demanding quick repatriation of the workers.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

SEVEN-MURDER

Rab man makes 'confession'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Sepoy Nuruzzaman with another Rab man tailed Nazrul Islam on Narayanganj court premises on the day of the city panel mayor's abduction.

At one stage, Nazrul's aides caught Nuruzzaman's partner, who was in plainclothes, at the courtyard but freed him when he identified himself as a member of the elite force.

When Nazrul and his associates left the court on a car, the duo conveyed the message to Maj Arif Hossain and followed Nazrul's car on a microbus.

Nuruzzaman later joined the Rab team that abducted Nazrul and his four aides, and senior lawyer Chandan

Sarkar and his driver on Dhaka-Narayanganj Link Road on April 27.

He did all these on orders from his senior officer Maj Arif, Nuruzzaman said in his deposition before Senior Judicial Magistrate Ishtiaq Ahmed Siddiqui's court in Narayanganj yesterday.

He gave deposition in two cases filed in connection with the sensational seven-murder incident, said Additional Public Prosecutor KM Fazlur Rahman.

Nuruzzaman, who was deputed from army, was arrested by detectives on Tuesday afternoon in his hometown Magura. He was running a

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Rural households

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and the land administration plays a counterproductive role in the rural land market.

"The poor's participation in the rural land market does not necessarily imply that they are market gainers; rather sub-sistence pressure keeps them active in the land market," he said.

"Inefficient, insufficient and corrupt formal institutions are attributes of the rural land market, which cause transaction cost of land to go higher and remain crucial determinants behind sluggish market."

Barkat shared the findings of the study -- Rural Land Market in Bangladesh -- at a roundtable at The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

The study was conducted as part of the Sustainable Access to Land Equality (SALE) Project, which is being implemented by a consortium of Uttaran, Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) and CARE Bangladesh in support of the land ministry.

The project, which receives financial support from the European Union, aims to promote digitalisation of land records and survey in Bangladesh.

The study shows that about 60 percent households in Bangladesh do not own any land.

River erosion is responsible for 39.2 percent of land lost, while 27.3 percent households lost their land to land grabbers.

Relatives, especially paternal uncles, took 18.1 percent of land using trickery, said the study.

Around 4.3 percent of the land was lost to government acquisitions in the last 10 years.

The study showed 65 percent households did not receive proper services from land offices and were asked for bribe by government officials.

Prof Barkat said the laws have been enacted in a way that protects the interest of the land-grabbers and rent-seekers.

Barkat said the digitalisation of the land system could be a good thing. "But it is not a panacea for equitable access to land as it might take 20 years to complete."

Also speaking at the event, MM Akash, a professor of economics at Dhaka University, said laws have to be enacted to empower the state to ensure the optimum use of land.

He said a land bank could also be set up. "If people want to sell any piece of land it will sell it to the bank. The bank will sell the land to the people who can

ensure optimum use."

"It will, however, depend on a committed leadership," said the economist, calling for handing over all khas land to rural households.

Akash said the land-use policy has to be effective so arable land could not be used for non-agricultural purpose.

Shamsul Huda, executive director of Association for Land Reform and Development, said the land market is hostile towards the poor, as the country has failed to establish a land administration and governance in the last four decades.

Huda urged the government to pass the land-use act. "The draft has been prepared. We have given our opinions long time ago, but it is not being passed because of the pressure from the land grabbers."

Shahidul Islam, director of Uttaran, said the country's marginalised people were losing land every day, because of weaknesses in the laws and illegal land grabbing.

Shaheen Anam, executive director of MJF, said the country's poor and marginalised face harassment and violence due to the complicated land system and they were leading risky lives.

She said the draft land act had been prepared from the perspective of the rights of marginalised people and women a couple of years ago, but has not been made into law. "We have to campaign to have it passed."

Julia Jacoby, project manager of governance and human rights of the Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh, said, "In our experience, digitalisation is not a solution, but a tool. And you can define digitalisation as scanning papers or as using intelligent technologies to record multiple data so state services can understand and control land resources in the country."

Pasi Rajander, operations manager of the Promote Access to Land in Bangladesh project of the land ministry, said the absence of a comprehensive national land policy was one of the major reasons that impede the realisation of an integrated and multi-sectoral approach to land use, which is a necessary requirement for putting in place a coherent land management and administration system in the country.

"What kind of information we are going to feed into the digitalisation of land records system is very important because by giving and putting in wrong information in it, we can even create greater mess."

Just bring them back from Iraq

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gathered at the Jatiya Press Club in the capital and urged the government to take measures immediately for the repatriation of the stranded Bangladeshis.

The migrants are among the 180 people who went to Najaf of the Middle Eastern country in May to work at Abu Torab Housing Project owned by a Turkish employer. The project work could not even begin as the country saw clashes between different rebel groups intensify from the following month.

Since their employer left the site, they have been subsisting on limited food and water that their recruiting agency Career Overseas Consultants can arrange for them in a desert area in Najaf, said Rafiqul Islam, Murad Ahmed and Farid Uddin among the emigrants when contacted by The Daily Star over the phone.

They, however, complained about the quality of food and lack of electricity at the place.

Expressing anger over negligence of the government authorities concerned in making arrangements for their return, the family members sought the prime minister's intervention in bringing them back home before the Victory Day.

"I earnestly beg the prime minister for my son's life," said Banowara Khatun, mother of Rubel Hossain, of Kushtia.

Relatives of the migrants spoke of their plight at the press conference organised by Rights Jessore and two other non-government organisations working for human rights.

Rights Jessore Executive Director Binoy Krishna Mollick read out a statement at the conference urging the government to ensure the migrants' safe return and compensation.

But the workers' safe return is their

families' utmost concern.

"I don't want any money. I want my children to get their father back soon," said Momota Mondol, wife of Doshorot Mondol, of Nawabganj in Dhaka.

Noted jurist Shahdeen Malik and migration expert and Dhaka University Prof CR Abrar expressed their solidarity with the relatives.

Some victims' families and Rights Jessore brought allegations of human trafficking and forced labour against the recruiting agency.

They also accused officials at the Bangladesh Embassy in Baghdad and the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry of helping the agency in keeping the migrants there for long.

But the agency and the officials denied the allegations and said Rights Jessore and its chief had been provoking the migrants and their families to

protest against the authorities concerned.

"Only some people want to return home while the majority will stay and wait for jobs. So, we are trying to arrange jobs for those who are interested in working there," ABM Badrul Amin, managing director of the recruiting agency, told The Daily Star.

He admitted that the migrants were facing some problems in the unexpected situation but expressed his feelings of helplessness as the agency was not able to bear the costs of bringing back all the victims and arranging compensation.

He added that the agency had already arranged jobs for 63 workers at a construction company in Baghdad last month and the rest would be rehabilitated soon.

Bangladesh Ambassador Maj Gen Rezanur Rahman Khan acknowledged the agency's claim.

Living her dream

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outputs either in agriculture, medicine, research and development or industrial sectors.

Dr Firdausi Qadri shares the view and dreams of improving people's lives through the use of scientific research and technology.

And her relentless efforts to this end has brought her many accolades, most notably her recent inclusion in a high-level 10-member UN panel on a proposed Technology Bank and Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Supporting Mechanism dedicated to help the LDCs emerge out of poverty.

In an exclusive interview with The Daily Star recently, Dr Qadri spoke of the challenges the LDCs face in scientific research and development of technologies, while shedding light on the probable actions the Technology Bank can take.

Promoting important technologies, collaboration among research institutions in the developing countries, and utilising innovations to improve lives would be the prime goals of the proposed body, she said.

"At present, individuals and institutions have to work in an isolated manner without the knowledge of what is available and whom to network with. Lack of collaboration often hinders improvement of innovations in the LDCs. Once the Technology Bank and STI planning is underway, we can expect stronger cooperation and sharing of knowledge," said Dr Qadri.

The Bank will have three components -- patent bank; science, technology and innovation supporting mechanism; and repository facility.

Dr Qadri thinks the LDCs lag behind the developed countries in patenting innovations.

"Many innovations take place in the LDCs, but they are not patented. So, if you publish an innovation without getting it patented, others use it without paying any fee and you remain deprived."

So, the idea of the patent bank is to preserve all the patented innovations and use these across the LDCs as applicable, she said.

"For example, a low-cost scientific diagnostic test or vaccine developed in Bangladesh can be applied somewhere in Africa. In that case, Africa may not need to invest in developing such technology, but can use it by paying the fees," said Dr Qadri, whose key scientific achievements lie in enteric and diarrhoeal infections and vaccines.

Also, the LDCs do not have a central database of researchers or scientists or institutions. If the Technology Bank has such a database, networking and collaboration among those people and institutions would be easy, she added.

These are the issues expected to come up in the first meeting of the panel in February, said Dr Qadri, who is serving as the director at the Centre for Vaccine Sciences of the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh

(icddr,b).

The panel would also analyse the inadequacies and opportunities in the field of science and technology in the LDCs in the meeting and advise UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon accordingly. On the basis of that, the UN would decide the organisational structure of the Technology Bank.

She also stressed the need to encourage and patronise the young talents of Bangladesh.

"There are many talented Bangladeshi scientists working abroad. Once a strong scientific and research base is established in Bangladesh, they will return home. This will stop brain drain too," said Dr Qadri, whose scientific achievements earned her the Institut de France's Christophe Mérieux Prize in 2012 and the CNR Rao Prize of The World Academy of Sciences in 2013.

In 2012, she on her own started an initiative named Institute for Developing Science and Health Initiatives to create awareness strengthen capacity and power innovations to make Bangladesh a leader in the field of technology and health research in the region.

How does she feel to have been appointed in the UN panel? A beaming Qadri said, "This is a great opportunity for me to work to improve people's lives. I was doing it at national level so far, but the new appointment has given me a chance to work at the global level."

Armed forces turn corporate body

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to serve the business interests of this corporate organisation?" he said.

He was addressing a public hearing on the Human Rights Situation of Indigenous People. The Institute for Environment and Development organised the programme at the CBCB Centre in the capital's Asad Gate.

"We are proud of our armed forces. They are employed to ensure our security and safeguard our sovereignty. This is why when the government buys modern arms and ammunition for them, buys fighter planes and even when initiatives are taken to buy submarines to protect our maritime border, we welcome such initiatives," he said.

"But when we see the armed forces

that are tasked with ensuring our overall security and sovereignty are setting up banks, when we see that they are competing with the Public Works Department to engage in tender business, when we see that they are involving themselves in the activities of school, college and universities, then we fear if we will have to establish private armed forces to ensure our security in the near future."

He noted that every institution should limit itself within the scope of its work.

On violating the rights of indigenous people, Prof Mizanur said the ruling class's greed for land was the main reason behind most atrocities on the indigenous communities.

Advocate Rana Dasgupta, general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu-Bouddha-Christian Oikya Parishad, urged the government to immediately amend the land commission act to settle land disputes.

Claiming that the indigenous and non-Muslim population is being driven out from the country, he warned the state would collapse if such oppression continued.

He also called on the government to fully implement the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord.

Seven indigenous people, including a woman, from different parts of the country spoke of the torture they endured at the hands of Bangalee people.

JP lawmakers to quit cabinet soon

Says Ershad

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad yesterday said his party's lawmakers would step down from the cabinet soon.

He said not getting the due respect as the opposition has prompted the party to take the decision.

The former president made the comments while replying to questions of reporters at his house 'Palli Nibashi' here.

Opposition Leader Raushan Ershad, wife of the JP chief, has also agreed on the issue, he claimed.

Raushan also informed US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Nisha Desai Biswal about the decision during the latter's recent visit to the country, he said.

Ershad, the special envoy to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also strongly criticised the primary terminal examinations' question "leaks".

"Where are the children being taken to? Towards what the country is heading? This has become a matter of concern for the people," he said.

The JP chief said the country experiences an economic downturn. The country would face crisis if there was

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The Daily Star



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ONLINE POLL

Do you agree with an international report that women representation in different institutions is very poor in Bangladesh?

Yes (63%)

No (37%)

TOTAL VOTES: 192

TODAY'S POLL

Do you agree with BGMEA President Atiqul Islam that there is no child labour in the garment sector?

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