

Non-cognisable or penal offence?

Two probe reports give contradictory versions regarding attack on Tabith Awal

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

A police investigation report submitted to the returning office of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) election showed that they did not find any attack on Tabith Awal -- BNP's mayor candidate for DNCC -- and his followers.

Police said a scuffle between activists of Awami League and BNP took place, which is a non-cognisable offence.

However, after holding a separate investigation, Executive Magistrate Imran Shahrir in his probe report said Tabith's complaint is out of purview of mobile court, and should be tried under The Penal Code, 1860.

"Necessary steps can be taken after detailed probe," Imran Shahrir said in his report.

DNCC returning officer Abul Kashem said that he would forward the reports to the Election Commission for further action.

Tabith Awal and his followers came under attack while campaigning in the capital's Gabtoli area on January 21.

Witnesses said a group of people started throwing brickbats at Tabith and his followers while they were electioneering in Gabtoli's Bajarpara area around 11:15am.

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Posters, many of them laminated, cover a road in Lalbagh as far as the eyes can see, almost forming an uninterrupted canopy. The High Court on Wednesday ordered disposal of all laminated posters, but authorities' action is yet to be seen. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO OF THE DAY

PALASH KHAN

Ward-based budget allocation a must

Experts say at 'Citizen Manifesto on Behalf of City Planners' event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mayors and councilors are indifferent when it comes to carrying out their roles described in the corresponding law, said city planners yesterday.

"According to the city corporation act, mayors and councilors have to perform quite a few duties to serve citizens. But they are more concerned about waste management and act as if it is their only mandate," said Dr Adil Mohammed Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP), at a press conference.

BIP organised the event on "City Corporation Election of Dhaka: Citizen Manifesto on Behalf of City Planners", at Planners Tower in the capital's Bangla Motor.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- Community-based activities
- Ward complex in each area
- Empowering councilors to select mayors
- Area-based probe team to inspect dev
- Making councilor offices more vibrant

Deal inked to expand Akhaura-Ashuganj road to four lanes

Project cost likely to increase

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) yesterday signed a deal with an Indian company for widening 39 kilometers out of 51km road from Ashuganj river port to Akhaura land port to four lanes.

Under the deal, Afcons Infrastructure Limited, India will do the widening work for two packages (39.26km) from Ashuganj river port to Dharhar area at the cost of Tk 2,446 crore within three years.

RHD also signed a separate deal with an India-Bangladesh joint venture firm for project management consultancy services at the cost Tk 117.65 crore for five years.

The companies are: RITES Ltd, an Indian government enterprise, and Modern Engineers Planners and Consultants Ltd of Bangladesh.

Arun Alo Chakma, project director of "Improvement of Ashuganj River Port-Sarail-Dharhar-Akhaura Land Port Road as 4-lane National Highway" and officials of the companies signed the contracts at a city hotel.

The contract-signing comes around two and half years after the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) passed the project in July 2017 at the cost of Tk 3,567.85 crore.

Sixty four percent of the project cost would come from an Indian second line of credit signed in March 2016. The project is scheduled to be completed by this year.

However, project authorities have not been able to complete tender process of the third package from Dharhar to Akhaura Land Port (around 10km), and according to project officials, the cost of the project is going to rise.

The project has been conceived as a part of an initiative to establish better communication between Bangladesh and North-eastern part of India, which will ultimately facilitate sub-regional connectivity among South and South-east Asian countries, read project documents.

Although transshipment through the Ashuganj port started for the first time in June 2017, not much could be transported due to poor condition of roads.

Talking at the deal-signing programme, Riva Ganguly Das, high commissioner of India to Bangladesh, said development cooperation is an important aspect of India-Bangladesh relations.

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Over 49,000 river grabbers in 64 dists

State minister for shipping informs JS; Cumilla tops the list

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury yesterday in parliament disclosed a statistics of 49,558 river grabbers across the country with the highest 5,906 grabbers in Cumilla district.

The junior minister placed the statistics in parliament replying to a question from Awami League MP Abdul Latif.

The second highest number of illegal occupants of rivers is in Chattogram (4,704) while the third highest is in Noakhali (4,499), the minister said in a scripted answer.

The other districts with highest river grabbers are Kushtia (3,134 grabbers), Barishal (2,272), Mymensingh (2,160), Faridpur (1,883), Barguna (1,554), Natore (1,541) and Gopalganj (1,399), according to the statistics.

The five districts with lowest number of river grabbers are Lalmonirhat (13 grabbers), Khagrachhari (26), Rajbari (26), Rangpur (30) and Bogura (40).

Mahmud said the lists of river grabbers, prepared by the deputy commissioners of 64 districts, were made public at the website of National River Protection Commission and all district portals.

"The deputy commissioners have been given directives to conduct drives against the grabbers," he said.

He also informed lawmakers that the eviction drives have already started in different districts including Jhalakathi, Manikganj and Kishoreganj.

The state minister said a total of 1,027 illegal structures were evicted from Dhaka and Narayanganj river port areas during

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999 helpline promises 10-minute response time

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Bangladesh Police is making its National Emergency Helpline (999) more robust, while strengthening its services to stand beside people in trouble, according to officials.

The hotline 999 is a toll-free number that allows citizens in distress to call and ask for police assistance. Citizens can avail a number of services through this helpline, including assistance for any types of crime, accident, abduction, fire, and call for ambulance.

With an aim to ensure prompt service, authorities have already started setting up Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) in all police patrol cars across the country.

At present, there are 1,300 patrol cars of police -- which remain on duty round the clock -- under the supervision of 622 police stations across the country, according to officials.

Once the MDT sets are installed in cars, helpline officials will be able to assign the nearest patrolling team to support the caller, collecting live location online.

For this service, the authorities have already updated the location tracking system with help from Engineering and Operation (E&O) department of Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission (BTRC) to get the caller's exact location.

BTRC officials confirmed that they have already issued letters to all telecom companies asking them to assist in the process of locating callers.

Tabarak Ullah, additional deputy inspector general of police, also in-charge of the emergency helpline service, told The Daily Star on Tuesday that they have taken multiple initiatives marking the occasion of "Mujib Borsho" to address people's calls more promptly.

BETTER TECH FOR FASTER RESPONSE
During the primary stage of the helpline's operation, average response time was 31 minutes.

Since last year, the authorities have installed MDT sets in 92 patrol cars, and "disperse systems" in 200 police stations, said police officials.

A disperse system is a separate communication device that allows emergency helpline authorities to contact duty officers of police stations at any time, they said.

This has brought the average response time down to 21 minutes, sources told this newspaper.

After the successful installation of MDT and disperse systems, the officials are hopeful of bringing the average response

time down to just 10 minutes, said additional DIG Tabarak.

This helpline is playing an active role in combating crime. For example, on September 26 last year at 8:31am, a caller from Khilgaon informed that three girls were confined at a flat inside a five-storey building.

The girls were brought to Dhaka from Sylhet with the promise of jobs abroad, the caller said, explaining to helpline officials that one of the girls had managed to escape and seek help from him.

The helpline officer immediately communicated with Khilgaon Police Station and asked them to take necessary action. A team lead by Sub-inspector Shakhawat Hossain went to the spot immediately and rescued the girls.

The police team also arrested a trafficker named Roksana (30).

Helpline officials said they were able to complete the operation in just 20 minutes, successfully rescuing the three teenage victims.

Additional DIG Tabarak said they would install MDT sets at 350 fire stations and in fire service vehicles in phases, once the installation in police patrol cars is complete.

BRINGING MORE HANDS ON DECK
With 450 employees, the national help desk is now able to take 120 calls simultaneously, according to officials.

The construction of a five-storey building for the helpline's central command centre is underway in the capital's Demra.

Officials said the building would have a steel structure and they are hopeful to complete the work before Mujib Borsho ends.

Presently, the hotline is providing service using the premises of central command and control centre of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

The authorities have a plan to increase the number of service desks to accommodate 500 calls at a time, said helpline officials.

They also have a plan to increase the helpline's manpower during Mujib Borsho. Presently, the helpline has authorised manpower of 200 officials, while 250 others are working in deputation, according to police sources.

A proposal for recruiting another 1,923 people is already under process at home ministry, which is expected to be approved within this year, said Additional DIG Tabarak.

"We want to revamp and improve this helpline during Mujib Borsho," added the official.

Why not pass Baksal-like law?

BNP's Harunur Rashid says at JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP lawmaker Harunur Rashid yesterday in parliament said the government should pass a Baksal-like law, as the country is moving towards a one-party rule.

"I think the parliament should amend the constitution and pass a law restoring the decision taken during the introduction of Baksal in 1975 regarding the Articles of the constitution that mentioned basic rights. The country is now moving towards one-party rule," he said speaking on a point of order.

Expressing grave concerns over the recent killing of Bangladeshi citizens by BSF, he said the government is not doing anything to stop this.

The opposition MP alleged that terrorist activities cannot be eradicated from university campuses due to a lack of the government's intent.

Referring to media reports, Harunur said Chhatra League recently tortured four Dhaka University students, and later handed them over to police through teachers of the proctorial body.

"A few days back, 25 students of Buet were expelled for killing its student Abrar. We can't free the educational institutions from terror activities for lack of the government's intent," he also said.

Stating that universities are the highest place for practicing knowledge, Harun said the government is failing to ensure the freedom of speech there.

"If this is the case, the parliament can pass a law banning the universities."

The BNP MP also alleged that the ruling party candidates and their supporters are not obeying

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