

Killers of Momtaz still at large

ROVING CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Six main suspects for the murder of Awami League (AL) leader Momtaz Uddin Ahmed are at large. They are Alam, Moti, Babu, Shamim, Sujon and Aslam of Lalpur. Local people claimed some of the suspects were seen moving freely in the area while police said they were chasing the abscondees. Although the victim's brother Abul Kalam Azad had not accused anyone specific, witnesses said the six persons and three unidentified men aided by seven others committed the murder. The majority of the six are also accused in other cases, sources said. According to plaintiff Azad, some ruling party cadres allegedly threatened Momtaz on June 2 when he decided to challenge the withdrawal of the names of the accused from the Khannas murder case. The 11 accused of Khannas murder case including Alam, Shamim, Sujon, Faruk and Babu, in a prayer to the home minister, had claimed themselves to be 'local

leaders and workers' and sought withdrawal of their names from the case. Later, in a home ministry notice issued on February 5, 2003 the names were withdrawn. State Minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman Patal told The Daily Star that as the local MP he had to recommend many such prayers. "The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) is independently investigating the case," he said, refuting the AL allegation that he was influencing the CID police. Natore AL leaders at a press conference claimed the CID was trying to prove the killing of Momtaz as the outcome of an internal rift. "Momtaz was well liked by all. There is very little chance that he was killed by partymen," Natore AL General Secretary Hanif Ali Sheikh said. Momtaz Uddin Ahmed was murdered by unknown assailants at Darapara on Gopalpur-Abdulpur road on the night of June 6.

Bills to hike perks

FROM PAGE 1

Minister's (Remuneration and Privileges) (Amendment) Act, 2002, The Speaker and Deputy Speaker's (Remuneration and Privileges) (Amendment) Act, 2002, The Ministers, Ministers of State and Deputy Ministers (Remuneration and Privileges) (Amendment) Act, 2002, and The Members of Parliament (Remuneration and Privileges) (Amendment) Act, 2002. The AL legislators, who joined the House for the first time in the current budget session yesterday, rejected the government's rationale behind the proposed rise in perks that cost of living had increased. They argued that the living costs of people in general had also increased. The bills proposing huge increase in house rents and various other allowances of the head of the government and her cabinet colleagues came just four days after Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman proposed a 10 per cent dearness allowance for government employees in the 2003-04 national budget. In the four bills, significant enhancement has been proposed in their house rents, daily allowances, sumptuary allowances, discretionary grants and other benefits. The Prime Minister's (Remuneration and Privileges) (Amendment) Act, 2002, proposed enhancing the prime minister's house rent from Tk 35,000 to Tk 50,000 a month. It proposed a four-fold rise in daily allowance of the prime minister from Tk 250 to Tk 1,000. To justify the huge rise in allowances, the bill said living expenses have increased and there has been a significant expansion of the prime minister's activities and mass contacts. The Speaker and Deputy Speaker (Remuneration and Privileges) (Amendment) Act, 2002, proposed a rise in sumptuary allowance to Tk 6,000. Currently, the speaker gets Tk 5,000 and deputy speaker Tk 3,000. Besides, the bill proposed a three-time increase in daily allowance for the speaker -- from Tk 250 to Tk 750. It also proposed a 50 per cent rise in discretionary grant for the speaker from Tk 2 lakh to Tk 3 lakh. Ministers, Ministers of State and Deputy Ministers (Remuneration and Privileges) (Amendment) Act, 2002, proposed a rise in monthly house rent for ministers from Tk 17,500 to Tk 25,000 and for state and deputy ministers to Tk 20,000 from Tk 15,000. The ministers would be entitled to a daily allowance of Tk 750 instead of the current Tk 225. The state and deputy ministers would receive Tk 600 instead of Tk 200 now, a three times jump in both cases. It would also enable the ministers to draw an annual discretionary grant of Tk 3 lakh each, a 50 per cent rise from Tk 2 lakh they get now. In a similar fashion, the state ministers and deputy ministers would be entitled to enhanced discretionary grants of Tk 2 lakh and Tk 1.5 lakh respectively. Currently, both state and deputy ministers get Tk 1 lakh. The bill further proposed that in addition to an official car, maintained at government expense, the ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers would also get a Jeep each for essential official business, particularly on official tours outside Dhaka. If the attached departments, directorates or corporations of the ministries and divisions concerned cannot provide the additional transport to the ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers, the finance ministry

will allocate necessary funds for procurement of the transports. The amounts of sumptuary allowance for ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers would be enhanced from Tk 3,000, Tk 2,000 and Tk 1,500 to Tk 6,000, Tk 4,000 and Tk 3,000 respectively. The Members of Parliament (Remuneration and Allowances) (Amendment) Act, 2002, proposed a 100 per cent increase in the MPs' sumptuary allowance from Tk 1,000 to Tk 2,000. The bill proposed a 400 per cent increase in office allowance of the MPs from Tk 1,500 to Tk 6,000. It also proposed a hike in the constituency allowance of the MPs from Tk 1,500 to Tk 5,000. It proposed an increase of Tk 25,000 in discretionary grants. Currently, lawmakers get Tk 75,000 each a year under this head. If the House passes the bill, each lawmaker will be entitled to a monthly telephone bill allowance of Tk 6,000, up from Tk 4,000 now. Besides, a proposal was made to give the lawmakers an enhanced travel allowance -- Tk 6 a kilometre, up from Tk 1 a mile now. Prior to tabling of the bills, AL lawmakers Suranjit Sengupta, Mohammed Nasim, Opposition Chief Whip Abdu Shahid, and Jatiya Party deputy Dr TIM Fazle Rabbi Chowdhury raised objections, which were overruled by voice vote. The AL legislators criticised the rise in perks, while the JP lawmaker pleaded for more funds under various heads for lawmakers. Fazle Rabbi pointed to Australian lawmakers getting 2,000 Australian dollars each for every parliamentary sitting. When the masses are bearing under economic hardship and feeling the brunt of tax enhancement in the 2003-04 proposed budget, it is unfair to increase house rents and other benefits of ministers, said the AL lawmakers. They argued why the burden of paying the members of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's large cabinet high allowances would be shifted onto taxpayers. Mannan Bhuiyan and Moudud Ahmed said in defence that the living cost increased and the government had to keep a budgetary provision of 10 per cent dearness allowance for public servants. Bhuiyan said the salaries for the public servants would be further enhanced, if need be. Both ministers said the proposal for a rise in perks is not significant, compared to benefits the ministers of other countries enjoy. "When people from abroad learn about our salaries, they make fun of the poor amount," said Bhuiyan. Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui, who was chairing the session, supplemented their arguments -- saying ministers and MPs even in African countries get more benefits. On July 10 last year, the same four bills were in the order of the day's business in parliament. But the speaker withdrew the bills from the day's order amid strong protest by Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina. The salaries of the prime minister, ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers were raised earlier in 2000.

BNP to merge

FROM PAGE 1 The rest two each. Besides, efforts are on to defuse intra-party conflict in other districts, highly placed party sources said.

They said the decision to merge the rival units into one came following demands from local leaders and activists who felt intra-party conflict hobbled party activities and sapped its strength. The BNP has already abolished its Narayanganj city committee and merged it with Narayanganj district unit. Party joint secretary general Tareque Rahman has been given the responsibility to settle the organisational problems. He is sitting with local leaders and legislators from Barisal at his Hawa Bhaban office this evening.

Hawa Bhaban sources hinted that the meeting would form a convening committee for the district, dissolving the three largely inactive units that have struck frustration into party rank and file. A close aide of Tareque told The Daily Star yesterday that plans were underway to merge the district units in Comilla and Mymensingh. Party activities in 15 districts have been slackened by inner conflicts and Tareque has been given the responsibility to fix those, he said, requesting anonymity. He said similar steps would also be taken to reshape quarrelling front organisation units. A decision has also been taken to complete restructuring of all district and thana committees within the next month, he said.

Arms, ammunition recovered in Narsingdi: 3 held

UNB, Narsingdi

Police recovered a number of firearms and ammunition from a house at Chhoto Madhabdi Mahalla in sadar upazila of the district on Sunday night and arrested three people in that connection. Acting on a tip, police raided the house of one Ayub Ali at 11:00pm and arrested his son Ariful Huq Bhuiyan and two others -- Kausar and Shahjada. Upon their statement, the arms were recovered from the room of Ariful, identified as a BNP cadre, police said. The seized arms and ammunition included a submachine carbine, an automatic 9mm pistol, two revolvers, a shotgun, two handguns, five rounds of bullet, a knife and two mobile phones. A police source said the arrested persons had collected the weapons from different parts of the country to use them during the Madhabdi pourashava election which was held on Thursday. A case was filed with police under the Arms Act. The DC and SP visited the spot.

Boral murder trial begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Trial of the Awami League leader Advocate Kalidas Boral murder case began in the Additional District and Sessions Judge's Court, Bagherhat, on Sunday. Kalidas Boral, a central leader of Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikyo Parishad and senior vice-president of Bagerhat district Awami League, was gunned down by a gang of miscreants on August 20, 2000 at Shadhana crossing in the town. Of the 72 persecution witnesses, Happy Boral, wife of slain AL leader, give her deposition in the court. She is also the complainant of the case. Twenty-two people have been charge-sheeted in the case. Of them, five are now in jail custody, 14 on bail and the rest three are still at large. The next hearing of the case will be held on June 23.

Peacekeeping

FROM PAGE 12 and economic cooperation, between Dhaka and Washington would be reviewed.

The foreign minister would not say whether the two countries would sign any accord or MOU during Powell's visit on June 19. About a bill called Middle East Trade Act to be placed before the US Congress, he said Bangladesh is on the list of 18 countries seeking duty- and quota-free access to the US market after expiry of the multi-fibre agreement (MFA) in 2005. He said America is a major destination of Bangladesh garments. "We hope that Bangladesh, being a liberal democracy and a moderate Muslim country ensuring empowerment women, will receive special concession from the US government."

Termining the Dhaka-Washington relation excellent, the foreign minister said Powell's visit is an important milestone in the bilateral relation. Replying to a question, he said Colin Powell's upcoming visit but is the outcome of Khan's invitation to the US Secretary of State following long discussions through diplomatic channel.

Robbers

FROM PAGE 1 The robbers then broke into Royal Bengal Machineries at Madan Pal Lane and confined the two guards inside the shop.

They opened the cash box of the shop, but finding only Tk 770, the robbers took away agricultural machines worth Tk 2.5 lakh from the shop. The gang also knocked down the gates of Hanif Machinery Store and GMC Machinery of the same market and took away Tk 62,500 in cash and Tk 19,500 in machinery. The looters then went to the adjacent Chowdhury Market and took away Tk 20,000 from the cash box of Alam Bearing and machinery worth about Tk 90,000. They also nicked the motorbike of the owner of the market. The thugs broke open the gates of four other shops -- Tanvir Enterprise, Masum Enterprise, Khajia & Brothers and SR Bearing -- of the adjacent Mollah market and looted some small articles. After they had left, the guards came out of their confinement and contacted the officials of the Bangladesh Agricultural Machinery Merchants' Association (BAMMA). A robbery case was filed with the Sutrapur Police Station, but police failed to arrest anyone. They picked up the guards for interrogation. Deputy Commissioner (East) of police Majedul Haq said a police team has been engaged to trace out the robbers.

Banks barely armed

FROM PAGE 12 of Tk 56 lakh were lost during the incidents. Khaled noted.

He said his bank has decided to frequently transfer guards at all the branches in the city. Asked why the Pubali Bank was the target of miscreants, he said, "It's just a coincidence. We don't know why it happens to us." According to other officials of the Pubali Bank, the security guards are involved in unionism and are a big headache although the bank is a private one. There are over 700 guards in the bank, mostly old, who stand in the way of hiring much dependable private security personnel. "As there is a shortage of guards in public banks, many are virtually on duty for 24 hours," said a source. "This itself threatens the quality of security they are providing." Alarmed at the recent spate of looting and heist, all banks are now taking steps to beef up security. As per a Bangladesh Bank advice last year, all banks have already taken some steps. Bangladesh Bank has recommended that each branch have at least three guards who would provide security in three shifts. The BB also suggested installation of alarm system, close-circuit TV, and other measures. While many private banks have installed close-circuit TV and alarm system in their important branches, few public banks have acted in line with the recommendations. Leading public banks including Sonali Bank and Janata Bank are now hiring private security personnel as well as retired army personnel. Sonali Bank will place a proposal in this

could prevent recurrence of such incidents. Khaled noted. He said his bank has decided to frequently transfer guards at all the branches in the city. Asked why the Pubali Bank was the target of miscreants, he said, "It's just a coincidence. We don't know why it happens to us." According to other officials of the Pubali Bank, the security guards are involved in unionism and are a big headache although the bank is a private one. There are over 700 guards in the bank, mostly old, who stand in the way of hiring much dependable private security personnel.

Flooded dists hit by river erosion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The flash flood situation improved in Goddimari and Sindurani villages under Hatibandha upazila, Gokunda and Khuniyagachha villages under Sadar upazila and Mohishan Shahor, Mohis Khocha villages under Aditmari Upazila. Our Sylhet correspondent adds: The water level rose in all the major rivers which were flowing above danger level till yesterday evening. The Surma was flowing 102 centimeter above the danger level at Kanaihat and the Kushiya 103 centimeter above the level at Sheola in Beanibazar. The Bangladesh Rifles camp at Gazukata was under threat as the river continued to swell and devour its banks. Besides, the villages of Kona Shaleswar, Charia and Angarjur are facing looming erosion threats. Breaches in the Kushiya dike have already swamped some villages in Beanibazar upazila, local officials said.

Bush calls for crackdown

FROM PAGE 12 Bush's comments came as Israeli and Palestinian officials were reportedly near agreement on an Israeli withdrawal from parts of Gaza, and as Hamas itself sought to keep its options open seeking to avoid isolation.

After a week of relentless Israeli strikes against the radical movement's leaders and militants and a bloody suicide attack in Jerusalem, Hamas appeared to be toning down somewhat its bellicose declarations against Israel and Palestinian prime minister Mahmud Abbas. But Bush sidestepped questions about whether the United States would provide money or arms to help Abbas set up a security force that can deal forcefully with extremists. "We would like for the Palestinian Authority to set up a security force ... that will do the job that Prime Minister Abbas assured me that they're interested in doing, which is to defeat those terrorists," he said. The United States has moved to cut off sources of funding for Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups and recently indicted leaders of the

Revival of Upazila system

FROM PAGE 1 The number of upazila is 469.

As per the polls commitment, the government formed a cabinet committee headed by LGRD and Cooperatives Minister and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan. After a series of meetings, the committee okayed revival of upazila system and placed before the cabinet its recommendations for approval. But the cabinet meeting on October 16 last year failed to endorse. Military ruler HM Ershad had introduced upazila system in 1985 and held election to 460 upazila parishes. Ershad also held the second election to upazila parishes in 1990. But the BNP after assuming power in 1991 cancelled the system. The Awami League (AL) government revived the Upazila Parishad Act in November 1998 but it could not hold election to the parishes due to resistance from the BNP-led four-party alliance, then in the opposition. Now there is a constitutional obligation and a court order to hold upazila elections by December this year. The Local Government Division has so far sought time extension as many as 17 times. Meeting sources said a section of ministers are opposing the system on the ground that it was introduced by a military dictator when there was a presidential form of government. They argue that upazila system is redundant under the parliamentary

regard in its next board meeting. Sonali Bank Managing Director Rabul Hossain told The Daily Star that his bank has deployed police and Ansar personnel in the main branches in Dhaka and other divisional headquarters. "But it is not possible to deploy police at all branches," he said, "this is very costly. But we are considering deployment of private security personnel."

Janata Bank Managing Director Murshid Kuli Khan said measures have been taken to ensure increased security. As part of the measures, guards are frequently transferred. Besides, many branches now have close-circuit TV. And the management is continuously monitoring how the new system is working. A high official of Arab Bangladesh Bank, one of the leading private banks, said their bank was secure with the services of private security in the divisional cities. However, in other places where the private security system is not available, the branches have their own guards. "Their security is weak. But there is no other alternative for us," he admitted.

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Jubo Dal leader gunned down

UNB, Tangail

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BTTB

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several European Union foreign ministers urged Tehran to accept the tougher controls that are designed to make sure its nuclear power programme is not a cover for making bombs as the United States alleges. Iran, currently also facing some of the most outspoken domestic protests since the 1979 Islamic revolution, said it would consider the inspections "with a positive view" but stuck by a demand it should get Western technology in return. A diplomat close to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said Iran's statement offered "nothing new," but one European diplomat said Tehran's position may be softening. IAEA chief Mohammed ElBaradei appealed for Iran's compliance after presenting a harsh report saying Tehran was in breach of its current obligations, although it was now making amends. "The report points out that Iran has failed to report certain nuclear material and activities, and that corrective actions are being taken in co-operation with the Iranian authorities," he told a meeting of the IAEA board in Vienna. The criticism should please Washington, which has piled pressure on Iran since ousting Iraq's Saddam Hussein.

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BCL city secretary

FROM PAGE 1 that took place at 3:15pm.

Two gunmen of the 10-strong gang fired through the window-panes of Sony Enterprise on Palash and two other BCL leaders Hira and Shabbir, who were sitting on a sofa inside. Hira, organising secretary of the BCL Dhaka College unit and Shabbir, joint secretary of the SM Hall unit of Dhaka University escaped gunshots, as they ducked behind the sofa. Hira and Shabbir took the fatally injured Palash by taxicab to the DMCH and he lost consciousness on the way. Witnesses said a young man in full-sleeved red shirt walked into the office of Sony Enterprise in front of the Kalyanpur BRTC bus stand and asked for Palash minutes before the killers went on the shooting spree, eyewitnesses said. "I heard five gunshots," said a vendor who was hawking cigarettes close-by. The gang hurried out of the area after the apparent premeditated attack, as locals started gathering at the spot hearing the gunshots, said the witnesses. Deputy Commissioner of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (west) Ruhul Amin said law enforcers are investigating the leads to the killing. Police believe the killing was the

result of political rivalry. Palash was upgraded to the general secretary after his predecessor Akkasur Rahman Akhi was killed. Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina and other frontline leaders, including Abdul Jalil, Mohammad Hanif, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Sabar Hossain Chowdhury, HBM Iqbal, Mookbul Hossain, Obaidul Kader and Motia Chowdhury visited the DMCH to see Palash. The BCL supporters brought out an instant procession at the DMCH and announced a half-day hartal on June 19 in protest at the killing. The victim's brother Mithul said he left home at about 1:00pm after a call from a party member. They were planning to go to Nasiragar in Brahmanbaria, said Mithul. The body of Palash was taken to his Paikpara residence after an autopsy. A namaz-e-janaza will be held at the BCL office on Bangabandhu Avenue at 10:00am today. Autopsy was carried out on Basir too. The killing sent many shopkeepers shutting their shops and security was tightened in the area. Palash, son of Mohammad Sahjahan of the Paikpara Staff Quarters in Mirpur, was fourth among four brothers and one sister.

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Kibria granted bail in ETV corruption cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former Finance Minister and Awami league leader Shah AMS Kibria MP and former Information Secretary M Akmal Hossain were yesterday granted anticipatory bail for 6 months in ETV corruption cases. A division bench of the High Court comprising Justice Syed Amirul Islam and Justice MA Hafiz also issued rule upon the government to show cause why the accused should not be granted regular bail. On June 4, the Bureau of Anti-corruption filed two corruption cases against four people including Kibria and Akmal. Barrister Amir-ul Islam appeared for the accused.

Walkout

FROM PAGE 1 men named Palash and Basir were killed in an intra-party conflict."

Awami League has accused the BNP's student wing JCD for the killing. "Ruling party men are responsible for the killing, and we are expressing strong hatred for it," said Abdu Samad Azad, presidium member of the AL while speaking on point of order. After his speech AL walked out the session. Mannan Bhuiyan, the local government and rural development minister, then took the floor and claimed that AL wanted to make parliament inactive and that was why they had walked out for nothing. "Killers of Palash and Basir will be punished," vowed Mannan. AL got back after a 4-minute stay out and Opposition Chief Whip Abdu Shahid took the floor to accuse the JCD for the killing. Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar Hossain finally intervened to conclude the debate. He also asked for expunging the irrelevant comments.

Iran protests

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HC order

FROM PAGE 1 of six additional judges, the attorney general argued citing Article 48 of the Constitution. Seeking leave to appeal against the High Court order, he submitted that appointment of judges is an exclusive domain of the executive. The question of looking into the recommendation of the chief justice in this context is irrelevant for determining the primary question of deciding the necessity of such recommendation. Referring to Article 48 of the Constitution, the attorney general argued that the president appoints a judge on the prime minister's advice. Recommendation of the chief justice being a part of the process comes under the protection of Article 48 that made the advice immune from inquiry by any court. Opposing the attorney general's arguments, the counsel for the petitioners Barrister Ajmalul

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