

Death threat given to CPA magistrate

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Unknown miscreants, in a letter, have threatened to kill the magistrate of Chittagong Port Authority (CPA).

In a two-page handwritten letter dated February 18, intimidators on behalf of 'repressed people of Chittagong' gave Magistrate Munir Chowdhury one-month ultimatum to leave Chittagong Port or face dire consequences for his role (against illegal land grabbers and vested quarters).

The letter sent through Chittagong General Post Office said, "You (Munir) have evicted many land grabbers bothering little about pending cases and ignoring court injunctions or stay orders. So killing you will not be a crime or sin."

It also said a killing squad was engaged to 'take care' of him.

"A few high-ups at Chittagong Port and some syndicated groups had vehemently opposed my appointment at the CPA for a second term and they want to kill me now," Munir told The Daily Star last night.

Munir recovered huge land properties of the CPA worth about Tk 350 crore from land grabbers during his three-year posting there, which ended in 2003, sources said.

CPA Chairman ANM Shahadat Hossain lodged a GD (general diary) with Bandar Police Station yesterday afternoon.

Chittagong Metropolitan Police posted a police patrol team around the magistrate's residence for his security, sources said.

Attack on Dr Kamal

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At a press conference in Dhaka yesterday, Kamal Hossain said the home minister's statement in parliament on the attack on him was 'a blatant lie' and urged the prime minister to ask him (home minister) to resign for failure to discharge his duties.

Our Rangamati correspondent reported that during the daylight hartal vehicles kept off the roads and shops and business establishments remained closed.

Hundreds of PCJSS workers brought out processions in different areas of the district town and held a rally at the Shilpakala Academy.

Gano Forum presidium member Pankaj Bhattacharya filed the case under the Speedy Trial Act with Kauhkhali Police Station at 10:45pm on Monday. Mohammad Nurul Absar, assistant general secretary of Chittagong District Bar Association, submitted the FIR (first information report) on behalf of the complainant.

In the FIR, Pankaj said, "Lawmaker from Khagrachhari Abdul Wadud Bhuiyan instigated his terrorists to launch the premeditated attack out of mere political vengeance."

The FIR went on, "A gang of 80 to 100 terrorists equipped with iron rods, tree-trunks, stones and knives carried out the attack with an ill motive to kill Dr Kamal Hossain. But fortunately, it was the presence of mind of driver Jamal Uddin that saved the lives of Dr Kamal and others in his motorcade."

"The terrorist gang would have killed Dr Kamal and us had the driver not risen to the occasion," the FIR further stated.

The motorcade of eminent jurist Kamal Hossain came under attack in Godarpar Rubber Garden area under Kauhkhali upazila, about 3 kilometres off Raozan upazila headquarters in Chittagong. The attackers damaged two minibuses including the one in which Kamal was travelling.

The deputy commissioner (DC) of Rangamati and 62 police officials of the district said the place of occurrence is not under their jurisdiction, creating uncertainty about the case.

Additional Superintendent of Police Khairul Alam said it will be necessary to shift the case. "We'll seek cooperation from the police station concerned for proper investigation into the case and arrest of the criminals till the case is shifted," he added.

Earlier, Kamal alleged the attack was made as the local administration did not ensure their security despite previous assurance.

About this, the DC Dr Jafar Ahmed Khan said he had no contact with Dr Kamal or any other members of his team. "Even then sufficient police, magistrates and army personnel were deployed near Rangamati border following appeal from the organiser of the public meeting he (Kamal) was scheduled to address," he said.

The DC and police officials also said they were yet to receive any directive from the prime minister or the home minister to arrest the attackers.

Kamal Hossain at his press conference yesterday expressed

India, Lanka

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while the Lankans defeated South Africa by 29 runs at the Fatullah Stadium in Narayanganj.

India rode on a well-made 66 by Suresh Raina to post a formidable 253. The Caribbeans, in their chase, were bowled out for 157 with Abhishek Sharma taking four wickets.

Upul Tharanga smashed 117 in Sri Lanka's 277 for five. In reply, Farveez Mahroof scored a polished 120, but that was not enough for the Proteas to avoid defeat.

In the Plate Championship, Australia recorded an easy nine-wicket win over Papua New Guinea at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong.

Australia shot the Pacific Islanders out for 83 and then romped to 84 in 18.2 overs at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium.

In the other match, all-rounders Moneeb Iqbal scored 62 and took two wickets as Scotland overcame a determined effort from Nepal to record their first victory in the tournament.

The Scots won the toss and did well to restrict Nepal to 200 for nine. But it took a late onslaught from Sean Weeraratna to reach home with one ball to spare.

JS body to probe hajj irregularities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Aparliamentary standing committee yesterday formed a probe body to investigate into the mismanagement in the government sponsored hajj services this year.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Religious Affairs at a meeting at Jatiya Sangsad (JS) Bhaban formed the three-member sub-committee headed by Mufti Mohammad Wakkas MP and asked it to submit its report within 15 days.

Shah Mohammad Ruhul Kuddus and Mohammad Shahiduzzaman are the other members of the committee.

Committee members expressed their dissatisfaction at the government's failure in providing appropriate services to Bangladeshi hajj pilgrims. The meeting also reviewed press reports on hajj mismanagement.

The meeting decided to create five posts of deputy director at Islamic Foundation. It also discussed about beautification of Baitul Mukarram Mosque.

Delwar Hossain Saidyee MP, chairman of the committee, chaired the meeting while State Minister for Religion Mosharraf Hossain Shahjahan, committee members and officials concerned, were present at the meeting.

3 JCD men injured in intra-party clash at DU hall

DU CORRESPONDENT

At least three leaders and activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) of Jasimuddin Hall of Dhaka University were injured in a clash between two rival factions of the organisation on Monday night.

Md. Kaium Hossain, a fourth-year student of Persian literature and hall unit office secretary of the JCD, was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with serious head injuries.

The hall unit JCD leaders later ousted Abdul Halim, joint convener of the Science Annex JCD, from the hall for his involvement in the clash.

Sources said the clash erupted over the control of TV remote at the TV room of the hall.

Additional police were deployed to avoid further untoward incidents.

Meanwhile, DU unit JCD President Amirul Islam Khan Alim and General Secretary Hasan Mamun have expelled nine party leaders and activists of Sir AF Rahman Hall unit for their alleged involvement in anti-organisational activities.

They are Razib, David, Asad, Kabir, Shahin, Mohim, Anwar and Jewel.

At an emergency meeting on Monday night, the DU unit JCD leaders also withdrew expulsion order of its Senior Vice-President Golam Hafiz Nahin who was expelled few months ago.

The JCD leaders also expelled four leaders and activists Kamal, Nazim, Shohel and Tuhin of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall unit for their involvement in a clash at the hall last week.

A tense situation has been prevailing among the three conflicting factions of the JCD at different residential halls following three internal clashes at three halls.

8 guns seized in Bandarban

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

The joint forces recovered eight local guns from Kalashi Para under Naikhongchhari upazila yesterday evening.

A team led by Lt Mohashin, camp-in-charge of Lembuchari of Naikhongchhari zone, raided the area under direction of Bandaban Region Headquarters and recovered the guns.

The joint forces have recovered seven M-79 and three M-16 rifles with 451-round bullets and other weapons in last 4 days so far from the same area.

Hasina

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He was rushed to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital with a broken hand and wounded head. The attack foiled a pre-scheduled meeting of Hasina there.

In Agailjhara, the BNP cadres drove out ex-UP chairman and AL leader Aiyub Ali from the roadside meeting venue.

Ruling four-party alliance had a human chain formed by relatives of 'the murdered, oppressed, and maimed by the AL cadres during their previous regime' in front of Barisal Aswini Kumar Hall on Tuesday morning, just hours before Hasina drove through the city.

The ruling BNP also convened a public meeting on Wednesday morning in front of Aswini Kumar Hall to what it said prevent the return of terrorism and terrorists of AL.

Police, Armed Police Battalion and paramilitary BDR were deployed on the route Hasina took for her security.

Bandarban hotelier

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security ring. "We did not pay the abductors any money, but I cannot confirm whether some others have paid them or not," Milan told The Daily Star last night.

Well-placed sources however said the gang released him only after pocketing Tk 15 lakh in two instalments from the family members who brokered the deal through different sources.

The family had contacted the gang on several occasions and paid Tk 9 lakh in the first instalment. They paid Tk 6 lakh hours before Bablu's release, the sources added.

The abductors first demanded Tk 2 crore in ransom.

After his release, Bablu walked to Tarasa point where a boat was already waiting. It dropped him at Shankha bridge ghat near the Bandarban town at around midnight.

Bablu was taken to Bandarban Cantonment. The hotelier later drove in a white private car for his Dhaka residence.

"They abducted me for money," Bablu said in Dhaka. The abductors were mostly Bangladeshi indigenous people, but their leader was a Burmese and most of them were carrying AK-47 rifles and some had M-16s, he added.

"They behaved well with me and provided me with a mosquito net,"

he said.

Bandarban Deputy Commissioner Hafizur Rahman Bhuiyan quoting Bablu told reporters that the abductors had not tortured him.

A band of 15 gunmen broke into Ri Gri Khong, the restaurant of Bablu's family-owned Hillside Resort, on the Eid-day evening on February 2.

The kidnappers first looked for Bablu's elder brother Milan, executive director of the hotel, but picked up Bablu failing to find him.

"They took me hostage brandishing AK-47s and crossed the Shankha river before taking me to the jungle," Bablu said in Dhaka last night. Two to three people joined them and the group later camped at an open, abandoned house, he said.

The abductors moved to a hill the following morning where they stayed till February 9. They moved to another place and stayed there for two days, Bablu said. Afterwards, they were always on the move.

Bablu wrote his brother on February 19 that the abductors had demanded Tk 30 lakh for the release. However, he asked his brother not to get the army engaged in the rescue drive, citing the abductors' threat to kill him in such an event.

Altaf's statement

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Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Agreement "so-called", sparking off resentment and chagrin among policymakers and ministers, highly placed sources said.

Although most policymakers and ministers declined to make any official statement over Altaf's remarks, they did say that the home minister had continued making comments that made the government embarrassed time and again.

"I don't know why and how the home minister is still holding his portfolio despite making such blundering remarks one after another," said a senior cabinet minister on condition of anonymity. He also wondered how he [the home minister] could make such a statement in parliament when the prime minister herself ordered to arrest the attackers on Dr Kamal.

Several ministers said it was not wise on the part of the home minister to call the CHT peace accord a "so-called" agreement when the alliance government after assuming power formed a high-powered cabinet committee to implement it.

A number of senior BNP leaders said though the party, while in opposition, strongly opposed the CHT agreement, organised a long march denouncing it and declared to cancel the deal if voted to power, situation had forced it to shift its position ahead of the last general elections. The BNP in its election manifesto did not say it would cancel the

agreement signed during the Awami League regime and after assuming power refrained from repealing or bringing any amendment to it. Rather, the government formed the cabinet committee to implement the accord.

The committee headed by BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan so far held six meetings with the CHT Regional Council and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) and took several decisions towards implementation of the deal.

In such a context, BNP policymakers and ministers said the home minister's 'blundering remarks' made the entire government embarrassed.

A senior minister on condition of anonymity said although the government was apparently going slow with implementation of the CHT peace agreement, it did take a number of decisions in the meantime that were now under implementation.

After the sixth meeting of the cabinet committee on December 24 last, its Chairman Mannan Bhuiyan told reporters, "It's a large agreement comprised of many articles and clauses. So it's not possible to implement the entire deal in a day or two. But, so far, we've made remarkable progress. We hope to implement the agreement in phases."

Sajek no more forlorn

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Located on the northeast end of Rangamati bordering the Indian state of Mizoram, Sajek had so far remained underdeveloped despite its huge economic prospects. Its inhabitants have stayed underprivileged as the region's vast natural resources remained untapped due to its inaccessibility.

Sitting 1825 feet above the sea level amidst impenetrable forest, Sajek is known for its wild animals, particularly pythons and other dangerous reptiles, that forage in the jungle.

Some 30,000 indigenous people from the tribes of Pangkho, Lusai, Chakma and Triupha live in the 450 sq km union lying some 50 km along the border with Mizoram.

So far, their movement were basically confined within Shilchhari Bazar in Mizoram in the east and Massalong and Baghaihat of Rangamati in the west.

It took at least two days to reach the district town of Rangamati on foot and by boat, which made it virtually impossible for them to market their produce.

The lone BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) platoon in charge of the area's security could reach the Border Outpost (BOP) at Sajek from their headquarters at Marishya under Baghaihchhari thana after a 3-4 days walk through dense forests and unforgiving hills.

Now all that should change. The BMS Road would enable the BDR to reach the BOP within two hours and Sajek residents to reach Khagrachhari in three hours.

The road should help the BDR set up two more planned BOPs to maintain the security of Sajek considered vulnerable to attacks by criminals.

The 19 Engineer Construction Battalion (ECB) of the Engineering Core of Bangladesh Army have been implementing the

HC asks BPC chairman to show up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The High Court yesterday asked the chairman of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) to appear before the court on March 9 following a writ petition.

A Division bench comprising Justices Abdul Matin and Rifat Ahmed directed BPC Chairman Dr Md Mahabubur Rahman to show up for the BPC's alleged irregularities in leasing out the corporation's Sylhet Motel.

The bench also asked all concerned to suspend their activities involving the motel till disposal of the writ petition.

Earlier, following the BPC's invitation of bid for the lease, Messrs Samson Private Ltd offered Tk 47 lakh and Sylhet Shishu Park Ltd Tk 42 lakh, but the BPC entertained the latter and asked it to raise its proposal to Tk 47 lakh.

Following the writ petition by Samson Ltd, the High Court issued a stay order on leasing out the motel.

But the BPC violating the stay order signed a contract with Sylhet Shishu Park Ltd for lease of the motel at Tk 47 lakh Monday.

Road blockade observed in Bandarban

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Samo Adhikar Andolon (SAA), an organisation representing Bangalee settlers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), enforced a road blockade programme in Bandarban yesterday without any untoward incident.

Pickets obstructed movement of vehicles at various points of the town during the day-long programme.

The SAA observed the strike demanding cancellation of CHT peace accord and removal of Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Lama, chief of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity, from CHT Regional Council chairman post.

The SAA also held a rally at Bandarban Press Club premises in the evening to voice their demands.

4 shot in city

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fired at them and walked away.

At Mirpur, 30-year-old Mohammad Rafiq was working at an under-construction building at Section 10 when about five extortionists came over there to collect toll from the owner of the building.

Failing to find the owner, they shot at Rafiq and left the spot.

Rafiq is undergoing treatment at the DMCH with wound in his right leg.

Traffic deptt

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said Rashed Talukder, owner and driver of a truck.

When asked how he justifies damaging the roads by overloading the vehicles, about half a dozen drivers present there said they overload to "meet the rise in fuel cost and extortion by police and criminals".

"Stop extortion and we'll stop overloading," said Talukder.

Bus drivers said they maintain a high-speed journey to avoid penalties for running late. "On the highways there's a mass of rickshaws, vans, buffalo carts and hundreds of pedestrians who don't know how to use the roads where large vehicles ply," said Omar Sheikh, a bus driver at Panthapath.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) officials seemed helpless about the chaotic situation on the highways. A BRTA official said although the BRTA maintains 22 offices throughout the country, their activities are controlled by the deputy commissioners (DCs) outside Dhaka.

If an assistant director of the BRTA wants to launch an inspection, he has to write to the DC for permission and police help. He cannot act on his own to clamp down on irregularities, the official said.

"We have the same manpower as in 1995 when there were only 300,000 registered vehicles in the country that has raised over 700,000 this year."

"Unless a single authority with proper resources is engaged to combat the irregularities, the road transport sector will keep on inflicting losses to the society," the BRTA official said.

CIA

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was probably an associate of Osama bin Laden, but never tracked him down, the newspaper said citing American officials.

The information has become an important element of an independent commission investigating September 11, the Times reported.

The Germans considered the information on Shehri particularly valuable, and the commission is looking into why it did not lead to greater scrutiny, the newspaper said.

The independent commission investigating the attacks has received information on the 1999 Shehri tip and is actively investigating the issue, Philip Zelikov, executive director of the commission, told The Times.

AL submits memo

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the Speedy Trial Act. The speaker will also be reminded of the government's indifference to the three-point demand that AL registered long ago as preconditions for its return to the House.

The decision for submitting the memorandum was taken at a meeting of the AL Parliamentary Party on February 18 with its Leader Sheikh Hasina in the chair. And the speaker's ruling was made last Sunday upon a point of order raised by BNP Whip Rezaul Bari Deena which demanded a ruling from the speaker banning the planned demonstration by AL today.

According to the programme schedule, all the 60 AL lawmakers excepting Sheikh Hasina would converge at the deputy opposition leader's chamber at parliament at 3pm today and then, Hamid said, "We'll seek an appointment with the speaker to hand over the memorandum before the House sits [at 4:15pm]."

On the eve of today's programme, Hamid briefed newsmen at the Sangsad Bhavan last night expressing his deep anguish over the speaker's ruling.

"The speaker is a prestigious institution. Both the treasury and opposition members respect him as

the guardian of parliament. But the way the incumbent speaker gives unnecessary rulings, even on trivial matters and abusing his power, has not only undermined the importance of the ruling itself but also has made his office a farce," Hamid said.

Expressing his dismay over the ruling, Hamid, a former speaker, said, "The way the speaker [Sircar] is abusing his chair, I feel I should enter the House and commit suicide before the speaker's podium to uphold the prestige of this institution."

The deputy opposition leader said the AL lawmakers had no plan to demonstrate or chant slogans inside the chambers, galleries or lobbies and the speaker's ruling in that respect was totally unwarranted.

Hamid recalled that, when the BNP was in the opposition in the previous parliament, its lawmakers brought out procession and raised slogans at the Sangsad Bhavan, and "we did neither oppose, nor obstruct them."

He said the way the government reacted to every matter and obstructed the opposition in and outside parliament it seemed the government was scared and lost the people's support.

Quake kills 226

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(10 miles) of Al Hoceima had been hit.

"Ait Kamara has been reported to be totally destroyed. We've been told that the entire affected area has between 300,000 and 400,000 people. It is a remote area, very mountainous, so it is a bit difficult to access."

She said victims needed blankets, warm clothing, food and water. "There is possibly a need for a field hospital as local health facilities are basically saturated," she added.

An Interior Ministry official in Al Hoceima said heavy equipment was badly needed in order to clear the rubble and search for survivors.

A civil defence spokesman in Al Hoceima said there were many dead in Ait Kamara, 14 km to the south. "So far rescue workers have found 15 bodies in that village alone," he said by telephone. Most houses in the village were built of mud bricks and collapsed.

A local member of parliament, who did not want to be identified, told Reuters: "The number of people killed could easily reach 300."

"Rescuers have only managed to dig out about 10 percent of the number of people believed to be buried under the rubble" in villages around Al Hoceima, he said.

Two villages, Im-Zouren and Bni-Hadifa, were also badly hit.

WORST QUAKE SINCE 1960 MAP said a rescue operation involving army and navy troops, backed by helicopters, was under way. King Mohammed cancelled appointments to supervise rescue operations, a member of the royal palace

al-Qaeda warns

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tirades against the United States, Britain, Gulf Arab states and other supporters of last year's US-led invasion of Iraq.

"France is the country of freedom which defends freedom to show the body and to be immoral and depraved. In France you're free to show yourself but not to dress modestly," he said in reference to the headscarf ban newly approved by parliament.

"This is a new sign of the Crusader hatred which Westerners harbour against Muslims while they boast of freedom, democracy and human rights," said the voice on the tape.

The authenticity of both recordings aired on the two Arab television channels could not immediately be verified, but they sounded like previous messages attributed to the Egyptian Zawahri, who is regarded as Osama bin Laden's deputy and thought to be hiding with him somewhere near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

In the Al-Jazeera tape, Zawahri said Bush had lied in last month's State of the Union address when he asserted that most of al-Qaeda had been crushed and that US troops were spreading freedom and democracy.

"Bush alleged that his troops have spread freedom in the world, that Iraq had achieved democracy thanks to his coalition forces, that his government has crushed more than two-thirds of al-Qaeda and that...Afghanistan is secure," he said.

"The leader of the most powerful country on earth is not embarrassed to say these deceptions and lies. It's gotten to the stage that he can ridicule his listeners to this degree," he said.

Bush defended his war on terrorism and policy in Iraq in his State of the Union address that set the tone for his re-election campaign later this year.

Al-Qaeda is widely seen as bent on radicalising Muslims worldwide and encouraging them to rise up against the West in what some

said.

The US Geological Survey said the quake measured 6.5 on the Richter scale and struck at around 2:30 a.m. (0230 GMT). A magnitude of 6.0 can cause severe damage.

In Al Hoceima, residents were reported to have jumped out of their beds and rushed into the streets when the quake struck. But damage in the fishing port and beach resort of about 70,000 inhabitants, which was founded by Spaniards in 1926, was slight.

MAP put the magnitude of the tremor at 6.0 and said it was felt in the historic tourist city of Fez and Taza.

USGS spokesman Butch Kinerney said the quake's epicentre was in the Strait of Gibraltar separating Morocco and Spain.

Kinerney said there had been hundreds of small tremors in the North African country since 1990.

The last major earthquake to hit the Maghreb area was in neighbouring Algeria last May. It measured 6.8 on the Richter scale and killed 2,300 people near the capital Algiers.

Morocco's worst recorded quake was in 1960. It destroyed the southern Atlantic city of Agadir, killing 12,000 people.

Julie Ryan, from the International Rescue Corps whose teams worked on recovery operations after an earthquake in the Iranian city of Bam in December killed more than 40,000 people, told Sky News: "Lots of lessons have been learnt from the Iranian earthquake."

analysts have termed a "clash of civilisations."

The network, held responsible for the September 2001 attacks on the US cities and a string of others, has portrayed Bush's "war on terror" as a modern-day crusade against Islam.

Atish Dipankar's 1,024th birth anniversary observed

ABDUL KADER back from Munshiganj

The 1,024th birth anniversary of Buddhist scholar Atish Dipankar Srignan was observed at his native village Bajrojogini under Sadar upazila of the district yesterday.

Speakers at a function at the village paid rich tributes to the Buddhist scholar who dedicated himself to spreading, reforming Buddhism. They urged the government to establish a university naming after him.

Land Minister M Shamsul Islam attended the function as chief guest while Education Minister Dr M Osman Farruk, Japanese Ambassador Matshuhiro Horiguchi, Chinese Ambassador Chai Xi and High Commissioner of Sri Lanka Gamini Munasinghe as special guests.