

Judgement in Mondal murder case May 29

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A speedy trial tribunal yesterday set May 29 for judgement on the killing of advocate Habibur Rahman Mondal in Old Dhaka in 2000.

Judge Shahed Noor Uddin of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1, Dhaka Division scheduled the date after completion of arguments from prosecution and defence counsels.

Earlier, the tribunal recorded statements of 27 out of 46 prosecution witnesses and framed charges against Saidur Rahman Shahid, a ward commissioner, and 17 others on January 9 this year. The trial began on January 14.

Habibur Rahman Mondal, 44, joint secretary of the city BNP and leader of the Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Parishad, was shot dead by a gang at Chandra Mohon Basak Lane in Banogram in Old Dhaka on August 20, 2000. He came under attacks when he and his muhuri (clerk) were heading for court by motor-bike.

Mohammad Abdul Hai Bhuiyan, a BNP activist, filed a murder case with the Sutrapur Police Station against four people the same day.

But Abu Hena Mostafa Kamal, the then officer-in-charge (OC) of the Sutrapur Police Station and investigation officer of the case,

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Two workers electrocuted in Old Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two construction workers were electrocuted at Siddikbazar yesterday.

The victims have been identified as Lal Mia, 25, and Abdul Ali, 35, both from Khajurbaria village in Baufal, Patuakhali.

While pulling iron bars, the two were electrocuted as an iron bar came into contact with high-voltage electric cables hanging overhead.

The incident occurred at around 10:00am. Both died on the spot.

In another incident at Elephant Road, a labourer fell from a building and died on the way to hospital.

Raku, 14, son of one Rafiq of Lalmonirhat, slipped from the 13th floor of the building at around 11:45am.

All three bodies were sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

'Tarabo polls hijacked'

UNB, Dhaka

A chairman candidate of Tarabo Pourasava in Narayanganj alleged that yesterday's election to the municipality was marred by massive irregularities and demanded re-polling.

"Voters could not turn up at the polling stations due to threat by armed criminals. They even drove out my polling agents from almost all the centres," Mahbubur Rahman Khan told journalists at a press conference at Jatiya Press Club yesterday afternoon.

Mahbub, a pro-Awami League candidate with the election symbol of "umbrella", alleged that there were no BDR troops or any magistrate at the polling stations till 11am, allowing the armed cadres to prevent people from casting their votes.

Awami League leader Maj Gen (ret'd) Shafiqullah, Colonel (ret'd) Faruk Khan, MP, and Tanjim Ahmed Sohel, MP, who visited a number of election centres in the pourasava, were also present at the press conference.

They also alleged that they were threatened by armed criminals during the visit.

"This cannot be an election...it's a mockery of election. Many polling agents were assaulted by the cadres let loose by Textiles Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury," said Gen (ret'd) Shafiqullah.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
May 27		6-39 pm
May 28	5-12 am	
Prayer Timings		
May 27		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-15	4-45
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-45	6-49
Esha	8-15	8-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		

Air crash kills over 60 Spanish peacekeepers

REUTERS, Ankara

A Ukrainian Yak-42 plane carrying 62 Spanish peacekeepers returning from duty in Afghanistan and 13 crew crashed as it tried to land near Turkey's Black Sea city of Trabzon early yesterday, Turkish television said.

None of the passengers survived, television news channels reported.

The Ukrainian Emergencies Ministry confirmed that rescuers were at the site in mountainous northeastern Turkey and estimated that around 70 people had been on board the Yak-42.

"It is difficult to say why the accident occurred but of course an investigation is under way. Rescuers are at the scene," the spokesman said.

The state-run Anatolian news agency said the plane was flying from the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek

to Zaragoza, Spain.

The plane was attempting to land at Trabzon's airport to refuel in heavy fog, when it crashed in a rural area, Anatolian said.

"It was due to land here but it never did," an official at Trabzon airport told Reuters.

Turkish government officials were not available for comment.

Television footage showed black, charred wreckage strewn over a foggy hillside near the small town of Macka, around 35 kilometres (22 miles) from Trabzon airport.

Fire fighters and emergency personnel were at the scene.

Sait Topcu, a cleric at a mosque in a nearby village, said he had heard a loud explosion and hurried to the scene.

"There were flames everywhere. I couldn't get close to it for 15 to 20 minutes," he told the CNN Turk

news channel.

A Spanish Defence Ministry spokesman confirmed that the plane was carrying soldiers returning from Afghanistan, but could not provide any further details.

Lieutenant Colonel Paul Kolken, a spokesman for the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul, Afghanistan, said a plane carrying 56 Spanish peacekeepers and a crew of six left Afghanistan on Sunday after the soldiers completed their mission with ISAF.

"We are trying to find out if the plane that crashed is actually the same one," he told Reuters.

He said Spain had contributed 120 peacekeepers to ISAF, which is responsible for helping to maintain security in the Afghan capital.

Private television station NTV reported that paramilitary police recovered 25 bodies but that there were no survivors.



PHOTO: AFP

Turkish rescue workers search yesterday through the wreckage of the Ukrainian-operated Yak-42 transport plane that crashed near Trabzon in northeastern Turkey near the Black Sea. More than 70 people were killed.

Free float of exchange rate IMF adviser to start work next month

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) adviser will get down to work from next month to devise ways of floating the exchange rate.

The government wants to open up the exchange rate regime by next month to make it market-pegged.

The IMF adviser, David Mitchen, who also performed similar tasks in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka when they let the market dictate currency rates, will advise the Bangladesh Bank (BB).

BB sources said the exchange rate will be freely floating only in current account and not in capital account, which itself is now non-

convertible.

There is an apprehension that foreign currencies might become costlier once the exchange rate is made freely floating, fuelling inflation.

But BB officials and many private bankers allayed the fear, saying banks are already transacting dollar among themselves at rates beyond the BB set band and this did not create any volatility in the market.

Managing Director of Pubali Bank Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled said when India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka introduced free exchange rate, the market was volatile for some time. But this is unlikely in

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Cops to catch beggars at intersections

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) are taking initiatives to free intersections from beggars to ease the traffic congestion in the city.

"I am determined to free the streets for traffic," the DMP Commissioner Mohammad Ashraf Huda said while talking to a group of journalists at the Telecom Auditorium of Rajarbagh Police Lines yesterday.

The commissioner also said the beggars are defaming Bangladesh to foreigners. A huge number of beggars have occupied the city roads and they roam around the intersections, he added.

"Inform the police if any beggar is found on the intersection of the metropolitan area," he suggested.

"My priority is to reduce the traffic jam, which is also a nuisance, to curb the crime," Huda said.

The commissioner also urged people to assist police to restore law and order in the metropolitan area.

Businessman slaughtered in Feni

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Feni

A businessman was slaughtered at his residence at Shahid Shahidullah Kaisar Road under sadar upazila Sunday night.

Police said Kamal Uddin, 40, a pharmacy owner and son of late Habibur Rahman hailed from Elashpur village, six kilometre away from Fentown.

Family sources said some unidentified people called Kamal out of his residence at about 10 pm. In the morning, local people found Kamal's body near a graveyard at Elashpur.

Police later recovered the body and sent it to Feni Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

Jobeda Khanam, wife of the victim, filed a case with Feni sadar police.

Traders of Shaheed Shahidullah Kaisar Road observed a two-hour token strike yesterday to protest the murder and demanded an immediate arrest of the culprits.

No one was arrested till filing of this report last night.

9 'criminals' nabbed in Mohakhali

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested nine alleged criminals in Mohakhali on Sunday.

Tipped off about a secret meeting, Tejgaon police managed to catch some listed local criminals including Bhutto and Ibrahim Khalil from the rooftop of a residential building at around 10:00pm.

However, the miscreants were found to possess no firearms.

The other arrestees are Abdur Razzak alias Chanchal, Masud, Mohiuddin, Afzal Hossain alias Emon, Ali Mithu, Habibur Rahman and Sohel.

Police produced them before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka yesterday and filed a petition for seven-day remand each.

According to police, Bhutto is accused in 13 criminal cases, four of which are with the Kafrul Police Station, four with Mirpur, four with the Joydevpur Police Station in Gazipur and one with Kotwali.

Meanwhile, Ibrahim allegedly shot dead one Kazi Arif at Kafrul on June 27, 2001, snatched arrestee Shah Alam from police on September 29, 2000 and kidnapped one Selim on October 30, 1999.

He is an accused in 12 criminal cases with the Cantonment and with the Kafrul and Tejgaon Police Stations.

HC orders release of ADAB fund

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday directed the government to release ADAB fund for its project to strengthen the role of NGO.

The order came upon a writ petition filed by Mohammad Aminul Islam, director of ADAB (Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh), an association of NGOs.

The court also issued rule upon the NGO Bureau Affairs to show cause why its action of holding up approval should not be declared illegal.

Barrister Amirul Islam and Dr Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury appeared for the petitioner.

US soldier killed in Iraq ambush

REUTERS, Baghdad

One US soldier was killed and another wounded in central Iraq yesterday when Iraqi gunmen ambushed a US military convoy, the US military said.

It was a rare US fatality in action in Iraq since President George W Bush declared the end of major combat on May 1 -- three weeks after a US-led invasion toppled Saddam Hussein.

The Central Command said in a statement that gunmen fired assault rifles, machineguns and rocket-propelled grenades at a

convoy of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment convoy near the town of Hadiitha, 180 km northwest of Baghdad.

"The eight-vehicle convoy was conducting a resupply mission from Al Asad Air Base to Al Qaim (on the Syrian border) when it was attacked at about 6:15 am local time," it said.

The statement said attack helicopters and ground forces were immediately brought in to secure the area and seek out the attackers. It did not report any Iraqi casualties.

ME peace summit set for next week

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel said US President George W Bush was likely to hold a summit with the Israeli and Palestinian prime ministers in Jordan next week to promote a US-backed "road map" for Middle East peace.

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom made the announcement at a Euro Mediterranean meeting in Greece a day after his country approved the plan in a historic step accepting the creation of a Palestinian state.

In the West Bank city of Ramallah, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat said he welcomed Israel's endorsement of the road map "but no doubt the 12 reservations they have placed on it raises question marks about this acceptance."

The United States, which pressured Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to embrace the most ambitious Middle East blueprint in two years, has said Israel's objections will be addressed while the proposal is being implemented.

Defending the plan to legislators of his right-wing Likud party, Sharon assured one lawmaker from a West Bank settlement that homes would continue to be built in the community despite the road map's call for a blanket construction freeze.

"You can build for your children and grandchildren and I hope for your great-grandchildren," Sharon said, asked about "natural growth" housing to accommodate expanding settler families.

The peace plan specifically bans "natural growth."

Initial confidence-building steps in the road map aimed at ending 32 months of violence and loosening Israel's military grip on the Palestinians seemed likely to await a Bush summit.

"In Jordan, it looks like now, President Bush will meet with Prime Minister Sharon, Prime Minister (Mahmoud) Abbas and maybe a few others," Shalom said.

"We think it is very important that the president of the US is coming to our region to move us forward. The meeting will take place maybe at the end of next week."

Bush's attendance at a trilateral summit after a trip to Europe beginning next week would underscore his growing personal commitment to securing Israeli-Palestinian peace following a US-led war in Iraq that angered many in the Arab world.

Israeli media reports said a summit in Jordan was likely to be held in its Red Sea port of Aqaba, across from the Israeli resort of Eilat. There was no immediate

confirmation from Washington or Amman.

Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty in 1994, and Sharon visited the kingdom in 1998 as national infrastructure minister.

Before a trilateral summit, Sharon was expected to hold his second meeting with Abbas since the reformist prime minister took office on April 30 against the backdrop of a Palestinian uprising for statehood.

At their previous meeting, Sharon offered to pull Israeli forces out of the northern Gaza Strip and hand the area over to Palestinian security control in a test of Abbas's ability to rein in militants under the peace deal, Israeli officials said.

But no agreement was reached, and the Palestinians demanded that Israel first accept the road map.

Arafat, who reluctantly appointed a prime minister under international pressure to carry out democratic and security reforms, said on Monday that Abbas and Sharon would meet within 48 hours. Israel had no comment.

Strong quake hits Japan

REUTERS, Tokyo

A powerful earthquake hit a broad swathe of northeastern Japan yesterday, tangling communications and rocking buildings as far away as Tokyo about 280 miles to the south, but there were no reports of deaths or serious injuries.

The Meteorological Agency said the quake measured seven on the open-ended Richter scale, about the same strength as a devastating quake in the Japanese city of Kobe eight years ago.

US asks Iran to hand over al-Qaeda suspects

AFP, New York

The United States has asked Iran to hand over al-Qaeda members operating in its territory, the New York Times reported yesterday.

The request came in a message sent shortly after the May 12 suicide bombings in Saudi Arabia, and after US officials reviewed intelligence indications that Iran-based al-Qaeda operatives were involved in the attacks, the Times said.

"We passed them a message instead of meeting them face to face. The message was that this al-Qaeda link is very serious," an unnamed senior US official was quoted as saying.

"We and others concerned about the Saudi bombings have made clear that Iran needs to cooperate with the Saudi investigation, and there's no reason to allow al-Qaeda on Iranian territory," the official said.

But not all US intelligence analysts agree that the eavesdropped conversations out of Iran clearly establish "a link to the Saudi bombings or the Iranian regime," another official told The Times.

The triple suicide attacks in Riyadh killed 34 people, including nine suicide bombers.

Iran's UN ambassador Sunday renewed his nation's insistence it is cooperating in the war on terrorism, amid discussion of possible US moves against the Islamic regime in Tehran.

Iran's ambassador to the United Nations Javad Zarif pointed to detentions of several al-Qaeda members as proof Tehran is not sheltering members of the Islamist extremist group as Washington claims.