

Gallows for Bappi's killers

Cousin, 4 others found guilty

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A court in the capital yesterday convicted five persons to death for murdering schoolboy Rubayet Ahmed Bappi.

The convicts are Shahidul Alam Shipon, Ripon Kumar Roy, Sanjit Sarkar, Shankar Rajbanshi and Shariful Islam alias Badal.

Badal was tried in absentia as he has been absconding since the killing. All the accused except Badal had earlier confessed to their guilt before the court.

Sarker Abul Mansur Ahmed, judge of the Third Special Court for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka delivered a 23-page verdict yesterday in a packed courtroom after two months and five days of trial.

Eight-year-old Bappi, a student of class III of the Armanitola Government High School, was abducted by his maternal cousin Shipon from their Becharam Dewri residence in the old part of the city

on August 5. Shipon and the other abductors then demanded Tk 20 lakh in ransom for his release.

Later on the same day, the abductors took Bappi to Demra, strangled him and dumped the body into the river Shitalakhya.

Police recovered Bappi's decomposed body floating on the river near Kutubpur Gudara Ghat on



Rubayet Ahmed Bappi

August 14.

The court found Shipon, Sanjit, Shankar and Badal guilty under sections 7, 8 and 30 of the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000 for abducting and demanding ransom and for abetting in the act.

It also found the convicts guilty under sections 302, 34 and 201 of the Bangladesh penal code (BPC) for killing the victim, criminal liability and destruction of the evidences.

Bappi's father Alfu Miah, who is the complainant of the case, was present in the courtroom. Relatives, friends and many others crowded the court and its premises to hear the verdict.

The convicts broke down in tears after the judge had handed down the verdict. Later, they were taken to the Dhaka Central Jail amid tight security. The convicts have a week to appeal before the higher court against the judgement.

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PHOTO: STAR

Bappi's mother breaks down upon hearing the judgement.

Bappi's parents satisfied with the verdict

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Parents of slain schoolboy Rubayet Ahmed Bappi yesterday expressed satisfaction after a court in the city sentenced five youngsters to death for killing their son.

"I will never get my son back but I am satisfied with the judgement," Alfu Miah, father of Bappi, said upon hearing the verdict.

His bed-ridden wife, Rokshana Begum, echoed a similar sentiment.

"I am satisfied with the judgement," Rokshana told The Daily Star at her Becharam Dewri residence in the old city.

She said she hoped the judgement would deter such gruesome killings in the future.

Sisters and other family members of Bappi also expressed their satisfaction with the judgment in the Bappi murder case.

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PHOTO: STAR

Police escort four of the five young men sentenced to death in the Bappi murder case to jail after the judgement yesterday.

EC backs out, UP polls deferred by 3 weeks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ending a weeklong standoff, the Election Commission backed out of its stance on the union parishad election schedule yesterday and shifted the polls by three weeks.

Voting to 4,267 union parishes across the country will now be held between January 25 and March 16, instead of January 4 and February 27.

As per the revised schedule, the last date for filing of nomination papers is January 1. Returning officers will scrutinise those on January 2 while the last date for candidature withdrawal is January 9.

The decision followed an EC meeting yesterday, with Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed in

the chair. Election Commissioners Safur Rahman, MM Munsef Ali and AK Mohammad Ali and Secretary to the EC Secretariat SM Zakaria attended the meeting.

The meeting decided "to reschedule the UP elections on the basis of the government request", according to an EC press release issued yesterday.

The deferment "is in the interest of free, fair and neutral UP polls", it added.

Emerging from the meeting, the CEC told journalists that the EC decision was taken "in view of the reality".

Local Government, Rural Development (LGRD) and Cooperatives Minister Abdul

Mannan Bhuiyan welcomed the EC decision. "Both the government and the EC want to hold the election at an appropriate time to ensure free atmosphere."

Bhuiyan ruled out any rough edge in the relations between the government and the EC over last week's developments. "We did not have any dispute with the EC and there is no question about it."

Meanwhile, Awami League General Secretary Zillur Rahman termed the EC decision to back out of its own schedule "unfortunate".

"The government has forced the EC to defer the polls to meet its partisan end," he told The Daily Star last night. "The EC should not have made the shift. The decision has

defended the EC's credibility."

Last Saturday, two days before the EC was to announce the schedule, the government requested a two-month deferment.

Later on Tuesday, as the EC stood its ground, Bhuiyan and Political Secretary to the Prime Minister Haris Chowdhury asked the CEC to defer the polls by a month.

However, the commission did not budge and announced the next day that the UP elections would be held as per its own schedule.

Since the government request came only a day ahead of the announcement, it was impossible to revise the schedule, the EC maintained.

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Ruffled banks rankle BB governor

Sonali, Rupali banks fail on balance sheet targets

INAM AHMED

Both Sonali Bank and Rupali Bank have failed to achieve their targets set for the first nine months of the current fiscal.

In separate performance meetings with the banks yesterday,

Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed was visibly frustrated and said if the management failed to run the banks, they should close these down.

Both banks failed to make their expected operating profits and, at the same time, while deposits

dropped, classified loans increased alarmingly, the meeting found out.

Rupali had a target of Tk 75 crore in operating profit for the past nine months. However, let alone making any profit, its balance sheet shows Tk 26 crore in operating loss.

Its defaulted loans are increasing, the meeting found out and the governor termed the situation 'alarming', according to sources.

The governor wondered how the bank could give loans with such high defaulted loans and wanted to know the cost of fund. But Rupali's executives did not know the figure.

"You are running the bank and you can't say what is your cost of fund?" the governor was quoted to have asked.

To queries about a number of things that the bank was supposed to have done, the bank officials' answer was 'the jobs are being done'.

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The Telegraph reports BSF to 'create eastern theatre to counter Bangla threat'

SHILLONG/AGARTALA

A day after Bangladesh again denied the existence of militant bases on its soil, the Border Security Force (BSF) revealed plans to create an "eastern theatre" with 31 additional companies exclusively for deployment along the Indo-Bangladesh border.

Additional director-general (East) AK Mitra said in Shillong that the decision to deploy extra battalions had been taken because the BSF's presence along the Indo-Bangladesh border was inadequate at present. "We are completely stretched out in this sector," he said.

Under the new action plan, two more inspectors-general will be posted, in Malda and Silchar. As many as 78 new battalions will be raised to cope with the pressure of guarding the eastern frontier.

Mitra said the creation of an "eastern theatre" had been necessitated by the surge in militant activity

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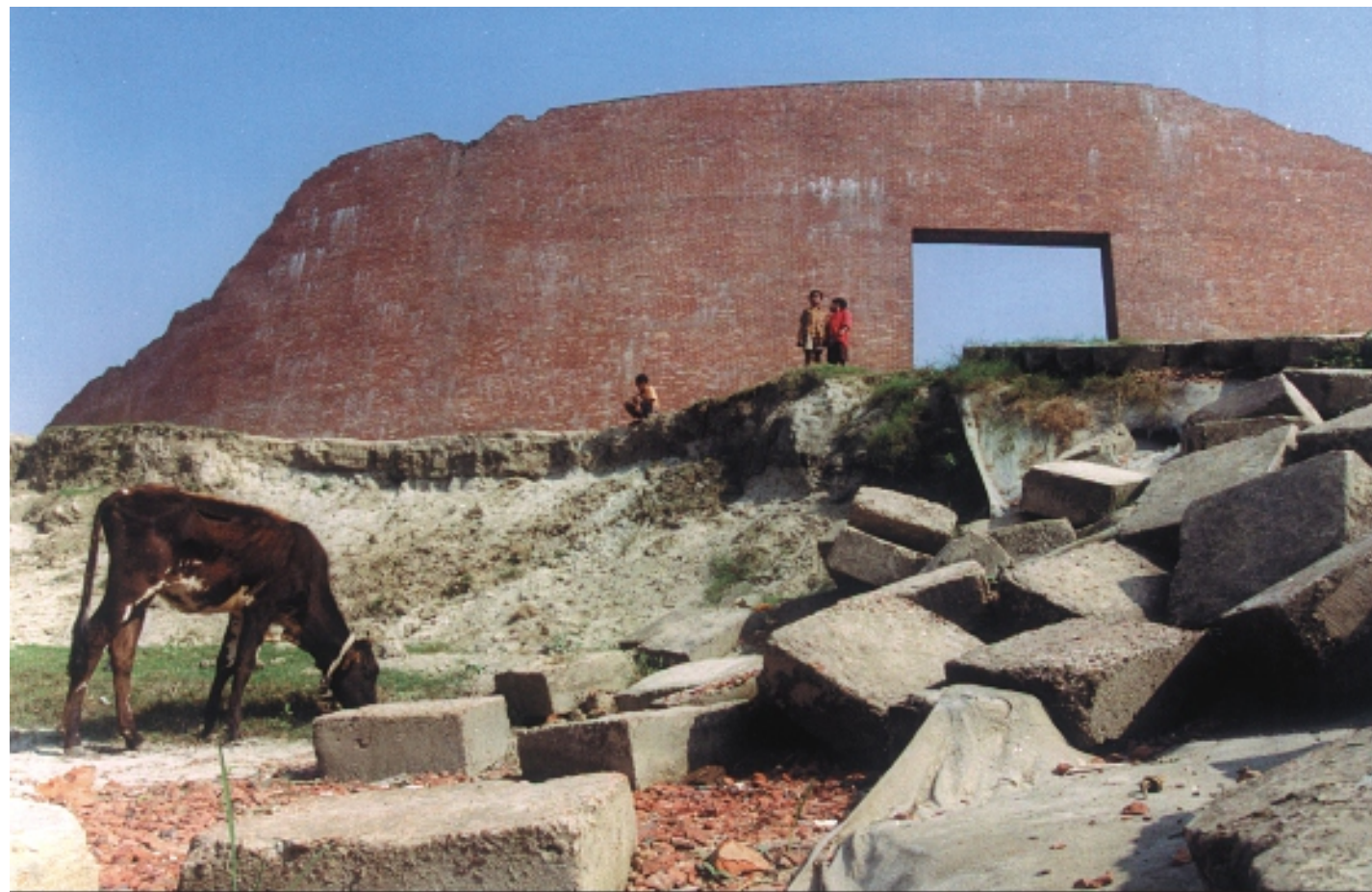


PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Land erosion and subsidence threatens the Martyred Intellectuals' Memorial in the city's Rayerbazar area while the authorities sit idle.

Forlorn and in shambles

NICOLE MEIER and JULHAS RIPON

Land erosion and subsidence threaten the martyred intellectuals' monument at Rayerbazar; however, little is being done to save it.

All around the monument, built on 6.51 acres of earth-filled land on the banks of the Haikkar Khal, the land is subsiding and being washed away by water. Due to incomplete slab work on the slopes of the monument, its existence is now seriously threatened.

Continuous erosion has already engulfed several parts of the area. If it is not repaired urgently, the huge structure of the monument may cave in.

In addition to this, a liquid is

constantly coming out from the walls of the granite stand, and it has badly stained the precious black stone.

The monument, dedicated to the intellectual martyrs, was inaugurated in 1999. The intellectuals were picked up by the Pakistani occupation army and their local collaborators - razakars.

They were brutally murdered at Rayerbazar in December 1971. But the alleged killers have not yet been punished.

The southern part of the edge of the monument is already damaged, and it is not more than 25 metres away from the main structure. And if immediate steps are not taken to protect the monument, floodwater, experts believe, will damage the whole structure.

During the construction of the monument, the slope on the base, designed to protect the area from erosion, could not be completed due to fund constraints, said an official of the Public Works Department (PWD).

Initially, only 3.51 acres of land was acquired for the project. But later it was felt that the monument needed a strong base that would protect it from erosion, and the land area was expanded to 6.51 acres. Tk 1.65 crore was spent for acquiring the additional three acres of land.

"For this expansion we had to arrange money from the original funds, and the slope protection work in some parts of the base-ment of the monument could not be

completed," said M Serajul Islam, sub-assistant engineer of Dhanmondi PWD sub-office.

He further said that to complete the work his office submitted a Tk 4.50 crore supplementary project proposal to the government during the past Awami League regime. The plan also included construction of an exhibition centre and an auditorium.

"But it seems highly unlikely that the supplementary proposal will be approved by the present government," a PWD source at its head office told The Daily Star, preferring anonymity.

He also pointed out that at least Taka 1 crore was needed immediately to protect the monument.

Khaleda performs Umrah

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia performed Umrah on Friday.

On arrival at Jeddah from Madina earlier on the day, she went to Makkah and took her Iftar at the Masjidul Haram.

The prime minister and her entourage performed 'tawaf' around the holy Kaaba and made Sa'ye, the ritual of running between the hills of Safa and Marwa.

They performed other rituals, including prayers, and offered special munajat seeking divine

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BSF guns down 2 Bangladeshis

UNB, Dinajpur

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) shot dead a man and his son at Bagnapara frontier of Fulbari upazila yesterday.

Villagers and police said Mohammad Ali, 50, and his son Hossain Ali, 16, of Mou village of Birampur upazila along with others went to the border at 8:00am when BSF opened fire killing them on the spot.

They said a group of eight people

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Prove me wrong or face legal action, Hasina dares govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sheikh Hasina yesterday dared the government to prove what she had said went against the country or face legal action.

"Whatever I have said during my visits to Bangkok and New Delhi is on record. The government must prove what I had said is against the country," she said while talking to reporters at Zia International Airport upon her return from a nine-day visit

to the Thai and Indian capitals.

If the government fails, the leader of the opposition in parliament warned, she would take it to court for "false propaganda against me".

Hasina also vowed not to spare anybody making "false" statements to smear her image.

On Tuesday, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan accused the Awami League president of sponsoring anti-Bangladesh campaign abroad

and prompting New Delhi to describe Dhaka as a nerve-centre for anti-Indian activities.

The following day, the BNP-led ruling alliance held a public rally in the capital protesting what it termed "an anti-Bangladesh" campaign by Hasina.

Drawn his attention to opposition leader's reaction to his remarks, the foreign minister yesterday told Channel-I that "time will say who will file case against whom".

"That Bangladesh is a free state now has been proved by her (Hasina's) unhindered return home even after speaking against the country while abroad," he said. "She could not have done so had it been any other third world country."

To a question, Khan told the TV channel that "whatever statements she has made in India and Thailand is a proof that she has tarnished the nation's image".

Meanwhile, Hasina lashed out at the government for failing to protect the country's image abroad. "Speaking against misdeeds of the government and speaking against the country are not the same. Speaking about crime and corruption by the government can never be an anti-state campaign."

Human rights violation, political persecution, crimes and corruption have damaged the country's image during the coalition rule, she alleged.

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PHOTO: AFP

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina talks to newsmen at Zia International Airport upon her arrival from New Delhi yesterday.