

Six to die for murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

A Speedy Trial Tribunal in Barisal yesterday handed down death sentences to six people and acquitted four others for the murder of one Sayedur Rahman Milon on February 24, 2005.

The convicts were identified as Mafiz, 25, Gias, 24, Rana, 24, Tara, 35, Rony, 23, and Mahfuz, 28, of Kaunia branch road area.

The acquitted are Sohag, 24, Shawon, 28, Mohan, 27, and Munna, 26, of the same area.

All of the accused except Tara and Sohag have been on the run till date.

Judge Abdul Matin announced the judgement in a crowded courtroom while Tara and Sohag were present.

According to the prosecution, Sayedur Rahman Milon, 27, was hacked to death with sharp weapons by the convicts in Kaunia branch road area in the city at 7:30pm on February 24, 2005.

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Loan default up 34pc in six months

Sonali, Oriental top the chart

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The volume of defaulted loans in the banking system rose by 34 per cent to stand at Tk 23,465 crore in June this year from Tk 17,509 crore in December last year.

While the total increase in default loans is Tk 5,956 crore, nationalised Sonali Bank alone witnessed an increase of Tk 4,596 crore and among the private banks the highest increase of Tk 418 crore was witnessed by Oriental Bank Limited, recent statistics of the Bangladesh Bank show.

Bankers attributed the rise, in the case of Sonali Bank, to Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation's (BPC) failure to pay back its Tk 4,300 crore loan which was borrowed to import

fuel.

But, the situation in foreign commercial banks (FCBs) is better since the amount of their defaulted loans decreased to Tk 41 crore in the last six months.

Classified loans of Sonali Bank were 23.48 per cent of its total outstanding loans in December last year and the figure rose to 44.11 per cent in June this year, the central bank data show.

"We are in a discussion with Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation for rescheduling the loan," said a high official of the largest nationalised bank. He hoped that the amount of classified loans will be reduced as soon as BPC reschedules its loans.

The central bank data also reveal

that Oriental bank broke all records among the commercial banks when its classified loans rose to 48.09 per cent in June this year compared to 24.4 per cent in December last year.

"The per centage of classified loans has increased dramatically after the central bank took over Oriental's charge as the problem bank's past management had shown many classified loans as good loans," said a banking sector source. "The central bank revealed it and so the figure has increased to a record point," the source added.

Oriental Bank sources however said a drastic drive has been taken to recover the defaulted loans and they are hopeful that the amount

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AL parliamentary team goes to Phulbari today

UNB, Dhaka

An Awami League (AL) parliamentary team goes to Phulbari today to investigate Saturday's killing of demonstrators by police and BDR there.

At least seven people were killed and 300 others injured as police and BDR opened fire on demonstrators advancing towards the office of Asia Energy Corporation (Bangladesh) Pvt. Ltd.

After investigation, the team comprising six lawmakers will submit a report to opposition leader Sheikh Hasina.

Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid will lead the team that includes Col (ret'd) Faruq Khan, Dr Abdur Razzaq, Asaduzzaman Noor, Mostafizur Rahman and Hamida Banu Shova.

8,000 govt employees to get pay rise

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Cabinet Committee on salary fixation yesterday decided in principle to increase salary scales of around 8,000 government officers and employees including the district election officers.

Others to get increased salary-scale are the officials of the Department of Registration, auditors of Railway Accounts Department, professional trainers of Marine Academy, Chittagong,

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Indian minister for settling enclave issue thru' talks

Bss, Rangpur

Indian State Minister for Home Affairs S Raghupathy yesterday stressed the need for resolving the enclave and outstanding border issues between Bangladesh and India through discussion.

He was exchanging views with senior officials of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Border Security Force (BSF) of India during his visit to

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PHOTO: STAR

Lawyers under the banner of Ainjibi Somonnoy Parishad bring out a procession from the Supreme Court premises yesterday demanding protection of the judiciary.

Israel rejects UN call to lift Lebanon blockade

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel rejected a call by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan yesterday to lift its air and sea blockade of Lebanon, saying it would only end the 7-week-old siege once all aspects of a ceasefire were in place.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert also told Annan he would not withdraw Israeli troops from southern Lebanon until the full implementation of the ceasefire, which took effect on August 14 and put an end to 34 days of conflict with Hizbollah.

Olmert's statements effectively amounted to a rejection of the two main requests Annan had come to Jerusalem to discuss, but Annan later played down the differences of opinion, saying his and Olmert's thinking were not so far apart.

"There isn't that much of a difference between Prime Minister Olmert and myself," Annan told a news conference in the West Bank city of Ramallah when asked about the apparent failure of his bid to strengthen the 2-week-old ceasefire.

Earlier, during an hour of talks

with Olmert, Annan said he pressed for a lifting of the embargo, imposed after the start of the war against Hizbollah on July 12, on economic grounds.

Olmert said any relaxation of pressure on Lebanon's ports and airspace depended on the full implementation of UN resolution 1701, which governs the ceasefire with Hizbollah.

"The (resolution) is a fixed buffet and everything will be implemented, including the lifting of the blockade, as part of the entire implementation of the different articles," he said.

Olmert was equally firm when Annan suggested Israel should withdraw its troops from Lebanon within "days or weeks", once up to 5,000 U.N.-backed peacekeepers are on the ground.

"Israel will pull out of Lebanon once the resolution is implemented," Olmert said, indicating a longer timeline.

Olmert also reiterated his call for the UN force to be deployed not just in southern Lebanon but along the border with Syria, a deployment that the U.N. resolution makes depend-

ent on a request from the Lebanese government.

Annan, in Jerusalem after visiting Lebanon, had made lifting the blockade his top priority, after describing it as a "humiliation" for Lebanon as well as an economic millstone.

SCANT PROGRESS

The secretary-general said he hoped to double to 5,000 the number of UN troops in Lebanon soon and urged Israel and Hizbollah to end swiftly disputes blocking a lasting ceasefire.

On Tuesday, Israeli Defense Minister Amir Peretz said Israel would pull out thousands of troops once a "reasonable" number of UN soldiers had been deployed, but did not give a figure.

Resolution 1701 calls for a deployment of 15,000 UN peacekeepers by November 4, alongside Lebanese army forces.

In another sign that Annan had

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PHOTO: STAR

Pickets pelt Communications Minister Nazmul Huda's car with stones on Green road in the capital during the opposition-sponsored hartal yesterday.

Series of bombings in Iraq kills 74

AFP, Baghdad

Insurgents killed at least 74 Iraqis and wounded scores in a series of shootings and bombings on Wednesday, including one in a crowded Baghdad market and another at a military recruitment centre.

The blast in the Shurja market left 24 dead and 35 wounded and came just two hours after rebels targeted an Iraqi army recruitment centre in the Shiite town of Hilla, south of Baghdad, killing 12 volunteers and wounding 38.

The Baghdad market blast came

despite a massive security crackdown in the violent Iraqi capital, rattling windows one kilometre away as a plume of dust and smoke climbed above the skyline.

Body parts were strewn across the area. Windows of nearby shops were shattered, two cars were ripped apart and a popular restaurant blown open.

"Firefighters are fighting to quell the fire as many shops are burning," a police officer said at the scene, adding that the bomb had been placed in a bag and partially concealed by a bicycle.

"People are gathering the mobile

phones and money of those killed and storing them in a nearby mosque. They were also collecting flesh and bodyparts in plastic bags," he added.

In the day's second biggest bombing, insurgents also used a bicycle to hide a bomb that exploded outside the army recruitment centre in the Shiite town of Hilla, 120 kilometres (75 miles) south of Baghdad.

The recruitment centre was set up four days ago to boost enlistments by youths from the mainly Shiite areas around Samawa,

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Devoted to world of creation

EMRAN HOSSAIN

At a time when growing numbers of skilled traditional musical instrument makers are leaving their inherited profession, Kalipada Das of Dhamrai is a warrior against all odds and still holding on to the profession with passion, integrity and devotion.

Kalipada's family moved to Dhamrai from Tili, Manikganj back in the forties. His father Rajani Kumar Das passed away when he was 12. Young Kalipada did not have any choice but to be the only provider of the family.

Kalipada followed his father's footprints like a ritual and embraced the profession as did his ancestors.

He dedicated himself for eight years and learned the skills under Kamadhar, a master musical instrument maker in Barisal, which helped him embark on a successful musical instruments manufacturing trade.

This dedicated craftsman of musical instruments also developed a passion for music and fell in love with Kirtan - a form of devotional religious songs.

Kalipada regularly attended Kirtan programmes and pursued to learn singing Kirtan and eventually earned recognition as a singer as well as a player of Khol or Mridangam (a two-sided drum used for accompaniment with devotional music).

He is now a member of Yashamadhab Sampradaya, a group that sings Kirtan professionally.

"Kirtan is like a prayer to me. I do not sing Kirtan and play Mridangam for money as it is for praising the God. It means everything to me, it brings joy to my heart," said Kalipada while working on a Tabla.

Kalipada is the father of three sons and four daughters. Recently, this old craftsman's monthly income went down and reached between Tk 2000 and Tk 5000 as his old age does not allow him to work as much as he used to.

Kalipada used to be a bulk supplier of

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PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Kalipada Das busy making a drum at his Dhamrai house. The ardent lover of traditional music is fighting all the odds to sustain his work of producing musical instruments.

Non-govt pry teachers' sit-in on Sept 17

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Non-government primary school teachers demanding nationalisation of their jobs under the banner of Bangladesh Non-government Primary Teachers Association yesterday rescheduled their sit-in programme from September 4 to September 17 due to the second term examinations and the holy Shab-e-Barat.

On that day, they will march to the Prime Minister's Office and submit a memorandum to the prime minister before commencement of the sit-in programme at Mukhtangon in the capital.

"The date of our sit-in programme has been changed considering the students' second term examinations and the holy Shab-e-Barat. We will announce tougher programmes from the

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Lanka troops killed 17 aid workers

Accuses truce monitors; govt rejects claim

AFP, London

Sri Lanka yesterday rejected as "outrageous" a ruling by independent ceasefire monitors that government forces were responsible for the massacre of 17 employees of a French charity.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera, who was visiting London, told the BBC that the Swedish-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) had made its conclusion ahead of a police investigation.

Earlier, SLMM said Sri Lankan troops had carried out execution-style killings of 17 French charity workers and also waged a bombing

campaign against Tamil Tiger rebels.

The Swedish-led truce monitor SLMM said security forces were solely responsible for the slayings of the employees of Action Against Hunger earlier this month. The workers had been shot in the back of the head.

The SLMM chief Ulf Henricsson in a statement issued in Colombo said he had "confidential discussions with highly reliable sources" about those responsible for the August 4 killings and concluded that the military was involved.

"... the security forces of Sri Lanka are widely and consistently

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