

Double murder at Mohammadpur Parents seek PM's intervention for arrest of killers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Parents of Syed Ashraf Hossain Jewel and Syed Mohammad Rivel who were murdered in the city's Mohammadpur area have appealed to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for her intervention to bring the killers to justice.

The principal accused in the double murder case, Kamal Pasha, is moving in Mohammadpur area under the protection of mastans and police, they claimed at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday. "He (Pasha) was seen seven or eight days ago along with his associates," Amjad Hossain, father of the two murdered young mensaid.

Amjad is a senior journalist and former editor of a monthly magazine, Detective.

They said police could not arrest the killer in more than 19 months. Jewel, 27 and Rivel, 24, were killed in the morning of May 5 last year.

Amjad alleged that the killers are threatening them and they are passing days in deep insecurity.

The press conference has been organised in view of threats, he said. "We are now passing days in a state of deep insecurity".

Amjad said Khaleda Zia, the then leader of the Opposition in Parliament, had visited their house and urged the then government to punish the killers after proper

investigation. But nothing has happened.

He demanded reinvestigation into the case, alleging that the charge sheet was prepared as per directive of the then Awami League MP Mocketul Hossain. "There was no investigation into the case. It (charge sheet) was prepared as per instruction of Mocketul," he said.

According to earlier newspaper reports, Kamal Pasha, an accused in many cases, went to the residence of Amjad Hossain in a car in the morning of May 5 and started calling Jewel by name.

Rivel, younger brother of Jewel, came out of their second floor residence. Pasha asked him to get into the car and then took him to nearby Kisholoy School only 300 yards off the residence of Mocketul.

When Rivel got out of the car at about 7:40am to buy cigarette, Pasha shot him dead.

Pasha came back to Amjad's house and called Jewel saying he had an urgent work with him. He took Jewel to nearby Lalmatia power supply office, shot him dead at about 8am and fled away leaving the car.

Jewel and Rivel were the second and the fourth of Amjad's five sons. Jewel was a field worker of Proshika and Rivel was an HSC student.

Their mother Hanufa Hossain and brothers Syed Jaynul Abedin and Syed Afjal Hossain were also present at the press conference.

BCL leader held with firearms, remanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gazi Mezbaul Hossain Sachchu, vice-president of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), was arrested in possession of firearms from his Ibrahimpur residence Sunday night.

A team of Special Branch (SB) of Police backed up by some officers of Kafur Police Station arrested him at about 10:00pm under section 54 of CrPC and seized a .32-bore pistol with eight bullets and a six-shooter gun with 89 rounds of ammunition.

The BCL leader was placed on a two-day remand for interrogation yesterday. No specific complaint was filed against him, though.

Kafur police produced him before the CMM's Court at 4:00pm yesterday with a prayer for a seven-day remand. Advocate Sahara Khatun, M Sajwar Hossain and General Secretary of Dhaka Bar Council M o m t a z u d d i n Mehedi submitted a petition for his bail.

They stated that Sachchu was arrested as part of a political conspiracy to harass him.

"He was arrested in possession of a licensed pistol and a six-shooter gun. He was godfather of Kala Jahangir, which is false, fabricated and politically motivated. So, we pray for his bail," the defence lawyers said.

Court Inspector Alfa Zaman Nahid opposed the bail petition and proposed the remand.

After hearing both sides, Magistrate Abu Taleb placed Sachchu on a two-day remand.

CU reopens today Prospect for resumption of classes bleak

CU CORRESPONDENT

After a prolonged vacation, the Chittagong University (CU) reopens today amidst tense situation prevailing on campus following the murder of a BCL leader on Saturday allegedly by Shibir gunmen.

After a month-long Ramadan, Martyred Intellectuals Day, Victory Day, Eid-ul-Fitr and Christmas vacations, the prospect of resumption of classes still remains bleak as the CU unit of BCL announced continuation of its ongoing siege programme following the murder of their leader.

Ali Mortuza Chowdhury, senior vice-president of BCL's CU unit, was shot dead Saturday evening allegedly by Shibir gunmen while he was getting a shave at a barber's shop in Fateyabad adjoining the CU campus.

"We are determined to continue the siege programme on the campus for months together if necessary until the killers of Mortuza are tried," Nasir Haider Babul, general

secretary of BCL's CU unit told this correspondent yesterday.

Acting general secretary of the CU unit of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) Ferdous Morshad Khan also blamed fundamentalist Shibir cadres for Mortuza's murder and demanded their arrest and exemplary punishment.

CU unit of BCL, and Jubo League and Awami League of Hathazari thana will jointly enforce a half-day strike today in North Chittagong including the university campus here in the district protesting the killing of Mortuza.

Meanwhile, CU authorities have asked all students to attend classes and secure their seats in their designated dormitories. The authorities have already taken all necessary measures in this regard, tightening security in and around the university to avert any untoward incident on the campus, university sources said.

A 14-member committee headed by Prof. Abu Saleh of the Department of Chemistry was formed yesterday to monitor the

prevailing situation and maintain security of the university.

A discussion meeting of the committee about the present situation was held in the afternoon yesterday with CUVF Prof. Fazle Hossain in the chair.

The other members of the committee are Dr. Mohammad Abdul Hai, Dr. Monindra Kumar Roy, Dr. Mohammad Anisul Islam, Dr. Abdul Kalam Azad, Prof. ANM Wahidur Rahman, Dr. AKM Shajahan Kabir, Dr. Mohammad Motiur Rahman, Dr. Mohammad Alauddin, Dr. Nurul Anwar, Proctor Prof. Mohammd Abdul Hakim, Dr. Mohammad Lufur Rahman, Dr. Towhid Hossain Chowdhury and Dr. Siddiq Ahmed Chowdhury.

A deadlock has prevailed in the university since November 4 when BCL enforced an indefinite strike on campus protesting attack on a procession allegedly by Islami Chhatra Shibir that left 10 BCL men including its president and general secretary injured on November 3.

New appointments

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Educationist Zobaidda Gulshan Ara has been made chairman of Bangladesh Shishu Academy for two years on contractual appointment while Dr Begum Jahannara has been made director of the Shishu Academy on a one-year contractual appointment.

The government also cancelled contractual appointments of three press ministers in Washington, London and New Delhi missions with immediate effect.

The Awami League government appointed three press ministers for three years before the end of its tenure. They are Abdul Kalam Azad in Washington, Abu Musa Mohammad Hasan in London and Faruq Zia in New Delhi.

The government has also called back Commercial Consul General in Dubai mission Shahjahan Siddique and made him Officer-on

Special Duty (OSD).

DG of Family Planning Directorate Mir Shahabuddin has been transferred to the Non-Formal Education Directorate as project director. He was replaced by DG of Bangladesh Industrial Technical Assistance Centre (BITAC) Fazlur Rahman.

Joint secretary for the Chittagong hill tracts affairs ministry AZM Shafulul Islam has been transferred as chief executive officer to the Dhaka City Corporation.

Meanwhile, the extension of service of Secretary of water resources ministry Faisal Ahmed Chowdhury is under process. He is expected to get a one-year contractual appointment within the next couple of days. The Ministry of Establishment has sent a proposal to the prime minister in this respect, official sources said.

House attacked

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toll money. Monowara Begum, sister-in-law of Selim told this correspondent.

At one stage, the gang opened fire and started to ransack the house, injuring Ipsar, 10, Selim's mother Amina Khatun, 72, sister-in-law Monowara, 50, and Selim's brother Shahin among others.

Selim was not in the house at that time.

Family members alleged that the attackers took away ornaments from the women in the house.

Tower Selim, one of the top terrorists loyal to former AL MP Shamim Osman, was arrested with firearms by the army before the October 1 election.

ASP of Narayanganj Sirajul Haq, described the incident as a political revenge but refused to disclose the names of the attackers for the sake of investigation. The OC of Fatullah thana also believed the incident to be an act of political revenge.

Meanwhile, the elder brother of Selim lodged a case with Fatullah thana accusing nine people.

Economy poses biggest challenge

FROM PAGE 1

With July-October figure up by 27.93 per cent. There is every sign that inflationary pressure is building up and foreign exchange reserve barely managing to hover over \$1 billion-mark at \$1.26 billion on Thursday.

With such a trail behind, the country's top economists observe that the new year will be the most crucial one for the country. It remains to be seen how much of the macro-economic stability achieved in the 1990s, especially in the first half when both growth and stability primed, the country can retain.

Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud said the year 2001 was important for significant economic turnaround. The exports and industrial growth shrunk drastically from 23 per cent and 11 per cent respectively in the first half of the last fiscal to 2.3 per cent and 1.2 per cent at the end of the year. After July, exports further dipped to a negative growth of 10 per cent-- for the first time in two decades.

It is still difficult to say for sure how much dent the ongoing global recession would leave on the country's economy as the global scenario is rapidly unfolding, making forecasts at this stage like shooting a moving target, he said.

The sudden collapse of the external trade may have its fallout on the general people and create social problems due to job loss in the readymade garment sector, especially of the women.

"The prime objective of macro-economic management should be to backstop the sliding balance of payment (BOP) situation and restore fiscal balance, which should guide all other measures," said Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

"The government has to make a choice between growth and stability and my view is that the main target should be to maintain stability with a moderate growth," he said.

The government should think of a strategy to shrug off recession without having to pay a big price so that excess monetary expansion does not hurt stability.

Amid all the downsides, the upside is the low inflation rate and robust growth in remittance, and strategies should be built up with these strengths, noted Dr. Bhattacharya.

On the export front, Bangladesh has now become a typical case of mono-product vulnerability.

All price-related adjustments such as reduction of revenue expenditure, pruning of Annual Development Expenditure, reduction of interest rates on savings instruments and increase in utility prices would yield little results in the medium-term if these are not supported by other measures in the financial sector and institutional interventions like corporatisation of the nationalised commercial banks, creation of debt management institutions, reduction of loss of the state-owned enterprises, putting in place infrastructure to support trade and completion of public administration reforms, he said.

The next budget will be critical, as this has to show a roadmap to overcome the odds so that the economic trends are predictable. Currently, the economy is in suspended animation and its uncertainty about future has to be

removed.

The other vital issue that has to be dealt with carefully is aid utilisation because high local content projects have to be cut in favour of project aid to save foreign reserves from being drained out, concluded Dr. Bhattacharya.

Dr Mustafizur Rahman, research director of CPD, said the country steps into a new year under the most challenging situation in last one decade because of a fragile external sector.

During the first half of FY2002, the country witnessed erosion in almost all of its external indicators including terms of trade, export volume and price and forex reserves.

The rapid globalisation in the first half of the 1990s that led to cut in tariff rates, emergence of new competitors and new trade initiatives like the USFTA and regional trade deals like the Indo-Nepal, Indo-Sri Lanka and Israel-Jordan-US agreements, created bottlenecks in market access for the country.

"But we worked out little response mechanism to offset the impact," he said. "We didn't develop backward linkage industry, nor did we diversify our products. There was no effort to turn our comparative advantage of cheap labour into technology-blended competitive advantage. Even we lagged behind other countries in developing the forward linkage industry to process products for higher value addition."

As a result, the product and market concentration led to the logical consequence of slippage in exports.

Dr. Mustafiz feels that the country should now look forward to the new year to take advantage of the Everything-But-Arms (EBA) facility offered by the European Union (EU) to process its agro-products and boost exports.

"Here, poultry holds big promises. Because, we have a well-developed poultry sub-sector, all we need is to standardise the product to export it to the EU."

Dr Azizul Islam, former director, Development, Research and Policy Analysis Division, ESCAP, said the primary challenge for the country in the new year is to increase export earnings through intense lobbying with the US at the highest level.

"On the other hand, the market has to be diversified and instead of looking toward the US or the EU, we should explore the Middle East, Russia and the CIS countries," he said.

Russian economy is set to grow by over five per cent this year and many of the CIS countries are well poised to develop, too. They promise a big market for Bangladesh.

For the next six to nine months, the country is going to have a testing time and it has to brace itself for the worse.

In the realm of public finance, the increasing government borrowing would create further strain on the economy unless immediate measures were taken to raise revenue collection. Revenue expenditure also needs to be trimmed to relieve the pressure on the economy.

Dr Mahmud said for the last 15 years, RMG sector fuelled both export and industrial growth and with the changed situation, the future looks uncertain.

backstop the forex depletion because of pursued liberalised import policy and heavy dependence of the local industry on imported raw materials and intermediate goods. The slowdown in investments and industrial activities had a dampening effect on import trade as well. In view of the fragile forex reserves position, this has in fact proved to be a blessing in disguise, Dr Mahmud observed.

The year 2001 was also politically volatile with three governments coming to office which was not conducive to initiation of major strategic moves to cope with the adverse effect of global slowdown.

A medium-term plan to face the adverse international trade conditions was missing, deepening today's woes.

"We have to coordinate economic policies in a way so as to minimise any adverse effect of the export debacle on economic growth, employment and living standard," Dr Mahmud said.

The country has to take into account the new geo-political realities if it were to derive benefit out of the new economic order. Economic reforms alone are not enough. How far Bangladesh can prove itself as a modern, democratic, well-governed, literate and non-communal state will determine its gainful engagement in international economy.

Regarding recourse to IMF and the World Bank for loans to meet BOP crisis, he said this may solve the immediate crisis but would not work in medium- or long-term since the forex crisis is not going to subside in a year or two. Such donor loans would also warrant major reforms in the economy and policymakers have to sit together and ponder if they have the political will to go ahead with the measures.

Whatever the policymakers decide whether to go for a bailout measure or to try to overcome the problem with a homegrown agenda Fatema and more of her likes are now set to face the brunt of the economic storm that would surely dot the new year.

Euro launched

FROM PAGE 1

Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar said at the ceremony, which was attended by King Juan Carlos of Spain and Belgium's King Albert II.

"In less than two days, more than 300 million people will use the same currency in a zone stretching beyond Lisbon, Helsinki, Dublin and Athens," Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt said, speaking amid the sparkling chandeliers and red velvet curtains of Brussels' royal palace.

January 1 marks the culmination of a dream long held by European visionaries and one of the most significant steps in the building of the 15-nation EU.

The people of 12 EU nations will share the same currency, making it easy to compare prices throughout the bloc, eliminating the need for costly currency exchanges for travelers and creating a powerful unifying political symbol.

Three EU nations -- Britain, Sweden and Denmark -- have opted out of the initial launch but the currency will be accepted in some British shops and will play an influential role in world trade.

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Jute bags to regain old glory

FROM PAGE 12

jute bags of five different sizes and selling those at prices ranging from Tk3 to Tk7.

Different socio-cultural and non-governmental organisations have stuck posters on the city walls, disseminating awareness about the use of jute bags. Some cottage industries producing handicrafts came to the markets to sell various containers made of bamboo and cane.

The pro-environment decision to ban the 20-micron wafer-thin variety has been taken by the government to fight all sorts of pollution such as air pollution, solid waste pollution, soil pollution, water pollution and industrial waste pollution.

As a non-biodegradable product, polythene has already wreaked havoc on the public sanitation, not to speak of the irreparable damage its further use would bring to the life system.

Despite tremendous pressure from all sides, the cabinet at a meeting on December 23 approved of the environment ministry's proposal to ban the use and marketing of polybags in the city from January 1, 2002.

The decision has been applauded by all quarters because polythene shopping bags have proved damaging to the environment, harmful to public health and ruinous to the drainage and sewerage system in the capital in the last two decades.

Although civil society, media, environmental journalists and non-governmental organisations have long been trying to draw attention of the authorities to the dreadful impact of the shopping polythene bag, less attention was given to its

ever-increasing use, production and marketing.

In 1994, the BNP government had taken a step and finalised the decision to ban polybags, but the move did not live up to its implementation because of the pressure from both in and outside the government. The previous Awami League government also took a move to ban polybags, but to no avail.

The use and marketing of polybags will also be banned across the country in the next two months and necessary laws are likely to be enacted in the coming session of the Jatiya Sangsad, official sources said.

It was only in mid-1982 when polythene bags came to Bangladesh, replacing other shopping bags overnight from the market. The production of polybags started in 1983 and their use and production have multiplied since. Polybags are used extensively because of their low cost and their practical utility.

According to a study by the environment ministry, around 800 polythene factories have been set up across the country with most in the capital. In 1983, there were only two polythene bag factories in the country, but the number climbed to 800, with a production capacity of about 129 million polybags a day.

Another survey of an NGO said that there were 315 to 320 factories producing thin shopping bags -- each employing eight to 12 workers on average, with the workforce between 2,520 and 3,840.

However, manufacturers claimed that the number of plastic-producing factories is about 1,500 employing around 1,30,000 workers. But the survey reports by the govern-

ment and NGOs termed the claim completely false.

The ministerial survey shows that about ten million polybags are used and nine million polybags dumped everyday in the capital. On average, a family in Dhaka discards four polybags a day. Only ten per cent of them are kept at designated spots. Inadequate facilities are also responsible for the menace.

Typically, the bags are discarded on the streets or onto drains. Since polythene does not decompose as paper, polybags clog drains and sewers, resulting in water logging.

Moreover, the recycling of polybags creates harmful hydrogen cyanide gas, which contributes to respiratory problems.

Sources said the production of polythene bags is highly profitable and the investment for setting up of factories is all too low. Preliminary investment in a polybag factory is only about Tk2 lakh. The production cost of each thin polybag is Tk 0.05 to Tk 0.07, while the manufacturer sells each bag to the wholesaler at Tk 0.30 to Tk 0.35.

Tapan Chy

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chamber body. He is the Managing Director of Square Pharmaceutical Ltd, Square Textile Ltd and other companies of Square Group.

Other members of the executive committee of MCCI are Jean Alfonso, Muhammad A (Rumme) Ali, Syed Anwarul Alam, Maj Gen (ret'd) Amjad Khan Chowdhury, Syed Fazlul Haque, Md Nurul Islam, AKM Rafiqul Islam, Masih Ul Karim, A K Shamsuddin Khan, Feroz Rahim and Shahab Sattar.

Let New Year bring peace

FROM PAGE 1

flowers for near and dear ones. Jubilant people were seen hoping for one party or social gathering to another last night.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) deployed as many as 5,000 policemen in the city to avert untoward incidents by revellers, a common phenomenon during New Year celebrations.

The Department of Narcotics Control deployed seven teams at different parts of the city to contain use of narcotics and liquor during the celebrations.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in a message on the eve of New Year called for taking a fresh pledge to build a terrorism-free and peaceful society in the country.

"Let us march forward with new pledges, forgetting all woes and anger, envy and malice."

Leader of the Opposition in parliament and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina expressed her New Year's greetings to the people, wishing them happiness and peace.

"At the beginning of the New Year, I wish you all happiness, peace and prosperity," she said in a message sent from the United States.

The year that past was marked with some tragic events including

PM exchanges views with Editors

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday had an informal exchange of views with editors of different news media at Proddhan Mantri Bhavan.

Various issues, including law and order, local government format and environment problems came up during her discussion with the editors.

Writ challenging ban on polybags

BSS, Dhaka

A writ petition was filed with the High Court Division challenging the government decision to slap ban on thin polythene shopping bags in the capital, which takes effect from today.

Bangladesh Plastic Goods Manufacturers' Association (BPGMA) has filed the petition. A regular bench of the High Court Division will hear the petition after its opening tomorrow, court sources said.

Delhi hints at talks

FROM PAGE 1

the message as far as resolution is concerned through diplomatic means... We will certainly respond to that. We will engage with India through diplomatic means as we have been asking for in the past," he told a news conference.

However, Khan warned that if war "is thrust on Pakistan" the armed forces and the people would defend themselves.

He confirmed the arrest in Pakistan of Hafiz Mohammed Saad, head of the Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Lashkar is one of the two Kashmiri militant groups blamed by India for the December 13 attack on its parliament that sparked the current crisis.

In comments indicating a possible breakthrough in their military standoff, Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh said the arrest was "a step forward in the right direction."

Khan said he had not seen a report of Singh's remarks "but I can only welcome that comment."

He also played down clashes along the Line of Control, the de facto border between the two states in the disputed region of Kashmir.

India also gave Pakistan a list of 20 other suspected terrorists it wants arrested and handed over to India, according to AP.

Cross-border shelling between the two South Asian nuclear rivals resumed, meanwhile, leaving two Indian soldiers dead. Nine militants and one soldier were also killed in separate incidents near Srinagar, the summer capital of the disputed Kashmir region.

Hafiz Saad, until last week the leader of Lashkar-e-Taiba, was arrested Sunday in Islamabad, Interior Ministry officials in New Delhi said yesterday. He was charged with making inflammatory speeches and inciting violence, the Associated Press of Pakistan reported.

"The government has received information about action taken by Pakistan against the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, including the arrest of some of its leaders and raids on some of their premises," Jaswant Singh said after a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security. "If the information is confirmed, it's a step forward in the right direction."

He added, however, that Pakistan had far to go until New Delhi would be satisfied that Islamabad was committed to curbing the Islamic militants who launch terrorist attacks in India's disputed Himalayan state of Jammu-Kashmir and elsewhere.

"We want Pakistan to target terrorists who have been targeting India, Jammu and Kashmir," said Singh. "We want Pakistan to pursue it vigorously until cross-border terrorism is eliminated."

Later yesterday, India handed over to officials at the Pakistan High Commission a list of 20 suspected terrorists in Pakistan.

"A list of 20 criminals and terrorists who are fugitives of law and are in Pakistan was handed over to the Pakistani