

Photojournalist arrested on extortion charge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Police arrested a photojournalist on charge of extortion in Rajshahi city yesterday.

Boalia police said they arrested Nazrul Islam Zulu, who works for the daily Ittefaq, and sent him to jail custody as he was found involved in an extortion case in a primary police investigation.

Shamsur Rahman Rumu, owner of a computer centre at Seroil area, filed a case accusing Zulu that he demanded Tk 20,000 as toll from the trader.

Zulu also threatened him to kill when he declined to pay, the trader alleged.

Police said Zulu was accused in two other cases including one for assaulting a ward commissioner.

He was earlier arrested twice a few months ago, but was released for he was carrying anticipatory bail from the higher court.

Boy electrocuted

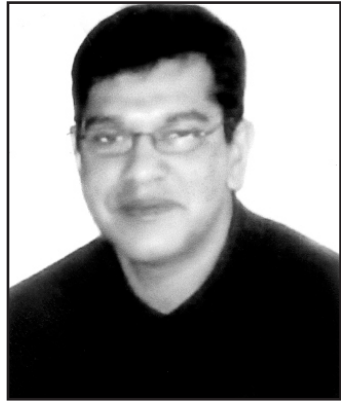
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An eight-year old boy was electrocuted at Kamrangirchar in the city yesterday when he climbed a tree to pluck mangoes.

The dead was identified as Hridoy, son of Hemayet Hossain of Borogram at Kamrangirchar.

Hridoy climbed up the roof of a one-storey building to reach the mangoes at 2:00pm and came in touch with electric wires adjacent to the tree.

His family took him to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital where doctors declared him dead.



Dr Kaafee found dead 10 hrs after 911phone glitch in US

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dr Kaafee Billah, a Bangladeshi immigrant in the United States, was found dead on April 19 at his Maryland workplace, 10 hours after he had called emergency services saying he needed medical help.

According to US media reports, an apparent telephone glitch sent emergency personnel to wrong address leading them to believe that the 911 (help line) call of Kaafee was unfounded.

Family members of Kaafee, former lecturer of economics department of Dhaka University, issued a press release in Dhaka yesterday announcing his death from a massive heart attack.

Son of ex-narcotics controller late MA Qasim and Bul Bul-E-Jannat, Kaafee left behind his wife, five-year-old daughter, mother, siblings and host of relatives and admirers to mourn his death.

He received a Ph.D. in agricultural economics from Cornell University in 2002.

Kaafee, who had recently started working at Medimmune Inc, a medical company, walked into his office shortly before 9:00am on Tuesday.

The 39-year-old sales representative made the first call from his desk at 9:02am, and roughly 40 minutes later, he again called 911 to say he needed medical help.

But almost 10 hours had passed before someone found his body lying on the floor.

US police said an apparent phone glitch sent emergency personnel to the wrong address leading them to believe that the 911 call was unfounded.

The police officer, who documented the death, wrote in a preliminary report that the error was in the technology of the company phone system.

A spokesman for the Montgomery County's Fire and Rescue Service said Kaafee was not able to provide an address when he called.

His body was found after emergency services received another call, this time from a worker at the building in which Kaafee's office was located.

"We are deeply saddened by the loss of Dr Kaafee Billah," said Medimmune spokeswoman Lori Weiman, adding, "Our thoughts and prayers are with his family."

His body is expected to reach Dhaka today and his namaz-e-janaza will be held at Gulshan Mosque after Zohr prayers.

He will be buried at Banani graveyard.

A doa mahfil will be held after Asr prayers on April 28 at House- 44A, Road-116, Gulshan.



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia speaks at a function on the occasion of the inauguration of Cooperatives Bhavan at Agargaon in the city yesterday.

Strengthen cooperative movement to reduce poverty: PM

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday called for involving the cooperatives in various programmes of the government to reduce poverty to half by the year 2015.

In this regard, she underscored the need for spreading the cooperative movement massively and strengthening it further.

Khaleda was speaking at the function organised on the occasion of the inauguration of "Samabaye Bhavan" at Agargaon area in the city.

Describing improvement of the lot of people, attainment of socio-economic prosperity and poverty alleviation as the focal point of all activities of her government, she said the government is pledged to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals.

The government, the prime minister said, has adopted poverty alleviation strategy in accordance with the country's own road map for development. She expressed her optimism that the cooperatives, one of the country's largest sector, can act as a strong instrument for alleviating poverty.

Terming honesty, unity and solidarity as the main key to the success of cooperative movement, the prime minister urged the co-operators to discharge their duties with honesty, competence and dedication.

Presided over by Secretary of the Rural Development and Cooperatives Division Rafiqul

Islam, the function was addressed also by LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Public Works and Housing Minister Mirza Abbas, State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Ziaul Huq Zia, Khandaker Mahbubuddin Ahmed MP and Registrar of the Directorate of Cooperatives Sheikh Altaf Ali.

Earlier, the prime minister unveiled the plaque of the newly constructed "Samabaye Bhavan (Cooperative Building)". Describing the cooperatives as a strong effort to achieve socio-economic freedom, she said the role of the cooperatives is widely recognised for achieving self-reliance by reducing poverty, formation of capital and generation of employment.

Referring to her election commitment to remove poverty through cooperatives, prime minister said after her return to power this time the government is patronising the cooperatives in a massive way and implementing multifarious programmes to infuse dynamism into the cooperative movement.

She said the larger segment of population particularly the small and marginal farmers and rural women and youths are being organised under the banner of the cooperatives. These people, she continued, are being involved in the mainstream of development.

The prime minister listed several measures taken by her government for the benefit of co-operators and the cooperative movement. These

included implementation of cooperative associations regulations 2004 and waiving of interests on agricultural loan up to Tk 5000 for the cooperative farmers, she added.

She said the government has been implementing a Tk 400 crore "housing project" to make the help-less co-operators active and self-reliant.

She said women and farmers cooperative associations under the upazila central cooperative associations are being made dynamic by providing credit from the revenue fund.

The Prime Minister said Taka 1500 crore has been disbursed as loan during the last four years to create self-employment for the rural asset-less men and women. About Taka 2500 crore, she said, has been distributed in poverty alleviation sector during the same period.

Prime minister said the new cooperative building will create opportunity to deliver greater services to about 78 lakhs cooperators of the country.

Built on an area of about one acre of land at an estimated cost of about Tk 45 crore, the new "Samabaye Bhavan" will have facilities like multi-purpose hall, cafeteria, day-care centre as well as exhibition and sales centre for the products of the co-operators.

Cases filed against AL leaders, workers in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Two cases were filed against Awami League (AL) leaders and activists yesterday for defying Section 144 and snatching rifle during a clash with police at Dhanbari under Madhupur upazila in the district on Saturday afternoon.

The AL leaders and activists in the area have gone into hiding to avoid arrests.

Police said the snatched rifle was recovered from near a bridge at Hadira Bazar under Gopalpur upazila on the same night.

SI Abdul Khaleque of Dhanbari Police Station filed a case in this regard under Speedy Trial Act accusing five unidentified people and ten local AL leaders by name.

On the other hand, Shaheen Mandal, officer-in-charge (OC) of Dhanbari Police Station, filed another case in connection with defying Section 144 on Pankata Islamia High School premises accusing 500 unidentified people including 36 AL leaders and activists by name.



Fire fighters try to put out a fire that broke out in a shop on the third floor of Ramna Bhavan in the city yesterday.

PHOENIX BUILDING Victims to get compensation cheques today

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Compensation for death and injuries in the Phoenix building collapse will be handed over to the victims and their families today.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Jalal Ahmed will hand over the money in cheques at his conference room at 11:30am, court sources said.

Earlier on March 27, Deen Mohammad, owner of the Phoenix building that collapsed on February 25, leaving 22 dead and 48 seriously injured, obtained bail from a Dhaka court after depositing Tk 1.20 crore as compensation for the victims of the disaster.

Families of those who died will get Tk 3 lakh each while those who were critically injured will get Tk 2 lakh each. Besides, the victims who sustained minor injuries will get Tk 50,000, sources said.

Deen deposited the money in a current account opened for the victims of Phoenix building collapse with the court branch of Sonali Bank.

Following the cave-in, Tejgaon police filed a case accusing Deen Mohammad and seven others the same day.

Army officer killed in road accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Major Galib Chowdhury of Jessore Cantonment was killed in a road accident on Jessore-Benapole road at Jhikargaachha on Saturday night.

The accident took place at about 11:00pm when Major Galib, 34, was returning to the cantonment from Sathkira by his private car.

Police said he was driving the car but lost control over the steering, crashing into a roadside tree. He died on the spot.

His driver Raihan Kabir, who was also in the car, was critically injured. He was taken to Jessore 250-bed hospital.

Major Galib was a son of Major (retd.) Abdul Awal Chowdhury.

Road accidents cause yearly loss of Tk 5000 crore

BSS, Dhaka

The annual economic cost of road accidents alone exceeds Tk 5000 crore, an expert told BSS in an exclusive interview yesterday.

The main factors of road accidents in the country are reckless driving, over-speeding, over-loading, lack of knowledge and consciousness of the road users, vehicular defects, hazardous roads and road environments, inadequate training, poor implementation of traffic rules and regulations, says Professor Dr Mohammad Mazharul Hoque, director of Accident Research Centre (ARC) of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

He said the country needs implementation of well-integrated programmes and raising of massive awareness among people about road accidents to ensure road safety.

Hoque said the government has recognised the magnitude of the problem and has taken numerous measures to combat the alarming situation. In response to the growing

road traffic accident problem in the country, ARC has started a comprehensive research on road traffic accidents and commensurate remedial measures.

However, the highest levels of commitment in this regard came from Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, who has established an independent Accident Research Centre in BUET within her 100-day priority programme.

ARC director said there are police records of 4000 deaths and another 5000 cases of injuries annually. The fatality rate is at least 50 times higher than the rates in western countries.

In current prices, road accident in Bangladesh is costing the community nearly 2 percent of GDP. Accident involving pedestrians are by far the biggest problem accounting for 44 percent. This is followed by rear-end and head-on accidents accounting for 16.5 percent and 13.2 percent respectively. Buses and trucks are the main contributors to accidents with buses accounts for 48 percent and trucks 37 percent.

"It is clear that pedestrian safety must have a priority in alleviating

road safety problems both in urban and rural areas. Together with pedestrian, safety of bicyclists and motorcyclists is essential for road traffic fatalities, the ARC director said.

According to ARC, of the total road accident fatalities, about 53 percent are pedestrians alone. In urban areas, pedestrians represent often up to 70- percent of road accident fatalities. Nearly 80 percent of the road deaths are in the age groups of 5-45 years, which have significant economic and societal impact. Children under 16 years of age account for nearly 21 percent of road fatalities. This percentage is nearly 2.5 times higher than that of the figure of developed countries.

According to ARC, about 40 percent of the accidents occurred in urban areas and 60 percent in rural areas. Accidents at rural locations are more severe, causing almost two-thirds of all road traffic fatalities. Nearly 37 percent fatalities occurred in national highways, 12 percent in regional roads and 15 percent in feeder roads.

Land ministry yet to receive list of sensitive cases

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The government did not receive a single list of the sensitive cases relating to land from any of the 64 district commissioners despite passage of about four months since issuance of the government order in this regard.

A high-powered National Executive Committee on Monitoring Land Related Cases, headed by Cabinet Secretary ASM Abdul Halim, took the decision in December last year.

The other committee members are Secretaries of Land, Information and Housing and Public Works ministries, Additional Attorney General, a Joint Secretary of Environment and Forest Ministry and a solicitor of Law Ministry.

"We are going to place the issue

before the 10th meeting of the national committee scheduled for Thursday," a senior official of the Land Ministry told BDNEWS preferring anonymity.

Even the district commissioners (DCs) failed to inform the ministry about their reluctance to send the required information, he said.

The Land Ministry issued letters to the 64 DCs asking them to send detailed information about the sensitive and very urgent cases involving land in their respective districts following a decision of the 9th meeting of the committee chaired by the Cabinet Secretary on December 26 last year, according to ministry sources.

Basically, DCs were asked to send the total number of the sensitive or very urgent land related cases in their respective district, a

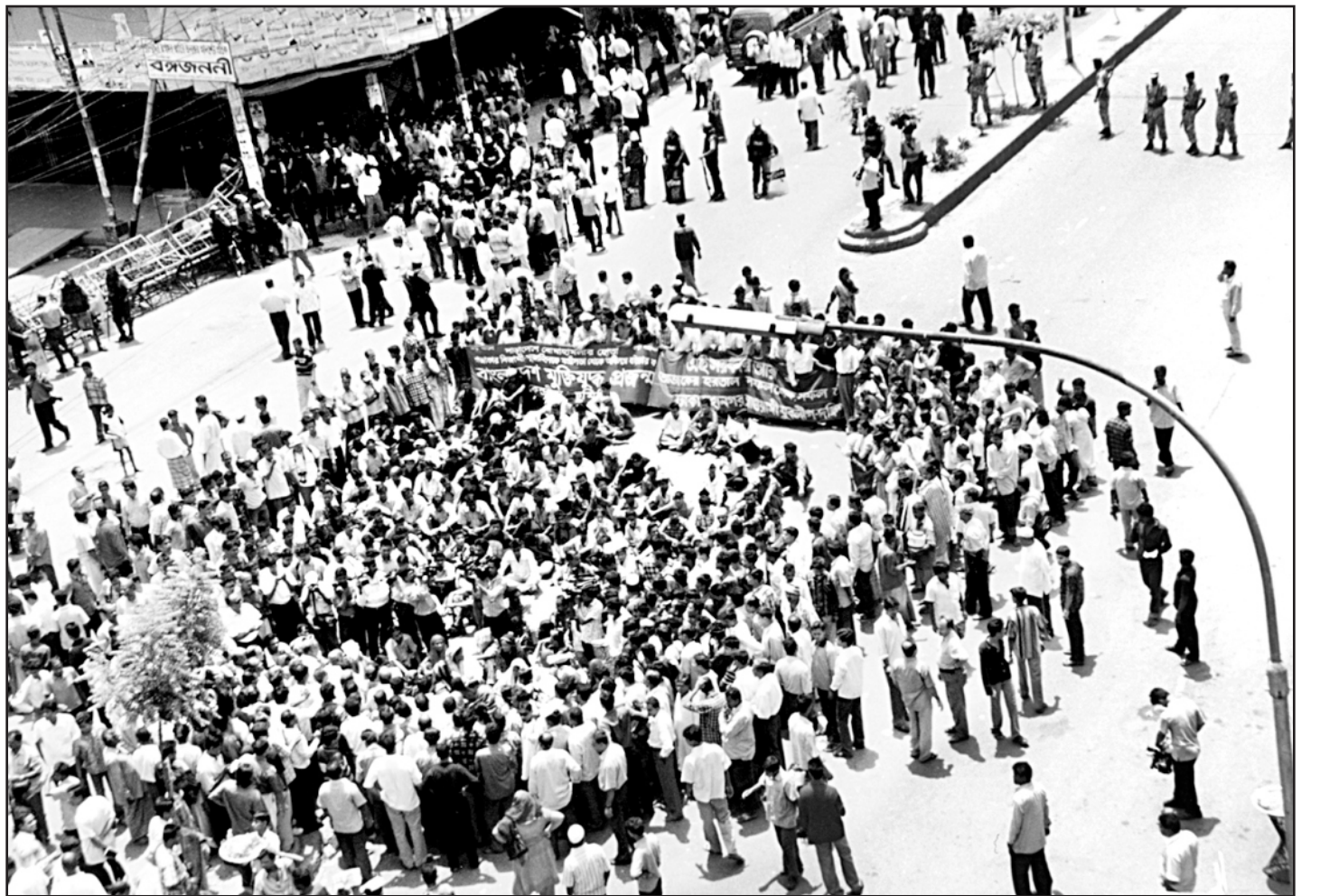
Land Ministry source said.

"But, why the DCs are remaining mum has become a matter of concern for the land ministry as the committee will seek the information at its Thursday's meeting," the source added.

The ministry has nothing to do except informing the committee about the DCs' reluctance to send the information, he said.

Another source in the cabinet division said the government sought the number of sensitive land related cases from all districts to take remedial measures as land is grabbed by powerful segment of the society.

The 10th meeting of the committee is being held after four months although it was to be held in February as per the decision.



Leaders and activists of 14-party opposition combine gather in front of Ramna Bhavan in the city during hartal hours yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

21 houses gutted in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Twenty-one houses were gutted damaging properties worth over Tk 20 lakh in two separate incidents of fire in Chittagong in the early hours of yesterday.

According to sources, 18 houses and a poultry firm were destroyed when fire broke out from a kitchen of the house of Abu Syed Sawdagar at Allama Kagojipara in Patiya at around 12:30am.

Over two hundred poultry of the firm were burned alive in the fire, sources added.

A youth named Salahuddin received burn injury while trying to put out the fire, they said.

Fire service sources estimated the losses of property at Tk 20 lakh while the fire affected people put it at over Tk 30 lakh.

The other fire incidence took place at the house of Marium Begum adjoining to Baro Miar Masjid at city's Bakalia at around 1:30am.

The fire originated from earthen oven destroyed two houses damaging properties over Tk 2 lakh before the fire fighters extinguished it, sources said.

WEATHER TODAY logo with sun and cloud icons.

Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at one or two places over Rajshahi, Dhaka, Sylhet, Barisal and Khulna divisions and the region of Comilla in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Weather may remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country, Met Office said, predicting nearly unchanged day temperature over the country.

Highest temperature 36.1 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sitakunda and lowest 18.8 degree Celsius at Ishwardi.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:24pm today and rises at 5:29am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

Table with columns: City/Town, Temperature in Celsius (Max, Min), Humidity in percentage (Morning, Evening). Rows include Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet, Cox's Bazar.

Rickshaw van puller stabbed to death in Keraniganj

BDNEWS, Keraniganj

A rickshaw van puller was killed and two others injured early yesterday during indiscriminate chopping at West Barishur Muslimbad area under Keraniganj in Dhaka.

The deceased was identified as Aslam, 35, son of Rahman Bepari of Baliaatali under Muladi thana in Barisal.

The injured persons, Shukur and Bashir, were rushed to Mitford Hospital in critical condition.

Police said the incident occurred at 2:30 am when the victims tried to stop Taher, 35, from swooping his wife Sharifa, 30, with sharp weapon demanding dowry at his father-in-laws house.

Police recovered the body and sent to the hospital for autopsy. A case was filed with Keraniganj Police Station in this connection.