

TANGAIL DOUBLE MURDER

Victim’s step brother, 5 others given death penalty

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A tribunal in Dhaka yesterday sentenced six people to death for killing a couple -- a retired government primary schoolteacher and his wife -- to grab their land in Tangail Sadar upazila in 2017.

Judge Abu Zafar Md Kamruzzaman of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 of Dhaka handed down the sentence in the presence of the six accused in the courtroom, said Abu Abdullah Bhuiyan, the prosecution lawyer.

The convicts are: Swapon Kumar Das, Zahidul Islam, Md Forhad, Moniruzzaman Bhuiyan, Monzurul Islam and Shayan Mia.

“The victims’ family got justice through this judgement,” said Abdullah, while expressing satisfaction over the verdict.

Defence lawyer Mahfuzur Rahman said, “We did not get justice in the

case. We will appeal to the higher court against this judgement.”

According to the prosecution, Swapon, a step brother of victim Anil Kumar Das, made a plan to occupy Anil’s land in connivance with the other five accused.

On July 26, 2017, the six killed Anil and his wife and hid the two bodies in a septic tank of the victims’ house.

Nirmal Kumar Das, the victims’ son, filed a case with Tangail Police Station over the double murder on July 28 that year.

Later, the case was transferred to the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 of Dhaka from Tangail’s court for quick disposal.

On September 17, 2018, police pressed charges against the six accused in the case.

The court on August 7 last year framed charges against them. Twenty-seven prosecution witnesses out of 35 gave their depositions.

Trial of British-Iranian aid worker Zaghari-Ratcliffe postponed

Says UK lawmaker Tulip Siddiq

REUTERS, LONDON

A trial of British-Iranian aid worker Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe scheduled for yesterday in Iran has been postponed, a British lawmaker said on Sunday, citing a conversation with Zaghari-Ratcliffe’s husband.

Member of parliament Tulip Siddiq said in a tweet she had spoken to Richard Ratcliffe and he had told her

the trial had been postponed. She added that more information would follow later on Sunday.

There was no immediate comment from Iran’s judiciary.

Last week Zaghari-Ratcliffe was summoned by an Iranian Revolutionary Court and informed about a new charge, state television reported.

Flawed system, misgovernance

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“People were killed. In many places these [death traps] are in a latent situation.”

He identified poor quality of raw materials used for illegal gas connections and worn pipes as the main reasons for frequent gas explosions.

He said Titas should snap the illegal connections and think of overhauling the existing network to avert further accidents and casualties.

“We saw that whenever there is any eviction against illegal connections, resistance comes from influential people.”

Imam suggested that the government make alternative fuel for domestic and industrial use popular to ease the burden on gas from pipelines.

“If needed, the government can subsidise LPG prices so that people do

not run after pipeline gas.”

Energy expert and BUET professor M Tamim thinks the main problem of Titas lies in its management.

“Basically, poor administration and poor management merged together. Illegal gas connections, gas line leakage, corruption are all interrelated,” Said Tamim, former adviser to a caretaker government.

Only seven to eight percent of the people get access to natural gas from the pipelines, which is unfair for those who are deprived of it.

“One person is getting gas round the clock for TK 950 a month and the next one is using an LPG cylinder for Tk 1,000. There is a discrepancy and if we don’t address it, the demand for illegal gas connection will be there,” said M Tamim.

Tamim said poor maintenance of old gas pipelines is another reason for accidents.

He siphoned

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2019, according to the case statement.

In those eight years, Samrat’s associate Arman, 56, also visited Singapore 23 times.

In the FIR, the CID mentioned that Samrat earned money through various illegal activities in Motijheel, Fakirapool, Paltan, and Kakrail areas.

On October 6, 2019, Rapid Action Battalion arrested Samrat, who was the president of Dhaka South unit Jubo League, and his close aide Arman, former vice-president of the same unit, from Cumilla after raiding a house near the Indian border.

He came under the spotlight after Rab busted his illegal casino business at different sporting clubs in Dhaka and later was expelled from the Jubo League.

Samrat was then brought to the capital, and the elite force conducted operations at various establishments where the Jubo League leader either lived or carried out political and “business” activities.

Rab also took Samrat to his political office in Kakrail, where he had stayed after the crackdown began on September 18 last year.

A Rab mobile court, led by Executive Magistrate Sarwoer Alam, sentenced Samrat to six months’ imprisonment for possessing wild animal hides and another six months for possessing illegal liquor.

The Anti-Corruption Commission also filed two cases against Samrat and Arman for amassing wealth through illegal means.

Border guards meet delayed

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BSF Rakesh Asthana was supposed to lead his country at the meeting at BCB’s Palkhana headquarters in Dhaka.

The issue of killings along the Indo-Bangla border was likely to dominate the talks between the two border forces.

Until August this year, 33 Bangladeshis were killed along the Bangladesh-India frontiers.

According to rights group Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), 15 people were killed along the Bangladesh-India border in 2018, and the number rose to 43 last year.

BCB’s Director (operations) Lt Col Fayzur Rahman earlier told The Daily Star that all important border related issues would be discussed and border killings was one of them.

Untreated household, industrial, and medical waste flowing into Bangladesh via a canal in Akhaura would also take priority during the discussions, officials said.

Lt Col Fayzur said, “The entry of waste from India through Akhaura-Agartala ICP [check post] will also get

priority in the talks as we have been trying hard to stop the inflow of such waste.”

The BCB official said chemical waste was flowing in via a canal even though India had been claiming that it was only human waste.

Other issues to be discussed at the meeting included cross-border smuggling -- especially of drugs -- and construction of structures like barbed wire fences and other installations.

Officials in India earlier said issues like better mechanisms to stop attacks and assault on BSF personnel and Indian civilians by criminals of both countries were expected to be discussed, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

The Indian side was also expected to take up the issue of joint border security management, fencing of unfenced areas, and effective steps to curb cross-border crimes.

Cattle smuggling, smuggling of fake Indian currency, illegal migration, human trafficking, breaching or damaging the border fence and illegal crossing by Rohingya refugees would also be discussed, Indian officials said.



Three children playing a game of football in front of Mojumdari tila (hill) in Sylhet’s ward-8. Parts of the hill have been shorn off for development purposes. This photo was taken on Saturday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Search on for survivors as wildfires continues to ravage US West

REUTERS, PORTLAND

Crews were to resume searching for the dead yesterday among blackened ruins left by massive wildfires raging in three western U.S. states, where millions of acres have burned in weeks and “mass fatality” incidents are feared in Oregon.

A blitz of wildfires across Oregon, California and Washington has destroyed thousands of homes and a half dozen small towns this summer, scorching a landscape the size of New Jersey and killing more than two dozen people since early August.

After four days of brutally hot, windy weather, the weekend brought calmer winds blowing inland from the Pacific Ocean, and cooler, moister conditions that helped crews make headway against blazes that had burned unchecked earlier in the week.

Still, emergency officials worried that the shifting weather might not bring much relief to southern Oregon, where an apocalyptic scene of charred residential subdivisions and trailer parks stretched for miles along Highway 99 south of Medford

through the neighboring communities of Phoenix and Talent.

“We’re concerned that the incoming front is not going to provide a lot of rain here in the Medford region and it’s going to bring increased winds,” Bureau of Land Management spokesman Kyle Sullivan told Reuters in a telephone interview on Sunday.

Oregon Governor Kate Brown called the perilous blazes a “once-in-a-generation event,” and the director of Oregon’s office of emergency management, Andrew Phelps, said authorities were bracing for the possibility of “mass fatality” incidents.

At least ten people have been killed in Oregon, according to the office of emergency management. Brown has said that dozens of people remained missing across three counties.

“There are going to be a number of fatalities, folks that just couldn’t get warning in time and couldn’t evacuate their homes and get to safety,” Phelps told MSNBC on Friday.

There were 38 active fires burning in Oregon as of Sunday morning, according to the state’s office of emergency management website.

Digital access dismal

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its kind to develop a Digital Literacy Index (DLI), which illustrates the current state of digital literacy in rural Bangladesh, BIGD said.

The study categorised rural households into four different classes, according to digital access -- none, low, basic, and above basic.

Seventy-two percent of households were found to have low access and only four percent had above basic access, the survey found.

These findings come at a time when the government is struggling to carry out regular online classes for students with uneven access to internet and devices as all educational institutions across the country are closed for an indefinite period due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Digital access, however, is only one of two aspects of digital literacy, the other being the skills that enable people to use these tools to effectively communicate, seek information, and solve problems.

The study found that among the respondents, 68 percent can read and write text messages, 10 percent can check and send emails, 15 percent can make video calls, 41 percent can participate in social media, and 28

percent can make comments on social media.

Only 27 percent search the internet for information and 59 percent obtain public service-related information through digital media.

But when it comes to problem-solving and actual utility, the percentage of households who possess the requisite skills is staggeringly low.

Among the respondents, only three percent pay bills via mobile, six percent use computers for productive activity, 20 percent use the internet for functional activities like reading news, online training, etc., three percent have online shopping experience, and less than one percent earn through online activities.

This study provides evidence of significant geographical diversity for the Digital Literacy Index.

According to the findings, rural households in Chattogram, Dhaka, and Khulna divisions possess higher digital access, digital skills, and digital literacy status, while households in Mymensingh, Rangpur, and Sylhet divisions have a significantly lower level of digital access, skills, and literacy.

The study also found that a household’s income had a strong and

significant correlation with its digital access, skills, and literacy.

Imaran Matin, executive director of BIGD, said, “As a research institute, we at BIGD want to create an entire social science of digitisation, which will be highly relevant in the coming years. This survey was a part of that digital social science domain.”

Mehnaz Rabbani, lead, research for policy and governance (RPG), BIGD, said “To create an e-government system, we need a critical mass of digitally literate people. This literacy should not only reflect in people’s access to digital devices but also in their behaviour. And like any other behavioural shift, this will require carefully designed innovative interventions.”

Gregory Chen, policy lead, CGAP said, “Digital literacy is the outcome of numerous determinants affecting one another. Only when all of these different determinants are identified and addressed, will the level of digital literacy improve.”

Asif Saleh, executive director, Brac; Anir Chowdhury, policy advisor, a2i; Dr Sajjad Zohir, executive director, Economic Research Group (ERG), among others, spoke at the webinar.

Metro not by next year

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for the extra time.

“We will be able to tell next month whether we will have to defer the deadline,” MAN Siddique, managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd (DMTCL), which is implementing the project, told The Daily Star on Saturday.

The company has sent a one-year time extension proposal to their consultant just a few days before the expiry date, he said.

Since the outbreak of the virus in March, the fast-track project witnessed only 5.03 percent progress in the last five months.

When the government declared a shutdown in late March, Japanese consultants and engineers involved in the project left Bangladesh and most of them are yet to return.

The authorities have so far been able to engage 50 to 60 percent manpower compared to the normal times and failed to meet the target of completing 65 percent work by June this year.

MAN Siddique said they were hopeful that 50 percent Japanese consultants would return to Bangladesh within this month and they would then assess the deadline.

He said the consultants told them that it would require two years to make up the leeway of six months.

The project -- formally known as Mass Rapid Transit-6 or MRT Line-6 -- is being implemented to build an elevated rail line from the capital’s Uttara Third Phase to Motijheel at the cost of Tk 20,000 crore. Once completed, the metro rail would carry 60,000 passengers per hour.

The original implementation period of the project was 2012-2024. Following the prime minister’s directive, the deadline was first set for December this year and then extended to December 2021.

The authorities had a plan to start operation of metro rail once the first phase is completed within December 2019, but they dropped the plan later.

PROGRESS SO FAR

On May 3, 2017, DMTCL signed a contract for packages 3 and 4 with the Italian-Thai contractor and as per the contract, the company was supposed to complete the work within August this year at the cost of Tk 4,230 crore, shows DMTCL documents.

The project is being implemented under a total of eight packages by different contractors.

Under the contract, Italian-Thai is supposed to build 11.73km viaduct and nine stations between Uttara Third phase and Agargaon.

Till August, they were able to complete installation of 10.86km

viaduct.

However, the contractor could have handed over only 5.90 km viaduct till August for installing rail tracks and overhead catenary system (OCS), which is being done by another contractor, shows the document.

Late in handing over the viaduct for installing the tracks and OCS will delay completion of the entire project, a project official said.

Works of any of the nine stations were not completed. However, construction of sub-structure of the nine stations and rooftop of two stations were done.

MAN Siddique said the company in their time-extension proposal said they could not work for about five months fully due to the Covid-19 situation and the pandemic was yet to come under control, so they need one more year to complete their works.

“Our consultants are now examining their proposal and will give us suggestions. Then, there may be an inter-ministerial meeting where the DMTCL board would fully or partially approve their proposal,” he said.

Replying to another question, the MD said, “So far we came to know, they [Italian-Thai] did not seek extra money for the time extension.”

The Daily Star could not reach the contractor for its comment.

PM to open chancery complex in Ankara today

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to virtually inaugurate the newly-constructed Bangladesh Chancery Complex in Ankara today.

Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen would join his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu at the inaugural ceremony.

Dr Momen left for Turkey yesterday morning, a senior official said.

The foreign minister will hold bilateral talks with his Turkish counterpart tomorrow, he said.

Rohingya crisis, D-8 summit, trade and investment issues are expected to come up for discussion at the meeting.

The foreign minister is scheduled to return home on Wednesday, said the official.

The construction of Bangladesh Chancery Complex in Ankara at a cost of Tk 45.76 crore was completed on September 3.

Main features of the Complex include Chancery Building, Embassy Residence, 229 seat hi-tech auditorium named “Victory 1971”, automated mechanical and electrical systems, mosque, gymnasium, display centre for Bangladeshi items, library for the reference books on Bangladesh primarily on Bangabandhu, War of Independence and socio-economic development of Bangladesh.

As reflection of Bangladesh’s history of independence, a bust of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Shaheed Minar were also installed at the Complex.

Moreover, 36 sqm mural works titled “Invincible Bangladesh” as well as terracotta works on the rural life of Bangladesh was also placed at the Complex.

Six leaks filled

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According to the investigation, the explosion took place when the methane gas came in contact with electric sparks. It was not air condition blast.

The probe body found evidence of gas bubbling inside the mosque and also at the mosque gate.

Lt Col Zillur said Titas Gas workers dug the adjacent area of the mosque and found six leakages and the gas accumulated in the mosque.

“We did not get any other reason except the gas leakage,” he said when asked whether they found any negligence of Titas Gas.

Titas Gas suspended eight of its officials and staffers in connection with the blast.

The fire service and civil defence official said they rushed to the spot within 20 minutes after the blast and found the presence of methane gas there.

Asked whether they had any evidence that the mosque committee talked to the Titas Gas authorities about the leakage, he said, “We did not get any evidential documents in favour of the mosque committee’s claim.”

The blast took place in Pashchim Talla Baitus Salat Mosque after Esha prayers on September 4. At least 39 people suffered burn injuries and of them, 31 have died so far.

The Criminal Investigation Department is also probing the incident. It also primarily suspected that the explosion happened due to leaky gas pipes.

Daily deaths

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detection of the cases decreased by 14.76 percent compared to the previous epidemiological week.

Bangladesh has now the 15th highest number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in the world, according to the worldometers.info.

This position is one step behind the United Kingdom and one step ahead of Saudi Arabia.

As 2,372 patients were added to the recovery list, the total number rose to 2,40,643. This is more than 71 percent of detected cases.

Compared to the previous week, recovery of the patients rose by 7.53 percent, according to the DGHS.

Six of yesterday’s deceased were females.

One of the 31 deceased was aged between 31 and 40, two were aged between 41 and 50, seven between 51 and 60, and the highest 21 were above 60 years.

So far, more than 50 percent casualties were from the age groups.

One each of the deceased was from Mymensingh and Khulna divisions, two each were from Rangpur, Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions, five from Chattogram division, and the rest 18 were from Dhaka division, according to the press release.

Dhaka division saw more than 48 percent of the deceased so far.

According to the press release, 3,241 patients were in general beds in the Covid-19 hospitals across the country and 295 were in ICUs as of yesterday morning.