

Wedding party mayhem

Gunmen barge into community centre; shoot 50 bullets; pregnant woman killed; 12 wounded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A wedding reception party turned into a mayhem when unidentified gunmen sprayed bullets inside a community centre, killing a woman and wounding at least 12 at Kazipara in Kafrul yesterday.

Nazma Akhter, sister of bride Afroza Akhter Doli, was hit by three bullets and died in the reception corner. She was pregnant. Two children aged between 10 and 12 were also bullet-hit.

It was the wedding reception

party of Golam Mostafa Labu, assistant organising secretary of Dhaka city Awami Juba League (North), at Kazi Community Centre. At around 3:15pm, as guests sat to lunch, six gunmen toting pistols entered the centre.

"As the wedding feast was underway, two of the six killers, both carrying pistols, entered the hall room," a witness said. They fired at random to disperse the guests.

As fear-stricken guests shrieked and ran for cover, the assailants

grabbed Shabbir Alam Litu, general secretary of the Tejgaon thana unit of the Juba League, and shot him point-blank four times. He was taken to Shamorita Hospital in a critical condition.

Police said the attack was aimed at killing Litu by hired assailants of another faction of the Juba League. The incident took place 20 minutes after former AL lawmaker Kamal Ahmed Majumder left the function.

But Nazma, sister of the bride, received three bullets in her chest

and abdomen when she stood up to see what was happening. She was taken to Orthopaedic Hospital where doctors declared her dead.

"The killers did not stop there. They fired at least 50 shots, many of which hit the guests. Chaos, fright and frenzy reigned supreme as guests ran for safety. Some crawled under dining tables," said Nasiruddin, manager of the community centre.

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PHOTO: STAR

Mayhem at wedding reception party: (Clockwise) Police guard the Kazi Community Centre at Kazipara yesterday after unknown gunmen sprayed a wedding reception with bullets, arrested suspect Amir Hossain Babu, another suspect flanked by law enforcers and an injured man at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Case No. Four against Star, Alo, editors, still counting

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Another defamatory suit was filed against the Editor of The Daily Star, Mahfuz Anam, and the Editor of the Protham Alo, Motiur Rahman for publishing news on Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, the parliamentary affairs advisor to the prime minister.

Syed Emranur Reza, the general secretary of BNP, Brahmanbaria district unit, filed the case before the First Class Magistrate's Court, Brahmanbaria yesterday.

The case was filed under sections 500/501/502/109 of the Bangladesh Penal Code. In his complaint, Emranur Reza said the above two newspapers published defamatory news on SQ Chowdhury with ill motivation.

The news contained false and

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BDR rescues women, children at Benapole

UNB, Benapole

BDR jawans of Benapole check post rescued 20 people including women and children who were to be trafficked to neighbouring India from Sadipur village on Thursday.

Being secretly informed, the BDR jawans raided the village in the morning and rescued seven males, nine females and four children while an alleged organised gang of human traffickers was taking them to India in the name of providing good jobs.

All the rescued persons were handed over to the local police.

Flood tightens grip on Dhaka, central dists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Floodwaters began to recede from most of the 23 affected districts, but tightened grip on Dhaka and its environs as swollen rivers were flowing fiercely towards the central region from upstream yesterday.

Dhaka, Manikganj, Narayanganj, Shariatpur, Madaripur and Barisal still reeled under floodwaters that marooned lakhs of people in their submerged villages.

Our Manikganj correspondent adds: Road links of all upazilas were cut off with the district headquarters and around four lakh people were stranded in their inundated homes.

In the shoals of Harirampur and Daulatpur upazilas, one lakh people

were marooned without bare necessities, including food and drinking water.

Shipping Minister Akber Hossain visited Paturia and Daulatdia ferry terminals and Deputy Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Asadul Habib visited the flood-hit areas in Manikganj and Ghior yesterday. The deputy minister distributed rice and cash among the flood victims.

The situation in Narayanganj took an alarming turn as more areas in seven unions in Sadar upazila went under water, marooning over 10 lakh people.

In Shariatpur, more areas went under water as the Padma began to swell further.

BSS adds heavy downpour during the last three days swamped

four upazilas in Madaripur district, affecting 50,000 people.

The low-lying area of Sadar and Shibchar upazilas went under water causing serious crop damage.

Nearly 50 feet of the Bogra-Rangpur highway protection shield along the Karotoa gave in to rushing waters at Hawyakhana, threatening road communication. Workers of Roads and Highway Department were trying to repair the vulnerable section.

The Gobindaganj-Dinajpur Highway was still swamped with floodwaters, brining further sufferings to the working class living along the road.

Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Chowdhury

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Saarc commerce ministers meet Aug 9 for common WTO stance

NAZMUL AHSAN

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has called a special meeting of commerce ministers and secretaries of the member states in Dhaka between August 9 and 10.

Bangladesh and Pakistan have so far responded positively, sources said.

The purpose of the meeting is to take a common position on trade

issues ahead of the next World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial meeting, slated for September in Mexico.

The initiative of the SAARC Secretariat came at the heels of a request by Dhaka for such a meeting, sources said.

The commerce secretaries of the member states will start the discussion on the first day and the ministers will conclude it on August 10 with the possible adoption of a Dhaka Declaration.

Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives are the members of the SAARC.

"During the forthcoming meeting, Dhaka would try to drum up support from the SAARC countries in favour of the 16-point Dhaka Declaration adopted in June last during the LDC trade ministers' meeting," a high commerce minis

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Student chopped to death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

'Burqa' clad assailants chopped a college student to death near Sutrapur Bazar yesterday afternoon.

Three criminals covered in black burqa waylaid Partha Sarkar, 22, and stabbed him indiscriminately when he was passing the area by a rickshaw.

Local people took Partha to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where the attending doctors declared him dead.

Son of Nirmal Sarkar of 37, Orupchand Lane in Sutrapur, Partha was a second year HSC student of Imperial College.

The motive behind the killing could not be known.

No case was filed with Sutrapur Police Station till 9:30pm yesterday.

In another incident, a youth died mysteriously in old Dhaka's Atash Khana road yesterday.

Friends who brought Siddiq, the victim, to DMCH said he died jumping from the roof of a six-story building.

But police said the youth bore an injury only in his nose.

A UD case was filed with Lalbagh Police station.

Rail to link Gazipur with Khulna, Rajshahi this month

REAZ AHMAD

Direct train communication between Gazipur and the divisional headquarters of Khulna and Rajshahi begins later this month.

Trains from the northern and southern regions will also run up to the capital with the completion of dual gauge (metre gauge and broad gauge together) track-laying between Joydevpur and Kamalapur in the city (34 kilometres) by the end of next year, Bangladesh Railway (BR) sources told The Daily Star recently.

The prime minister is likely to inaugurate the Khulna-Joydevpur rail route at last week of this month. A train-- Sundarban Express-- will be pressed into service on the day.

Moreover, Padma Express, which plies between Rajshahi and Ibrahimabad to the east of Bangabandhu Bridge, will now run another 80 extra kilometres to reach Joydevpur. The train will be renamed Silkcity Express.

Track-laying on a 80-kilometre stretch from Ibrahimabad to Joydevpur has been completed recently and Sundarban Express and Silkcity Express will run up to Joydevpur from Khulna and Rajshahi.

Trains on Khulna-Joydevpur and Rajshahi-Joydevpur routes will ply under manual signalling system for the time being. Interlocking system of signalling will be introduced by December this year, railway sources said.

Frequency of trains on the two routes might be increased to the capacity of Joydevpur station considering passengers' demand.

Day trips on four launch routes from next month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The launch owners association has decided to operate launches on at least four routes during the day starting next month.

The routes are those connecting Dhaka to the four district towns of Barisal, Patuakhali, Pirojpur and Bhola.

The decision was taken yesterday at a meeting of senior members of the association, source said.

In the beginning the operation would be on a test basis to get an idea about the viability, the source added.

"The decision was taken following the government's request. But launch owners are demanding that similar action be taken in respect of road vehicles," said Alhaj Kalimullah, chairman of the association.

Launch owners apprehend passengers would shift to travelling by road when the launch plying restrictions are put into effect, he added.

"We will give route permit to a n y

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Kelly's death rocks Blair government

REUTERS, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair's government was reeling yesterday over the death of a mild-mannered scientist caught in a vitriolic row over allegations London exaggerated the case for war in Iraq.

Police said yesterday former United Nations weapons inspector David Kelly had bled to death from a cut wrist, with no indication anyone else was involved.

"The post-mortem has revealed that the cause of death was hemorrhaging from a wound to his left

wrist," a police spokesman told a televised briefing.

A knife and a box of the painkiller Coproxamol had been found close to where Kelly's body was discovered on Friday in woodland near his rural Oxfordshire home in central England, police said.

On a tour of the Far East, the British prime minister appealed for "respect and restraint" as bitter accusations flew over the cause of the tragedy.

"I hope we can set aside the speculation and the claims and the

counter-claims," Blair told reporters in Tokyo when one questioner asked him if Kelly's death was on his conscience.

The bearded and bespectacled 59-year-old microbiologist, who worked for the Ministry of Defense, disappeared on Thursday -- apparently to take a walk from his family home.

Two days before, Kelly had faced an aggressive grilling in p a r l i a m e n t

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A plainclothes police officer, left, escorts a woman presumed to be Janice, right, the wife of Dr David Kelly leaving her home at the village of Southmoor in Oxfordshire yesterday. Janice was told by British police that her husband's death was a suicide.

PHOTO: AFP



11,000-strong joint force goes into operation in southwestern region

UNB, Pirojpur

An over 11,000-strong joint force comprising police, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Ansar launched a special drive last night to flush out criminals and underground activists in southwestern districts.

Sources said officials of police and paramilitary BDR conducting the operation from three sector headquarters of Pirojpur, Satkhira and Jhenidah had parleys for three

days to finalise the strategy to mop up the criminals.

"We will go for blockraid, search every house," said an official requesting anonymity.

Despite secrecy maintained by the operation leaders, movement of forces has alerted the underground activists and criminals who have gone into their hideouts. Many of them may have crossed the border, said villagers.

Rupsha upazila of Khulna and

Fakirhat and Mollarhat upazilas of Bagerhat are the most troubled areas where about a dozen policemen fell victim to underground activists in recent months.

UNB Satkhira correspondent said more than 2,000 personnel of the joint force camped at nine centres in the town last night to launch operation against the underground criminals.

Sources said as the news of

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Home ministry move to relieve BNP MP's brother of murder case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The home ministry has asked the Dhaka Metropolitan Public Prosecutor (PP) to relieve Rezauddin Ahmed Monir, brother of the ruling BNP lawmaker Nasir Uddin Ahmed Pintu, and nine others, of charges in the Keraniganj double murder case.

In the letter issued on July 5, the home ministry asked the PP to take necessary steps to withdraw the charges against Monir and nine others as the case was filed on the basis of falsehood and fabrication.

After receiving the letter, the PP submitted a petition to the Speedy Trial Tribunal-4, Dhaka Division, on July 17 where the case is still pending.

Judge Jahangir Alam Mollah

fixed today for hearing of the issue.

The nine others are -- Salahuddin, Mohammad Moula alias Ali Mahu, Mohammad Hasan, Jahangir alias Janu, Manju alias Manjur Ali, Shahin, Mohammad Alam, Mohammad Mesbah and Javed.

The Tribunal framed charges against Monir and 22 others on July 13.

Monir and eight others are in jail custody while 10 others are on bail. But Tahim, Azad, Javed and Mesbah have been absconding since the incident.

Amir Abdullah alias Shahil, 26, secretary of the Zinjira Market Association and sports secretary of the Zinjira Union Jubo Dal, and

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More microfilms decay at DU

HASAN JAHD TUSHER

Another 2,143 microfilm manuscripts at the Dhaka University Central Library have decayed over the years due to hot weather and lack of persons trained on microfilm processing, sources at the library said.

These rare manuscripts were collected and microfilmed since July 1984 under a project funded by Ford Foundation. Sources also said that about 50 manuscripts were earlier found missing.

Librarian of the Dhaka University Dr. Mohammad Serajul Islam, however, denied any micro-

film damages and said, "Not a single microfilm of the library has been damaged."

"It is not necessary to keep the microfilms at a certain temperature," the librarian said and asked this reporter, "Who told you that the microfilms should be kept within the range of 18 to 22 degrees Celsius?"

Suraiya Begum, a teacher of information science and library management, told The Daily Star that the temperature of microfilms and manuscripts storage rooms

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AL plans tie with left parties

SHAMEEM MAHMUD

The main opposition Awami League (AL) recently decided to talk its like-minded left-leaning parties into a common platform against the BNP-led four-party alliance government.

A meeting of the AL Central Working Committee (ALCWC) on July 10 assigned its senior leader Suranjit Sengupta, MP, to give it a try again.

The last year's AL bid for a rapprochement with pro-liberation parties fell apart as the leftists opted to stick to an 'independent policy line.'

"Taking the present political state into account, the AL will be ready to forge a ideal alliance of parties on mutual understanding," said Suranjit, who tabled the proposal for coalition in the meeting.

"Traditionally, we enjoy good relationship with the left-leaning parties. We want to strengthen that

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CityCell cuts call tariff

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

CityCell Digital yesterday sliced off the call tariff for its subscribers and promised to reduce it further shortly.

CityCell has introduced a new post-paid package "Amar Phone" with call charges as low as Tk 0.75 per minute, read a statement of the Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited (PBTCL), a mobile phone service provider.

The announcement followed the slashing of call charges by leading cell phone operator GrameenPhone.

"This is so far the lowest mobile cell charge in the country. This rate is applicable even for nationwide

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