

Alleged human trafficker killed in 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

An accused in three human trafficking cases was killed in an alleged gunfight with police in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf earlier yesterday.

The dead -- Abdus Salam, 30, from Noakhali para in Teknaf -- was one of the main accused in a human trafficking case filed after a trawler capsized near St Martin's Island, which killed at least 21 Rohingya refugees recently.

The "gunfight" took place at the foot of a hill near Salam's house around 4:00am, said Pradip Kumar Das, officer-in-charge (OC) of Teknaf Police Station.

Acting on a tip off, a team of police went to the area to arrest Salam and his cohorts, who were holding a meeting there, the OC said.

Sensing police presence, Salam's men opened fire on the law enforcers and injured three cops, he said.

In self-defence, police retaliated with gunshots. Salam's men fled at one point, the official said, adding that police found bullet-hit Salam and rushed him to the upazila health complex.

Later, he was shifted to Cox's Bazar General Hospital, where doctors declared him dead, the OC added.

The police officials injured in the gunfight received primary treatment, he said.

Police claimed to have recovered a locally made gun, ammunition and empty shells from the spot and a case was filed in this regard with Teknaf Police Station.

Salam was absconding as he was accused in three human trafficking cases, OC Pradip said.

At least 15 Rohingya refugees died when a trawler capsized in the Bay of Bengal near St Martin's Island while trying to go to Malaysia illegally on February 11, Bangladesh Coast Guard officials said.

Six more bodies were recovered from the Bay later as well.

The bodies that were recovered were aboard the trawler, Pradip told The Daily Star.

Apart from the victims, 72 people, including four boatmen, were rescued, while 50 others are still missing.

Israel readies for third election in less than a year

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel is bracing for an unprecedented third election in under a year, with voters eyeing an end to the deadlock but polls indicating another tight race despite criminal charges against the prime minister.

Two previous votes in April and September last year failed to produce a clear winner between right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his main challenger Benny Gantz, who heads the centrist Blue and White party.

Ballot-weary Israelis have shown limited enthusiasm ahead of the March 2 election, with some grudgingly accepting the possibility of a fourth run before the year ends.

But there have been significant developments since Israelis last went to the polls.

Netanyahu, Israel's longest serving premier, has become the first to be indicted while in office.



Two schoolchildren and a woman are forced to inhale noxious fumes caused by the burning of garbage dumped in Hazaribagh's Kalunagar area. The garbage includes plastic and waste from nearby hospitals and factories.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

'Unwanted obstruction'

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jurisdiction to launch buses across the country.

"Whenever the BRTC wants to launch new buses, private transport owners and workers obstruct the move," said a mid-level BRTC official, wishing not to be named.

The problem intensified last year as the BRTC took steps to launch more routes with 600 new buses, he added.

The corporation in its latest annual performance agreement (APA), signed with the road transport and bridges ministry in June last year, mentioned the "unwanted obstruction" from private transport owners as a major challenge.

The BRTC is now seeking changes to the directives as those go against the BRTC Ordinance 1961, now replaced by the BRTC Act 2020 that was passed in parliament on February 11.

BRTC Chairman Ehsan-E-Elahi on December 12 last year wrote to the road transport and bridges ministry, demanding the minister's intervention in this regard because the 2003 deal was signed by the then communications minister.

OBSTRUCTIONS Currently, the corporation owns 1,873 buses, including 600 new ones, and 1,357 are in service on 384 routes. Of the rest, 33 new buses are awaiting completion of official procedures while 259 damaged ones are beyond repair and 224 can run after repair.

Aiming at expanding BRTC's services, the government brought 600 buses and 500 trucks from different Indian makers under two projects worth around Tk 732 crore. The buses and trucks arrived at different times last year.

The vehicles include 300 double-deckers, 100 non-AC buses, 100 AC city buses, 100 AC intercity buses, 350 trucks (16.2-tonne) and 150 trucks (10.2-tonne).

But as the BRTC initiated launching of the buses on new routes, local transport owners and workers in Netrokona, Dinajpur, Bogura, Barishal, Sunamganj and Rangpur obstructed the move, officials said.

The latest incident was in Rangpur.

On February 3 and 4, the corporation had to suspend its double-decker service from Rangpur city and its surrounding areas following objections from local transport workers, causing sufferings to a large number of commuters.

The operation of eight double-decker buses faced repeated obstructions at various points since their launch in May last year. Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, also a lawmaker from Rangpur-6, had inaugurated the double-decker service.

"The workers are objecting to plying of the buses outside Rangpur City Corporation area, as this is affecting their income," said AKM Azizul Islam Razu, member-secretary of the Bus Owners Association in Rangpur.

The BRTC faced similar problems in December last year when it launched five double-deckers on Mymensingh-Netrokona route. Transport organisations even observed strikes in both the districts.

They also created obstruction to operation of single-decker buses of BRTC in different upazilas in Mymensingh.

As a result, the BRTC suspended operation of double-deckers on the inter-district route.

"We started operation of five double-deckers on Mymensingh-Netrokona route. After negotiation, we stopped double-decker operations on this route and are now operating three single-decker buses there," Lutfur Azad, BRTC's Mymensingh depot manager, told The Daily Star yesterday.

But, he added, double-deckers were allowed within Mymensingh.

CONCERN OVER INCOME WANING Contacted, Khondaker Enayet Ullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said local transport owners and workers were opposing the BRTC move because the 2003 deal is still in effect.

Besides, when the income of private operators went down due to the illegal three-wheelers like "nosimon"

and "korimon" on highways, the operation of new BRTC buses causes a fresh concern for them.

"However," he added, "we are trying to solve all the problems through discussions."

According to the directives, the corporation needs to talk to local transport operators for setting timing and number of trips if its buses are run from terminals instead of its own depots.

Local owners and workers say the BRTC is supposed to run buses from its own depots in different districts. In the absence of its own depot, it will go for a local bus terminal. But in many cases BRTC staff do not follow it, they added.

Osman Ali, general secretary of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation, alleged that the BRTC authorities are violating the deal by operating buses from "undesignated stops", and local workers and owners are against this.

Though the corporation has 21 bus depots including seven in Dhaka, and two truck depots in 15 districts, another directive said BRTC buses running from Dhaka on northern and south western routes would be operated from Kalyanpur depot and those running in eastern direction would be operated from Motijheel depot.

THE DEAL

On August 20, 2003, the then communications minister Nazmul Huda signed the deal with the workers federation. The federation's president Wazi Uddin Khan and executive president Shajahan Khan, now a ruling party lawmaker, signed on behalf of the organisation at that time.

The federation had announced a strike but called it off after the deal was signed.

The federation, a platform of 233 transport workers' unions, in many cases violated laws and government directives. They even ignored court verdicts and keep people hostage by enforcing strikes to protect its interests.

"The operations of BRTC double-deckers, which are running on inter-district routes, would be stopped from

today," reads section 8 (Kha) of the agreement.

On the basis of the pact, the then BRTC chairman in December 2003 issued five directives that included ending double-decker service on inter-district routes.

"The timing and number of trips of BRTC buses would have to be communicated to regional transport committee and local [transport] owners' association," read the deal.

A BRTC official said whenever they wanted to discuss the issue, the operators offered fewer trips and odd timing, making the service economically non-viable.

BRTC Chairman Ehsan-E-Elahi said they wrote to the ministry for cancelling the portions of the directives, which go against the BRTC Ordinance and the BRTC Act.

Section 21 of the ordinance reads, "The corporation can operate vehicles on any roads if it is found necessary."

On the other hand, section 22 of the BRTC Act says, "Whatever the Road Transport Act-2018 contains, the corporation, for the sake of public interest, can operate vehicles for transporting passengers and goods on any routes of the country."

The BRTC chairman said they face opposition mainly when it comes to double-deckers. "We sought intervention from our minister as the deal was signed by the then communication minister," he added.

Contacted, Road Transport and Highway Division Secretary Nazrul Islam, however, questioned the relevance of the agreement after so many years.

On the directives, he said those were not issued by the ministry and can be cancelled by the BRTC.

"We've asked the BRTC chairman to talk to transport leaders and resolve it," he told this newspaper on February 6.

When the BRTC chairman's attention was drawn to this, he said he had already spoken to several top transport leaders.

"More discussion is needed in this regard," he added.

3 killed in city street mishaps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three people were killed and at least 14 others injured in separate road accidents in the city yesterday.

In Uttara, two people died after a High Choice Paribahan bus hit the motorcycle they were riding on and ran them over around 11:45am, said Tapan Kumar Saha, officer-in-charge of Uttara West Police Station.

The victims were identified as Rasel, 24, and Fahad, 22.

Police seized the bus and detained its driver Rabiul, 40, and his helper Abdus Salam, 45, the OC said.

In Gulistan, a man died after a bus hit him in the afternoon.

The victim, Mahbubur Rahman, 56, was helping one of his relatives board a bus when another bus hit him, leaving him critically injured, said Shabbagh Police Station's Sub-Inspector Khairul Islam.

He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

Police seized the bus and detained its driver Abdul Wahab, 28, from the scene of the accident.

In another incident, at least 14 people were injured as a private car rammied into a group of people waiting for buses near Kurmitola General Hospital around 12:00pm.

Kazi Shahan Haque, officer-in-charge of Cantonment Police Station, told The Daily Star that the driver of the private car, which was heading towards Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, lost control of the vehicle.

The injured were immediately taken to Kurmitola General Hospital.

Two people in critical condition were shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) while two others were taken to National Institute of Neurosciences and Hospital, police said.

Police detained the driver Rabiul Islam, 42, and seized the car.

Egypt doctor to face trial over deadly female genital mutilation

AFP, Cairo

Egypt's state prosecutor decided to re-arrest and put on trial a doctor for performing a genital mutilation operation on a 12-year-old girl who died, his office said Saturday.

The procedure known as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has been banned in Egypt since 2008, but the practice remains rife in the conservative Muslim country with many believing it promotes women's chastity.

In January, Nada Hassan Abdel Maqsood died after undergoing an FGM operation, sparking fury online and in the media.

Her father filed a police complaint leading to the arrest of the doctor, but earlier this month he was released on bail by a court after the physician claimed he had only carried out "cosmetic surgery".

But according to the prosecutor's office, the coroner carried out an autopsy on the girl's body and determined she had died of shock and pain linked to FGM.

The prosecutor ordered the doctor, Abdel Fadel Reshwan, to stand trial for FGM that led to the death of the 12-year-old girl.



Pedestrians duck as they walk under a passenger shed that has collapsed near the city's Sat Rasta Intersection yesterday. The roof of the shed, which has been in a state of disrepair for some time, caved on Saturday night.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Rejoinder, our reply

FROM PAGE 1

understand how the question of investing Tk 50 lakh and its legality arises when he never lent any money to Mehedy.

The DC said Mehedy was not picked up rather, he himself came to the police station on request to solve the dispute.

Along with the rejoinder, bank statement of an importer company was also attached.

OUR REPLY

Our report was based on complaints filed by Mehedy Sheikh to the Inspector General of Police and the DMP commissioner.

The Daily Star has obtained documents and phone call records that prove the claims of Mehedy.

Businessman Mehedy claimed that he was picked up from his home.

According to Mehedy, he has taken money from the DC and the DC's brother-in-law used to take the interest accrued on the amount.

There are differences in statements between the DC and Mehedy about the amount of money and its dealings. The dealings were done in a shady way. Besides, it is not legal to take interest by giving someone an amount of money.

About the bank statement, Mehedy said some of the financial dealings were done in cash. A proper investigation into the allegations would bring out the whole truth.

HC asks for her treatment report

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and Justice AKM Zahirul Huq asked the VC to mention in the report whether Khaleda consented to her "advance" treatment.

If she gave the consent, the VC will have to mention in the report whether the medical board concerned has started her treatment.

The VC will have to state in the report the latest health condition of the BNP chief if the medical board has started treatment, the HC bench said in the order.

The bench passed the order as Attorney General Mahbub Alam told it that the BSMMU authorities had earlier submitted a report to the SC's Appellate Division, saying that the medical board concerned was waiting for Khaleda's consent for providing her better treatment.

The medical board is ready to treat her, but she has not given her consent, the attorney general said.

During yesterday's hearing, the BNP chief's lawyer Zainul Abedin told the court that Khaleda's health has been getting worse since December 12 last year. She is seriously ill and cannot move and take medicine on her own, the lawyer said.

Therefore, she needs bail for better treatment in the UK, he added.

He prayed to the court to grant Khaleda bail on health and humanitarian grounds.

The attorney general opposed the petition saying that the HC had earlier rejected a similar petition of Khaleda and the Appellate Division also

upheld the order.

Khaleda filed the petition on February 18.

In the petition, the BNP chief said she has been suffering from several diseases like diabetes and dental problem, and her physical condition had been deteriorating since December 12 last year.

She is now seriously ill. She cannot move freely, take food, and medicine without the help of others. She needs immediate treatment/therapy abroad, like in the UK, says the petition.

Meanwhile, the BNP yesterday expressed optimism that the HC, demonstrating the independence of the judiciary, would deliver the "appropriate" order in the bail petition.

"We believe the judiciary will protect its independence by delivering a verdict as per the case merit as she [Khaleda] has been kept in jail unlawfully," Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, secretary general of the party, said around two hours before the HC bench started hearing the petition.

He made the comments at a human chain in front of the Jatiya Press Club in the capital. Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, labour wing of BNP, organised the programme, demanding release of Khaleda.

The BNP leader said they believe in the High Court and that's why they are going there repeatedly.

"But it is unfortunate that the current fascist regime is regulating the court. So, people are not getting justice, and Khaleda Zia is also denied

justice."

Fakhru said, "The bail is her right, but she has been deprived of that right."

He mentioned that former BNP leader Nazmul Huda, former ministers Mofazzul Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, and Abdul Manan are out on bail even after being convicted in graft cases.

But the BNP chief has not been granted bail in similar cases, he added.

Fakhru also condemned the "police attack" on a procession of BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi on Saturday.

On August 8, 2011, the Anti-Corruption Commission lodged the graft case with Tejgaon Police Station against four people, including Khaleda. They were accused of abusing power in raising funds for the trust from unknown sources.

A special court in Dhaka jailed Khaleda and three others for seven years in the case on October 29, 2018.

Khurshid Alam Khan appeared for the ACC, while a group of pro-BNP lawyers, including Khondker Mahbub Hossain and Moudud Ahmed, represented Khaleda.

The BNP chief landed in jail after being sentenced to five years' imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case by the same court on February 8, 2018.

On October 30, 2018, the HC enhanced her punishment to 10 years in the case after dismissing her appeal.