

# Germany probes three over ‘spying for China’

AFP, Frankfurt Am Main

German prosecutors on Wednesday said they were investigating three people who allegedly spied for China, with media reporting that a German former EU diplomat was among the suspects.

“We can confirm an investigation into suspected espionage” for Chinese state security bodies, a spokesman for

the federal prosecutor’s office told AFP.

Der Spiegel weekly said one of the suspects was a German diplomat who worked at the European Commission in Brussels before serving several stints as ambassador for the European Union in foreign countries.

The other two were reportedly lobbyists employed by a “well-known Germany lobby firm”.

# Pressure piles up on the EC

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the election to take place on the day of Saraswati Puja.

“We have to keep in mind that no one should face any trouble while performing his or her religious rites,” he said hoping that the commission will consider the matter.

At his election campaign in west Tejturipara area, Tabith alleged that the EC intentionally fixed the polls date on the day of Saraswati Puja.

“It proves that the government doesn’t treat all religions equally,” he claimed.

Talking to journalists yesterday afternoon, Dr Kamal said, “This cannot happen. Won’t it be regarded as the government’s negligence and failure if an election is held on Eid day or puja day?”

Expressing solidarity with the DU students’ protest, Bangladesh Hindu-Bouddha-Christian Oikya Parishad said it would call a countrywide strike if the polls date is not changed.

It decided to hold human chain programmes across the country at 4:00pm on Monday to press home its demand.

Rana Dasgupta, general secretary of the platform, said the EC’s idea that the election and Saraswati Puja would take place simultaneously at educational institutions is “unrealistic” and “absurd”.

“We’re rejecting it,” he said at a press conference.

Speaking at another press briefing at his Secretariat office, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday urged those demanding the city polls’ deferral to stop protests and accept the HC order.

In another development, SC lawyer Ashoke Kumar Ghosh filed an appeal with the apex court, seeking its order for the EC to fix a fresh date for the DCC polls.

Ashoke said the SC chamber judge may hold hearing on the appeal on Sunday.

## EC STILL RIGID

EC Secretary Md Alamgir told journalists yesterday that Saraswati Puja is usually observed at 27 educational institutions in Dhaka North City Corporation and 26 in South City Corporation.

The commission already talked to the authorities of those educational institutions who said there would be no problem in observing puja there, he said.

“Puja will be held on January 29 and the election on January 30. There is no conflict ... The hearing on an appeal over the matter will take place

# Lone accused

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quoted him as saying.

After raping the girl, he took her watch, money and cell phone.

Majnu said he had committed such offences several times before, adding that rape was “a petty matter and natural activity for him”.

Metropolitan Magistrate Tofazzal Hossain recorded the statement at his chamber after Detective Branch of Police Inspector Abu Siddique, also the investigation officer of the case, produced him before the court.

According to the sources, the magistrate then ordered to send him to Keraniganj Central Jail.

On January 5, the DU student was raped while she was walking from Kurmitola bus stop to a friend’s house

# His first week

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in chaired a meeting where it was decided that a parliamentary system would be introduced in the country. He issued a provisional constitutional order under which parliamentary democracy was established. It was also decided that all the elected MNAs and MPAs of December 1970, January and March 1971 elections, otherwise not disqualified, will form the first Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh and they will also formulate the constitution of the country.

On 12 January, Bangabandhu stepped down from his previous role as the president of the country and took the charge of prime minister. The main reason behind this change was the prevailing political situation, which demanded Bangabandhu’s charismatic role and the political commitment to establishing parliamentary democracy. The oath-taking ceremony was held at the Durbar Hall. Justice Abu Syed Choudhury was made president of the new country. Eleven others took oath as ministers and their ministerial portfolio was distributed on that day.

Next day, Bangabandhu held a grand press conference, first after his

arrival in independent Bangladesh. In that meeting he reiterated his thought of establishing socialism within a democratic framework. He also promised an early constitution.

Bangabandhu chaired the first meeting of the cabinet on the same day. It was decided to waive all rent of agricultural land till April 14, 1972. The cabinet also adopted the first 10 lines of Rabindranath Tagore’s “Amar Sonar Bangla” as the national anthem and Kazi Nazrul Islam’s “Chol Chol Chol” as the national marching song.

After the Liberation War another major concern was to gain control over the large number of small armed groups with different political orientations. Bangabandhu put all his charisma behind it. An appeal was made on 17 January calling upon freedom fighters who still bore arms (other than those who formed the regular units recognised to be part of the national armed forces of the state) to surrender their arms.

[Source: Dainik Bangla (January 11-17, 1972), The Bangladesh Observer (January 11-17, 1972) and Kamal Hossain’s Bangladesh: Quest for Freedom and Justice]



**From left, Dr Salehuddin Ahmed, the first pro-vice chancellor of Brac university; Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, chairperson of Brac governing body; Prof Rehman Sobhan, chairman of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD); National Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury; Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE); and Prof Manzoor Ahmed, founding director of Brac University Institute of Educational Development, observe a minute of silence in memory of Brac founder Sir Fazle Hasan Abed at a programme at Dhaka university’s Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury Auditorium yesterday. Sir Fazle Abed passed away on December 20.**

PHOTO: STAR

# He poured his heart into people’s welfare

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Behind all these initiatives was a great vision held by Abed, the speakers said yesterday.

Centre for Policy Dialogue Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan said Abed was a rare personality with a vision and the ability to implement it successfully.

“Sir Fazle Abed was a man of action,” he said.

He also said starting its journey at a remote village, Brac has gone global and it continues to bring about economic and social changes in people’s lives. “Brac’s distinct feature is that it has established institutions that have self-financed programmes.”

He added that the NGO took up programmes for the poor people, helped them engage in income-generating activities and overcome poverty.

Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, chairperson of Brac governing body, said, “Whatever Sir Fazle Abed thought and did was about the welfare of the common people. He designed all his programmes accordingly.”

In the 1980s when Abed visited villages and found women having six to seven children and high rate of child mortality, he picked up the idea on how to reduce the number of child deaths, ensure rural education and make sure women can have a dignified life, said Zillur.

That’s how the non-formal education of children and health programmes began, he said.

“He always attached importance to building strong institutions and efficient management to make sure that the development made is sustainable ... he made changes as per the needs of the day,” Zillur said.

Dr Salehuddin Ahmed, the first pro-vice chancellor of Brac University, said all the initiatives undertaken by Brac were based on rigorous studies. And Sir Fazle Abed, who had a special quality of listening deeply to the people and interact with them, would learn from anybody and everybody.

Some 30 lakh children going to the Brac’s primary and pre-primary schools means something great, he said.

Dr Manzoor Ahmed, founder-director of the Institute of Educational Development, Brac University, said Abed had realised that development cannot happen without good education. So he put emphasis on education.

Apart from working to ensure primary and pre-primary education, Brac also established a university, he said, adding that the NGO has made significant contributions to achieving Bangladesh’s Millennium Development Goals.

Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of the Campaign for Popular Education, said she has long experience of closely working with Sir Fazle Abed in the education sector, and Abed was a guiding light for her.

Recalling an event, she said a study on primary schools in rural

areas in 2000 found that only 18 percent students of class five had basic competency level. A question arose how they could make such a finding public.

Abed then suggested conducting a study with the same parameters on the top 10 schools in Dhaka city. They did it and found 70 percent students of class five had the basic competency level. “We then made it a comparative study and brought it to the public,” she said.

“On the deathbed, Sir Fazle Abed told me that there are many challenges in the education sector, don’t give up ... keep working,” Rasheda said.

Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury, the first vice chancellor of Brac University, said Abed established the university, considering that it would have a long legacy.

Lauding Abed’s wisdom, he said, “Whatever he did, he got advice from the best brains of the world.”

Gyantapas Abdur Razzaq Foundation Director General Ahrar Ahmad said the discussion was not to mourn the death of Sir Fazle Abed, but to celebrate his life and activities.

“He [Abed] was a visionary. His thoughts on education are unique. A man of his stature had always been polite and soft voiced. He never demonstrated his authority,” he added.

Yesterday’s discussion was attended by students, academics and development activists.

# Were those really incidents of ‘crossfire’?

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killed or one of his accomplices. The cops, according to the official versions, always fought in self-defence.

Rights activists say the lawmakers’ statements make it evident that a section of law enforcement agency personnel were involved in extrajudicial killings for years, passing those as “shootout” or “crossfire”.

“It’s true we need a tougher law. But if we can take instant actions through crossfire on drug-related issues, then why can’t we follow the same in case of rapists?” said an Awami League MP, participating in an unscheduled discussion in the House on Tuesday.

“The person who we know has committed this crime [rape] does not have any right to stay alive anymore.”

Referring to the home minister, an opposition MP asked, “You are allowing crossfire as part of a fight against drugs. Then why aren’t you doing the same in case of rape?”

The remarks were not owned by the government or the ruling party although those were not expunged either. Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul

Quader said those were personal opinions of the MPs.

“It is not the stance of the government or the party,” he said.

“We can’t support encounter or crossfire, because this is unconstitutional,” Quader, also general secretary of ruling Awami League, said while talking to reporters at his secretariat office.

The incidents of “crossfire” increased significantly after the government declared an anti-narcotics drive in May 2018.

According to rights body Ain o Salish Kendra, around 2,700 people were killed in so-called shootouts or gunfights since 2004. Of them, more than 900 were killed after law enforcers picked them up.

Concerned over such extrajudicial killings, national and international rights groups have long been demanding an immediate end to such killings.

Nobody disagrees that crimes like rape and narcotics trade have to be dealt with iron fists. But the actions have to be within the legal framework.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday,

rights activist Nur Khan Liton said, “The lawmakers who are giving such speeches themselves believe that law enforcers are killing people extrajudicially in the name of shootout or crossfire.”

“For this, they are trying to encourage law enforcers with such speeches which will apparently push the country into a grave danger,” he said.

“These statements also make it evident that those killings in the name of shootouts are controlled and planned,” Nur said.

The rights defender also said such speeches by lawmakers were violations of the constitution.

About the MPs’ call, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said, “It is appalling to say the least, except the only silver lining that they distinctly acknowledged from the floor of parliament that extrajudicial killings are taking place in the country.

“The appalling part of it is that they are not only recognising that such killings have the blessing of the lawmakers, but that they are also proposing to promote it further.”

# Far-right Israeli parties unite ahead of election

AFP, Jerusalem

Three far-right Israeli political parties joined forces late Wednesday, seeking to strengthen their hand in a coming election after a left-leaning alliance was announced earlier in the week.

Israel is gearing up for its third election in less than a year after neither Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nor his centrist challenger Benny Gantz were able to form a majority government following two polls last year.

Whoever is tasked with forming a government will need to win the support of small parties, which can wield major clout in coalition negotiations.

Under Israel’s system of proportional representation, parties may form joint electoral lists to boost their chances of being selected as coalition partners.

On Tuesday, Defence Minister Naftali Bennett’s New Right party struck a deal with the National Union faction of Transport Minister Bezalel

Smotrich.

On Wednesday night, just before the deadline for filing electoral lists, they were joined by the national religious Jewish Home party, led by Education Minister Rafi Peretz.

The trio will run under the name Yamina (“Rightward” in Hebrew).

Left out in the cold was Jewish Power -- the extreme-right party which many view as racist -- despite Netanyahu’s reported push for them to be included in Bennett’s alliance.

“I will not include on my electoral list someone who has in his living room at home a picture of a man who murdered 29 innocent people,” Bennett wrote on Facebook Wednesday.

Video shot in Jewish Power leader Itamar Ben-Gvir’s home in the flashpoint West Bank city of Hebron shows a photograph of Israeli settler Baruch Goldstein, who killed 29 Muslim worshippers with an assault rifle in 1994 before being beaten to death by survivors.

Ben Gvir, who lives in a Jewish

settler enclave in the mainly Palestinian city, has been quoted as saying that the picture is there out of respect for Goldstein as a doctor he says saved Jewish lives.

Israeli media reported that Ben-Gvir had offered to take down the picture if Bennett allowed him into his alliance.

Data released by Israel’s National Elections Committee yesterday showed Jewish Power registered to run alone, with an optimistic 17 candidates on its list.

In the September election, Jewish Power failed to reach the threshold of 3.25 percent of the vote required to enter parliament. The other three far-right parties presented a joint list and won seven seats.

On Monday, the left-wing Labor-Gesher and Meretz parties announced they were joining forces for the next election.

Israel’s four Arab-led parties registered as running together, as they did in September, as the Joint List.

# Onion crisis

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He said people were worried over the onion price, but prices have become now stable to some extent.

The government lost control over the onion market as a large quantity of the crop was damaged in fields due to excessive monsoon rain in the last season. Besides, India suspended onion exports suddenly, the minister mentioned.

But India has recently withdrawn its suspension, he added.

Responding to another supplementary question from Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal MP Shirin Akter, Razzaque said onion prices would certainly not remain Tk 110 a kg.

Prices shot through the roof in November last year, reaching up to Tk 250 a kg in Dhaka and many other districts at retail level.

At present, each kg of onion is being sold at Tk 120 to Tk 140, which is three to four times higher than the usual value.

# Rajshahi and Khulna

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Dynamites to the trophy in the 2016 edition and while Tamim was not the captain of Cumilla Victorians when they lifted the trophy in the previous edition, the stalwart led the charge with a player-of-the-match performance to be part of a BPL-winning side for the first time.

Mushfiquur might find his counterpart Andre Russell as the biggest thorn on his path today, especially after the inspiring knock from the West Indian saw Rajshahi win the second qualifier against Chattogram Challengers from an almost unsalvageable situation on Wednesday.

Khulna Tigers had ended the league phase in top spot with eight wins from 12 games, leading second-placed Rajshahi on virtue of net run rate. The teams split the two league games against each other, winning one each, before Khulna entered the final by beating Rajshahi in the first qualifier, before Russell single-handedly beat Chattogram Challengers in the second qualifier on Wednesday.

# Traffic chaos

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A few rickshaws were there, but many of the pullers were not interested in taking passengers even after they were offered higher fares.

“This is a godforsaken city. There are gridlocks in every alley in Rajabazar, Monipuripara, and Indira Road,” said a man walking in Khamarbari area with his son.

A young man named Imran said he missed a job interview while being stuck in traffic. He could not reach Paltan from Khilkhet on time.

Saad, an architect, said he had missed a meeting with a potential client. His meeting was at 11:00am in Motijheel. He left Mohammadpur around 9:30am by bus, but it was 11:45am when he reached Shabbagh through Farmgate.

The agitated workers left the road after the owners assured them of meeting their demands, said Abdul Latif, officer-in-charge of Mohammadpur Police Station.

Police, representatives of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, and garment workers federation leaders were present when the factory management made the promises.

# Arrest warrant

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the case Abdul Alim, who is also an inspector of Mohammadpur Police Station, submitted the probe report to the court.

Ten copies of the warrants were sent to different police stations soon after the order was issued, court officials said.

The court fixed February 24 for the next hearing in the case.

Abrar, a ninth-grader, was electrocuted during the anniversary programme of Prothom Alo’s youth magazine Kishor Alo on November 1 last year.

The charges brought against all the accused are under section 304(A) of Bangladesh Penal Code. The section deals with deaths caused by “rash or negligent act”.

According to the section, a person may face up to five years in jail if charges are proven against him or her.

The victim’s father, Mojibur Rahman, filed the case with the Fourth Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate’s Court in Dhaka on November 6 last year.

In the complaint, Mojibur said his son was electrocuted and became unconscious around 4:30pm on November 1 last year while attending the programme of Kishor Alo.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Md Aminul Haque took it into cognizance and ordered the OC of Mohammadpur Police Station to submit an investigation report.