

Jubo League activist murdered in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

An activist of Awami Jubo League was stabbed to death by a gang of miscreants at Kashipur Bazar in Hemayetpur Union under Pabna Sadar Police Station yesterday.

Police said a gang of 12 stabbed Nazu, 30, in different parts of the body and left immediately. He was rushed to the Pabna Sadar Hospital where the doctors declared him dead.

Police said Nazu might have been killed by his opponents as a sequel to previous enmity over control of Hemayetpur area. He was accused in several political cases recorded with Pabna Sadar Police Station, police added.

Leaders and workers of AL Pabna district unit brought out a procession in the town protesting the killing of Nazu. They blamed local BNP for the killing.

No case was filed till 7pm yesterday.

Attack on AL MP Half-day hartal in Jhenidah today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Awami League Jhenidah unit has called a half-day hartal in the district today protesting the attack on party MP Abdul Hye and three other leaders of its front organisations on Thursday.

Local MP Abdul Hye, Jubo League district unit president Mahmudul Islam, Chhatra League leader Bachchu and Krishak League district unit joint-secretary Krishna Pada were stabbed by a group of armed men reportedly belonging to the ruling BNP during hartal hours in the town on Thursday morning.

The anti-hartal activists swooped on two separate processions and stabbed Abdul Hye and three other leaders.

Thursday's hartal was enforced to protest the June 17 killing of Saiful Rasul Palash, a leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) Dhaka city unit.

Meanwhile, Jhenidah police have so far arrested four -- Munir, Selim, Liton and Rubel -- for their alleged involvement in the attacks on AL processions.

Robber beaten to death at Kafrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An alleged robber was lynched and two others were severely injured by a mob yesterday when the robbers attempted a raid in the city's Kafrul area, police said.

They said gangster Mohammad Ripon died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where Ridoy and Jahid were getting treatment.

Sensing the presence of the gang, residents of Din Mohammad Colony in Damal Court raised an alarm in the early hours of yesterday, triggering a mob chase.

The mob caught three of the band of about seven and gave a thorough beating.

Called in by locals, Kafrul police went to the scene and rushed the trio to the DMCH where Ripon died from his wounds.

A case was filed.

Factory fire: One more charred body recovered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Death toll in Thursday's fire at a perfume chemical warehouse and factory in the old part of the city rose to two with the recovery of another charred body in the early hours of yesterday.

The victim was identified as Ismail, son of Yunus Khan of village Khanargaon in Nuria upazila of Shariatpur. Firemen recovered the body of the fire.

Fire service officials said the other victim, whose body was recovered on Thursday night, is Kazi Haider Ali, son of Sajed Ali.

Haider Ali, aged about 35, went to the warehouse on business purpose. Ismail went there to supply food to the factory workers.

Officials at the Lalbagh Fire
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WB gives \$536m no-interest loans

One for poverty reduction, the other for road building, telecoms and banking

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The World Bank (WB) on Thursday approved US\$536 million in no-interest credits for poverty reduction and support to rural infrastructure, telecoms and banking sectors in Bangladesh.

The credits will be provided on standard terms of the WB International Development Association (IDA), with no interest but a 0.75 per cent service charge and a maturity of 40 years, including a 10-year grace period, according to two WB press releases made available yesterday.

Of the total loans, \$300 million will be given to gear up reforms in pro-poor growth, good governance, human resources development and women's advancement and \$236 million to help improve rural roads,

increase access to telecommunications and move forward along the path to developing a sound and effective banking system.

The \$300 million development support credit is the first of a number of such operations the WB anticipates to offer to Bangladesh, as outlined in its Country Assistance Strategy Progress Report, which was also discussed at a meeting of the WB board of directors on Thursday.

The report assesses the results of WB operations in Bangladesh to date and outlines its assistance scenario over the next two years.

"Our assistance to Bangladesh is gradually moving away from project-based operations, to those which support broader programmes under the government's poverty

reduction strategy," said WB Country Director Frederick T Temple.

"Our goal is to do all that we can to help ensure that strategy is successful, and if I were to single out one area where attention is needed above all others to make that happen, it would be improving governance, increasing the transparency of government activities and its accountability and responsiveness to citizens. We are hopeful that this focus will be strengthened and maintained across the board."

The development credit is meant for supporting the first phase of implementation of the government's comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. Bangladesh finalised an interim-poverty reduc

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Commentary

People's Right to Know

It is the media's job to scrutinise every aspect of a public figure's past and present and inform the public about it without prejudice and malice.

MAHFUZ ANAM

The Daily Star's masthead announces our motto every morning - "Committed to People's Right to Know" - to the world, and we have every intention of living up to what we have promised our readers. Journalism without fear or favour is what we preach and practice and we see no reason to renege on that practice now, notwithstanding the direct and indirect attempts to intimidate us that our readers have seen recently.

Mr. Salauddin Quader

Chowdhury felt defamed by a certain report of this newspaper and decided to take us to court. Fair enough. As the matter is before the court both sides should have waited for its verdict to find out who is on the wrong. However Mr. Chowdhury, without waiting for the court's verdict has decided to take his case to the public. We say again, fair enough. In TV and newspaper interviews he has accused The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo of indulging in a malicious propaganda against him and of promoting the political agenda of a particular party.

Since Mr. Chowdhury went public, so naturally must we. We think people have a "Right to Know" what our views are about these accusations. Before we proceed we want to underscore that our write up has no reference to the case Mr. Chowdhury has filed and we will confine our comments to the issues raised by him in the press and TV interviews he has given.

Mr. Chowdhury told Channel i, "Some journalists are indulging in 'information terrorism'. It is to protest against information terror

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Pharmaceutical cos-doctors nexus-1



Fix of freebies

PINAKI ROY

Some pharmaceutical company salesmen in Bangladesh are bribing doctors to prescribe their drugs, with the result that patients are often given inappropriate or unnecessarily expensive medicine.

A large number of doctors accept "gifts" from drug companies, admitted S M Shafiuzzaman, president of the Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries.

He declined to comment further on the practice. But some salespeople or medical representatives -- as they like to be known -- are prepared to provide more information.

Four representatives from different pharmaceutical companies, multinational and local, told The Daily Star that bribing doctors in order to increase use of particular drugs was widespread.

"We are giving doctors almost everything, from paperweights to cash," admitted one.

Other "incentives" include free air ticket for foreign trips, computers, mobile phones, air conditioners, table lights, telephones, towels, calendars and pens. The representatives said that the value of gifts depended on the "quality" of the doctor.

"Quality" is defined by the number of patients the doctor sees every day.

An "A" class physician treats at least 30 patients a day. Because these doctors prescribe so many drugs, pharmaceutical salesmen visit them seven times a week, offering not only bribes but drug samples worth a minimum of Tk 500 on every visit.

Free samples are an investment for the company, because the doctor is likely to prescribe the drug for many patients.

A "B" class doctor, who treats 20 patients daily, will get three or four visits a week by salesmen, who hand over samples worth at least Tk 300 a visit.

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Body of college student recovered from city lake

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pallabi Police recovered the decomposed body of a college student from a lake at Kalsi of the city's Pallabi area Thursday evening, four days after his girlfriend's body was recovered from the same lake.

The victim Firoz Ahmed had been missing since Saturday after he went out for a stroll by the lakeside along with his girlfriend, sources said.

Police had been looking for Firoz as a murder suspect after the body of his girlfriend, Rabeya Akhter Rubina, 18, was found floating in the lake last Sunday evening.

Both Rubina and Firoz were students of class 10 and class 11 at Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan Shishu Paribar School.

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Megawati given hearty send-off

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri left Dhaka for Mongolia yesterday concluding her three-day tour that perked up her country's trading ties with Bangladesh.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, his wife Prof Anwara Iajuddin and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia gave Megawati a hearty send-off at Zia International Airport yesterday morning.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, diplomats, prime minister's political secretaries, chiefs of the three services and senior civil and military officials were present, among others, at Zia.

Before Megawati along with her husband Taufiq Kiemas boarded a special Garuda Indonesia aircraft, two small children presented her

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Sri Lanka detains 12 Bangladeshis heading to Italy

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan police arrested 12 Bangladeshi men who were allegedly going to board a fishing boat to take them illegally to Italy, officials said yesterday.

The men were taken into custody from a hotel in the capital Colombo Thursday, officials said, adding that their local contacts were under investigation.

Two months ago, police arrested Pakistani nationals who had arrived in Colombo with the aim of illegally travelling to Italy.

Sri Lankans trying to smuggle themselves out of the island and reach Europe on fishing trawlers are often detained as they try to leave or turned back after reaching their destinations.

Constitution of 34 JS bodies heads for a rough weather

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Formation of 34 more parliamentary standing committees on various ministries and functioning of the five already constituted seem to head for a rough weather with the ruling BNP and the main opposition Awami League (AL) sticking to their respective stances.

The five committees formed in the last session of the parliament in May, almost 20 months ago it came into being, are on Defence Ministry, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Ministry, Religious Affairs Ministry, Women and Children Affairs Ministry and Textile Ministry.

These were formed without the participation of the main opposition party.

Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid said Awami League will not nominate its representative on any

committee till the rest 34 bodies are formed.

But the BNP plans to form the remaining committees during the current budget session of the House, party sources said.

It will not offer the chair of any committee to the opposition, Chief Whip of the ruling party Khandoker Delwar Hossain had hinted earlier.

Apparently the AL stance is to 'wait and see' whether the ruling party offers it chairmanship of any of the bodies.

Parliament sources however pointed out that the House would take up formation of the committees towards the end of its current session.

In that case, it is quite likely that the committees would be devoid of AL lawmakers till the next session. Also once formed, these bodies would have to meet at least once a month and, evidently, without AL

representation.

The committees on Religious Affairs Ministry, and Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Ministry met earlier this month. Meetings of the three other bodies are due this week.

Meanwhile, the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Undertaking Committee could not hold any meeting due to some inherent flaws in their formation.

Two state ministers were included in the two committees through the Rules of Procedure of the parliament do not permit this.

It was earlier said that necessary changes would be made in the current session of the House so that the committees could function properly. But it is yet to be done.



PHOTO: PID

Sylhet jail slips into ruin

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

One of the oldest jails in on the brink of collapse and its renovation, long overdue.

The main buildings and boundary walls of the 85-year-old crammed jail are in a ramshackle condition.

Non-functioning of its drainage system has compounded the problem.

Besides, staff shortage ill affords the welfare of 2,000 to 2,500 prisoners of the 1,200-capacity jail.

Water leakage through the roof of the administrative building causes damage to valuable documents, jail sources said.

The jail hospital building had been declared 'abandoned' by the

Public Works Department (PWD) two years ago and shifted into a tin-shed structure.

But except for a minor repair of the administrative building roof, nothing else was done.

Constructed in 1917, the Sylhet jail was one of the two central jails of the then Assam-Bengal. It was made into a district jail in 1947 and upgraded to central jail in 1997, three years after the creation of Sylhet division.

A plan was then taken to shift the jail to the outskirts of Sylhet city and 54 acres of land was acquired in Sadar upazila.

But the work was stalled a few months ago when a decision was taken to construct new buildings on the old premises, sources said.

A Tk 54 crore project has been

taken up, but its implementation remains elusive. An official of the jail, however, claimed that work on the project might begin soon.

The posts of the deputy inspector general (DIG) prison, deputy superintendent, deputy jailor, junior consultant and assistant surgeon of the hospital stand vacant since its upgradation into a central jail.

Presently, the DIG prison from Comilla supervises the jail along with the district jails in Moulvibazar, Habiganj and Sunamganj.

The 162-bed jail hospital is the country's only facility to treat tubercular prisoners.

Lack of staff, facility and medicine expose the prisoners to serious health hazards, jail sources said.

Water of poison creeps in as silent killer

NAIMUL HAQ, back from Noakhali

Fourteen years old Suman used to go to school, but three months ago he had to drop out owing to failing health caused by arsenic poisoning.

His left foot was amputated four years ago due to gangrene, while both his palms show symptoms of decaying with pus oozing out. There are blisters all over his hand and body which doctors diagnosed as arsenic poisoning caused by drinking of contaminated water for more than 10 years. It is taking him to the terminal stage of the poisoning.

All six members of Suman's family, from a small village of Boro Hossainpur of Jairtuli union in Begumganj, Noakhali, are suffering from similar poisoning but Suman is the worst affected. They drink water from a neighbouring hand-pumped shallow tubewell, which has arsenic many times the level (0.05 mg/L) permitted for human consumption.

Suman is among the thousands of inhabitants in Begumganj where survey shows over 90 per cent hand-pumped shallow tubewells used for lifting drinking water are contaminated by naturally occurring arsenic in groundwater.

Most of the contaminated tubewells have been sealed off to avoid further health hazard, but Suman and his neighbours still drink from the same tubewell that cost his foot.

As part of the routine tubewell distribution by the lone government agency, the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) safe tubewells have been allocated to the affected population through local NGOs.

Unfortunately, Suman is not on the list of the affected and uncored for due to what many people view as an ineffective policy of the government.

To receive a tubewell, the beneficiaries must make an advance payment of 10 per cent of the total

costs of the tubewell. On an average the beneficiary--usually a group of about 50 people--has to pay Tk 4,500 in advance, and only then installation would begin at a site selected earlier for convenience of all the participants.

Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), a national NGO, in collaboration with its selected partner NGOs has been

empowered to select, motivate, and offer all necessary hygiene promotional services required before and after the installation of a tubewell including promoting low cost sanitary latrines.

Danish International Development Assistance, DANIDA,
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PHOTO: STAR

Schoolboy Suman's left foot was amputated due to gangrene caused by arsenic contamination, which has now affected his entire body.