

AHSANULLAH KILLING

Fourth accused escaped arrest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There was yet another accused in the Ahsanullah Master murder case holed up in the North Badda house from where police arrested three on May 14.

Kabir Hossain, the owner of the house, who is now on a five-day remand, disclosed it yesterday while being quizzed by the four-member Criminal Investigation Department (CID) team formed to probe the killing of the opposition lawmaker and a schoolboy.

CID officials, however, declined to divulge the identity of the fourth accused who managed to evade capture during the raid.

On May 14, CID officials raided a house in North Badda and nabbed Mahbub, Monir and Dulal -- all named accused in the First Information Report (FIR) of Ahsanullah Master murder case.

Kabir, who also owns an advertising firm in Badda, had always maintained good contacts with the local criminals, said police.

The CID will produce the four suspects -- Nasiruddin, Suman, Oli Mian and Qaiyum -- before a Gazipur court today on expiry of their six-day remand.

On May 11 police picked up the four, the alleged drug-peddlers and associates of Ahsanullah's killers, from their houses in Tongi.

Asked whether the four provided any clue to the killing, head of the CID team Assistant Superintendent of Police Khalequzzaman answered in the negative.

Kishoreganj police, meanwhile, raided the house of Kana Hafiz's uncle Rashid Mia in Badhber village in Kishoreganj on Monday night.

Kana Hafiz is another accused named in the FIR of the case. Sources in the CID said they are sure of Kana Hafiz's involvement in the killing.

"Most of the eight arrestees said Hafiz first opened fire," said a CID official.

The CID on May 12 attached property of Kana Hafiz and top accused Nurul Islam Dipu, his brothers Shahidul Islam Shipu and Ohidul Islam Tipu to force them to surrender.

UNB adds: Father of late Ahsanullah Master MP, Alhaj Abdul Kader Pathan (Pir Saheb), in a statement yesterday demanded immediate arrest of the killers of his son and called for release of those who fell victim to indiscriminate arrest. He also urged the government to withdraw cases filed against them under the Speedy Trial Act.

Pathan said his son was killed in broad daylight and the incidents of protest at the heinous killing showed the love of people for their leader.

ARSON ATTACK

UCBL phone operator remanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday placed a telephone operator of the United Commercial Bank Limited (UCBL), who is reportedly an associate of the car driver who allegedly set fire to a female employee of the bank Saturday.

Motijheel police produced Abul Kalam Azad, who was held on Monday afternoon, before the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Shafiq Anwar with a five-day remand prayer. The court, however, granted one-day remand, sources said.

Condition of the victim, Shaila Chowdhury Irani, telephone operator and receptionist of the UCBL, remains critical as 95 percent of her body was burnt, said Dr Shahidul Bari of City Hospital Limited at Panthapat where she is undergoing treatment.

"Azad introduced my wife to driver Ranjit Barua and they are also roommates," said Irani's husband Rezaul Haq Syed Raja.

Azad even phoned Irani on Friday, the day before the incident, and asked her to go somewhere, he said, adding, "But, I didn't let her go."

"We arrested Azad on the basis of statement provide by Irani," said Sub-Inspector Akhteruzzaman, investigation officer of the case.

The telephone operator also tried to persuade her to start an affair with Ranjit, and used to disturb her during and after office hours, he said quoting Irani as saying.

Ranjit committed suicide under a running train at Khilgaon Rail Crossing an hour after the incident.

Saifur

FROM PAGE 12 charge of issuing the coupons to the farmers will issue them to non-farmers and other favoured people," Saifur remarked.

He asked the NGOs to draft a proposal outlining the mechanism for delivering such direct subsidies.

Among the NGOs represented in the meeting were Brac, Save the Children, ActionAid, ASA, Care, World Vision, Caritas and Gono Sakhorola.

The NGO leaders urged Saifur to lower the interest rate on loans given by the government-sponsored Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) by 1 percent.

The PKSF provides loans to small NGOs at 3.5 percent interest rate and to big ones at 7 percent. The NGOs, in their turn, lend this money to farmers and other borrowers charging a 15-percent interest. Recently, the PKSF has instructed the NGOs not to charge their borrowers more than 12.5 percent interest from July 1. The NGOs' request for reduction of the interest rate on PKSF loan was made in this context.

The finance minister brushed aside the request saying, "The spread between your cost of fund and interest on loans is wide enough -- from 8 to 10 percent. So, you should rather consider narrowing the spread."

The NGOs also suggested to Saifur that a part of the annual budget spending on social, education and health sectors might be utilised through the NGOs in order to get better results.

The finance minister promised them to look into the proposal.

"The PKSF is already there to support you. In addition, we are working on setting up the NGO Foundation," he noted.

"Through the PKSF and the NGO Foundation, the government can give funds to NGOs for safety net programmes and education, health, nutrition and sanitation projects. We do want to increase our involvement with NGOs," he said.

Mysterious death

FROM PAGE 1 apparently after it slid down the stairs to the water tub on Sunday morning.

The reason for the death was not confirmed, however. One source claimed that it died from infection in the front right leg that he had been suffering since April. He added that the authorities pushed a 1000 cc injection through the vein near its left ear.

Yet another source blamed the death on the scorching heat. The zoo officials were not available for comments.

The authorities have formed a three-member committee to probe the death. The zoo sources said the body of the four-metre long, 36-inch tall rhino weighing 2,000 kilogram will be buried at the zoo premises after autopsy.

The late Nepalese King Raja Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev gifted the rhino couple to Dhaka zoo back in 1992 when they were six months old.

Zoo sources said his partner, Kanchi, has become depressed about the death and is not eating anything since then. The rhinos reached adulthood at seven but have no offspring.

Sonia turns down

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incoming MPs of her party.

"I must abide by the principles that have guided me all alone. I appeal to you to understand the force of my conviction," she said.

"There is no threat to me from anywhere. I want to give India a secular government that is strong and stable.

"My aim has always been to protect the secular foundations of our nation."

"We have waged a successful battle but we have not won the war. That is a long and arduous struggle and I will continue it with full determination."

The withdrawal by the heir of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty -- India's equivalent of America's Kennedys -- had earlier triggered anguished scenes outside her New Delhi home as hundreds of supporters rallied to press her to change her mind.

One man stood on the roof of a car, held a homemade gun to his head and waved a stick to deter people trying to calm him.

"Call Sonia Gandhi! Tell her I will kill myself if she doesn't become prime minister!" he said before being disarmed.

Others lay down in the street or torched effigies of Gandhi's Hindu nationalist opponents, who have run a bitter campaign targeting her Italian background after their humiliating election loss last week.

"Congress has informed us that Mrs Gandhi will no longer be leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party, and they are meeting to elect a new leader," said Sitaram Yechuri, a leader of the main Communist Party of India (Marxist), which has pledged its support to a Congress coalition government.

LAWMAKERS MEET Congress leaders had made frantic last minute efforts to persuade Gandhi to stay on and become India's first foreign born prime minister and the fourth from the

Nehru-Gandhi clan. Her withdrawal, and the prospect of Singh leading Asia's third-largest economy, spurred markets, helping stocks on the Bombay exchange post their second-biggest daily rally just a day after the worst plunge in the exchange's 129-year history.

At Gandhi's residence, Congress leaders, some beating their chests, urged her to ignore what they called the ousted Bharatiya Janata Party's "racist" campaign.

"She feels the country comes first, she does not want the country to be faced with this," said Congress official Saiman Khursheed. "We are stunned, it is shocking, I just can't see the Congress party accepting such an outcome."

Left-wing parties, with more than 60 seats, were supporting Gandhi without formally joining her coalition, but have spooked markets with anti-privatisation comments.

As news of Gandhi's possible withdrawal filtered out, the stock market rebounded sharply and recorded one of its biggest gains.

"The market has gone up because of news that Sonia is reluctant to be PM," said Bharat Shah, director of Vikram Kenia Securities. "This means that Manmohan Singh, who is very reformist, will become prime minister."

Gandhi, an Indian citizen, and Singh met President Abdul Kalam earlier yesterday to open talks about forming government. Gandhi said later she would meet Kalam again today.

Kalam invited Gandhi to meet him as leader of the biggest party in the new parliament, and is likely to accept Congress' claim to power in the world's largest democracy.

(Reuters, AFP and BBC)

OC dies

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and collapsed on the ground, vomiting blood," police sources said.

The OC was rushed to Samarita Hospital where the doctor declared him dead.

In the morning, Muhiuddin's Namaj-e-Janaza was held at Razarbagh Police Lines.

The body was sent to his residence in Chittagong.

NCBs to collect

FROM PAGE 1

The chairmen and managing directors of the NCBs Sunday held a meeting with the central bank Governor Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed regarding the MoU and discussed the targets.

The central bank's earlier effort to improve performance of the NCBs by signing MoUs with them achieved mixed results.

The first such MoU was signed in June 2003 outlining specific targets to be achieved by December 2003.

In December last, the NCB default loan stood at Tk 10,575 crore with the top 80 defaulters holding Tk 3,172 crore. But the NCBs could recover only Tk 16.40 crore in cash.

"Because of such poor cash recovery, the new MoU emphasises cash recovery this year," a central bank source said.

The NCBs were to cut their operating cost by 10 percent, according to the last year's MoU. But none of them could do it. Instead, their cost increased by 5.38 percent between 2002 and 2003.

Of them, the operating cost of Sonali Bank rose by 1.93 percent, Janata 8.36 percent, Agrani 6.31 percent and Rupali by 7.6 percent.

In this context, the Bangladesh Bank says that the NCBs will have to cut their cost by reducing transport, electricity and telephone costs where waste is plenty.

However some NCB officials told The Daily Star that this strategy is not realistic. "Cuts in transport, electricity or telephone costs will not lead to 5 percent reduction in operating costs. To really attain this goal, the NCBs may have to cut 2,000 jobs, close some loss-making

branches and take other measures," an official said.

The Bangladesh Bank told Agrani Bank authorities that a new private management body will take over the bank in a few weeks. Therefore, the central bank will have a different set of goals for Agrani.

Like the previous one, the new MoU will also limit the growth of loans to a maximum of 5 percent. The draft MoU will soon be sent to the NCBs for approval by their boards, sources added.

Deputy Commissioner Golam Murtuza and the superintendent of police of Naogaon visited the scene yesterday morning.

The bodies were sent to Naogaon Sadar Hospital for autopsy. Nurabi, 36, Momtaz, 55, Abdul Matin, 27, Majid, 37, Jewel, 27, and Litu, 30, were injured in the attack.

Our Staff Correspondent Anwar Ali reports from Rajshahi that senior police officials claimed that Bangla Bhai, dreaded operations commander of the JMB, was no longer in Rajshahi.

But police officers working in the troubled areas said Bangla Bhai has been staying alternately at camps in Bagmara in Rajshahi and Naldanga in Natore.

MP murder

FROM PAGE 12 the support of the government and termed it as 'vigilante activities' of the government," said Zafar Ullah.

Emerging from the meeting, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told reporters that the AL chief briefed the US assistant secretary about her party's stance on going back to the House and said the main opposition did not boycott parliament. "We are in parliament and took part in the obituary reference discussion on slain Awami League lawmaker Ahsanullah Master on May 12," Jallil quoted Hasina as saying.

"Rocca expressed profound shock over the killing of Ahsanullah Master and conveyed sympathy to the bereaved family members," said Saber Hossain Chowdhury, a political secretary to the AL chief.

On the issue of the party's come-back to parliament, Saber said, "We informed her about the atmosphere in the House where Awami League lawmakers submitted about 1,400 notices on different issues including price spiral of essentials, slide of law and order and unabated corruption, but none of the notices was accepted."

"Moreover, the speaker did not accept any of the 900 questions of Awami League lawmakers raised for the prime minister's question hour," he continued.

The AL leaders at the meeting also expressed grave concern at the recent emergence of Islamist militants in the country and 'government-sponsored oppression on opposition forces'.

US Ambassador in Bangladesh Harry K Thomas aided Rocca during the meeting but did not respond to queries of the journalists.

A number of women leaders and activists of the AL's women front shouted anti-government slogans during the arrival and departure of the visiting US assistant secretary.

Maj Mannan

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by-elections who also addressed the press conference, demanded army escorts for Abdul Mannan and troops deployment at all voting centres in Dhaka-10 and Munshiganj-1 constituencies during election.

Mahi rushed to Dhaka from Munshiganj upon hearing the news of attack on Mannan's motorcade yesterday.

Mannan alleged that ruling BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) cadres attacked his motorcade at Tejaon Railway Colony, Tejaon Truck Stand and East Rajabazar, injuring several activists and damaging nine vehicles.

He said the attackers snatched two loudspeakers and banners, and attempted to set fire to a jeep in the motorcade. They also prevented him from using loudspeakers during his campaign at East Rajabazar, Mannan alleged. "Had it not been for my security men, I'm afraid I would have been killed."

Mannan said he lodged complaints with the EC, but to no effect. He also alleged that police are not allowing him to lodge general diaries (GDs) or cases in connection with the attacks.

Atiqur Rahman, duty officer of Tejaon Police Station, however, said no-one went to the police station to file any case or GD.

In an earlier statement, Mannan alleged intelligence agencies of the government were preparing a list of his party workers who joined BDB's election campaign.

He brought allegations against the BNP candidate for the Dhaka-10 constituency of violating election rules by printing colour posters and hanging billboards.

Mahi and Mannan said the government was planning to rig the polls sensing BDB's victory in the by-elections.

6 JS bodies

FROM PAGE 12 ministries have remained vacant for a long time, but no initiative was taken to recast them.

No meeting of the standing committee on labour and employment ministry was held since the death of its chairman Ahsanul Haque Mollah on December 12 last year.

Retired army major Abdul Mannan, chairman of the standing committee on home ministry, resigned from parliament on March 10. Since then, its members held just one meeting just to scrutinise a bill.

During a cabinet reshuffle on May 6, the food and the relief and disaster management ministries were merged into one ministry while another ministry was formed by merging the jute and the textile ministries.

But the standing committees on the four previously separate ministries are still there and cannot hold any meetings unless they are recast accordingly.

Officials at the parliament secretariat are embarrassed to invite some ministers to certain committee meetings as they are no longer members of those committees since their portfolios changed during the reshuffle.

Former home minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury has been made commerce minister, but he is not a member of the standing committee on commerce ministry. Similarly, new Information Minister M Shamsul Islam, Forest and Environment Minister Tariqul Islam, Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah Al Noman and State Minister for Land Ukil Abdus Sattar are not members of the standing committees on their ministries.

Under the circumstances, parliament officials are still inviting the former ministers to committee meetings while the new ministers are being invited as special guests.

AL, BNP leaderships

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three-day visit. Representatives of the diplomatic missions in Dhaka and leading businesspeople also attended it. AmCham President Aftab ul Islam delivered the inaugural speech.

Earlier, Rocca arrived in the morning and after the luncheon meeting met Foreign Secretary Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury at the foreign ministry. She raised the issue of Chittagong arms seizure among other bilateral issues and expressed the US concern over the huge weapons cache.

She offered the services of US customs department for the ongoing probe into Chittagong arms haul. "If needed, we will seek their help," Shamsher said.

At the AmCham meeting, Rocca said, "Corruption is rampant, law and order is poor and doubts about Bangladesh's political and economic future propel many Bangladeshis to seek their future abroad."

Criticising the current practice of political dissent, Rocca continued, "Street agitation, violence, intimidation and general strikes belong to a bygone era and have no place in a democracy." "Hartals serve only to aggravate the suffering of Bangladeshis."

She reiterated the US belief that parliament should be used by all members, including the opposition, to pursue their political agenda.

"We hope to see greater effort to end attacks on journalists and deaths in police custody," Rocca added.

She obliquely referred to the government actions against the Ahmadiyya sect in January and said, "In keeping with Bangladesh's constitution, religious minorities must be protected, not stigmatised or victimised by book banning and attacks on their places of worship."

"Measures to undermine social and religious equality and promote disharmony are viewed with greater concern from outside Bangladesh," contributing, in the end, to what she termed was a 'cloudy outlook' on Bangladesh.

Rocca is scheduled to visit the Ahmadiyya complex in Bakshibazar today, talk to sect leaders and see the complex that was attacked by Sunni hardliners in January.

Two students held on charge of abduction

DU CORRESPONDENT

Police raided Sir AF Rahman Hall of Dhaka University (DU) in the early hours of yesterday and arrested two students for allegedly abducting one person.

The arrestees are Abul Hossain, a second year student of the DU, and Junaid, a student of Jagannath College.

Both are activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dai (JCD), the ruling BNP's student wing.

Sources said the two students along with a fourth year DU student, Ziaul Haque Zia, kept a manpower exporter, Pavel, confined in a room at the hall on Monday night. They said Pavel had taken Tk 20,000 from a relative of Ziaul long ago but did not give it back despite repeated reminders.

Hall unit JCD leaders alleged Pavel is a fake manpower exporter and cheated people in the name of sending them abroad for job.

Ramna police said they raided the hall on information that one person was kidnapped and kept there. They picked up three students including Ziaul.

A number of JCD workers later went to Ramna Police Station and demanded release of their fellow activists. Police however released Ziaul only.

A case under Speedy Trial Act was filed against Junaid and Abul Hossain.

Representing the biggest foreign investor in Bangladesh with a total investment of \$1.3 billion, Rocca cautioned that new foreign investment is going down and said to reverse the trend, deregulation, privatisation, export diversification, financial sector reform and major infrastructure investments are essential.

She, however, hoped that quick activation of an independent and effective anti-corruption commission and separation of the judiciary would attract more foreign investment.

The US assistant secretary stressed the need for prompt democratic, legal and economic reforms and said, "It is up to the leadership of Bangladesh to put it on the path to sustainable development."

She said that South Asia "is now, and will long remain, at the forefront of America's foreign policy concerns."

On the US role in the Kashmir conflict, she said, "We do not seek to impose ourselves as a mediator [but] to urge them toward reconciliation by peaceful means."

Shamsher also said in the meeting that the US economic assistance programme in Bangladesh has increased to \$109 million, a big improvement from last year.

Later, emerging from the meeting with the foreign secretary, Rocca told reporters, "We talked about a broad range of all bilateral issues ... US and Bangladesh are close so we talked frankly about the issues."

Shamsher informed reporters that they discussed issues concerning trade unions in the export processing zone, the progress of Tifa (trade and investment framework agreement) and Saarc. He also received assurances from Rocca that the two sides will continue talks on trade issues.

Ershad

FROM PAGE 12 the 12 lawmakers who voted in favour of the bill of violating party decision.

At a presidium meeting Monday, the party chief made a counter accusation against Kader, also of violating party decision by reacting in a bad way. Ershad also showed caused him for misbehaving with fellow party leaders.

Expressing his reactions, Kader yesterday told The Daily Star that he would not reply to the warning letter. "I have nothing to do with this warning letter, as I did not make any derogatory remarks against any party leader. The allegations raised against me are baseless," he claimed, adding, "I have decided to observe the current situation and will decide what I should do after some days."

Kader said he did not violate the party's decision and expressed his own opinion about the bill only after the JP had seconded the bill.

On the situation prevailing in the party, another JP lawmaker named the pending cases against Ershad as a major problem.

"If there was no case against our chairman, Jatiya Party would be able to act independently, without favouring any party," said yet another lawmaker to The Daily Star requesting anonymity.

During the previous BNP regime from 1991 to 1996, Ershad did not get bail in any of the cases. He was granted bails in those after Awami League (AL) took over the power in 1996 and came out of prison. But, as soon as Ershad became vocal against the AL government, he was sent back to jail in Janata Tower cases.

30 hurt

FROM PAGE 12 faction led by Sheikh Muhammad Shafi from a room at the hall. Workers of Munna group attacked their rivals with machete, hockey sticks and iron rods as they protested outside of their fellow activists.

On information, police rushed to the hall and brought the situation under control.

13 Palestinians die

FROM PAGE 12

Palestinian witnesses said the four, in their twenties and thirties, had gathered for pre-dawn prayers at a mosque set ablaze by the missile strike. Israeli military officials said the missiles hit a band of gunmen.

Six Palestinians, at least one of them a gunman, were killed in street fighting, medics said. About 20 people were wounded in the air attacks and street fighting of "Operation Rainbow."

"We will die and they will die, but we are Muslims and we go to heaven. They will go to the fires of hell," said 30-year-old Palestinian policeman Ashraf al-Jamal.

Palestinians fired rockets and set off hidden bombs in the cinderblock of 90,000 people, a hotbed of militants who attack soldiers patrolling the Egyptian border.

Hundreds of civilians bundled away belongings on donkey carts, fearing their houses would be destroyed. Some slept in the streets. The army said three buildings were demolished on Tuesday.

The planned raid drew UN and European Union criticism over fears it could make thousands of Palestinians homeless. Israel's main ally, the United States, also said it was concerned.

"We call upon the whole world to immediately intervene to block

PM warns rivals

FROM PAGE 1 'terrorist', and asked the people to stand guard against their activities.

"They are not discharging their responsibility in parliament, rather they are burning public property," she claimed.

She regretted that the party (AL) "has never played a responsible role, whether in office or in the opposition".

The prime minister was addressing a public meeting at Pakseye

Railway Ground after inaugurating the newly-built Lalon Shah Bridge, the second largest bridge of the country, on the river Padma at Pakseye-Bheramura point yesterday.

Presided over by local BNP President Sirajul Islam Sardar, the meeting was addressed, among others, by Communications Minister Nazmul Huda, Industries Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami, State Minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman and State Minister for Communications Salauddin Ahmed.

The prime minister alleged that the AL, while in office, did nothing for the people. Citing the closure of North Bengal Paper Mills in the district, she said mills and factories were closed down during its rule.

She accused the opposition party of handing illegal arms to their activists and said there was no justice for killing during their rule. "We have recovered a lot of arms, but some are still there," Khaleda said, claiming that the BNP-led coalition government had ensured justice.

"Our only aim is to educate the people and create employment," the prime minister said and referred to the programmes in the education sector.

Khaleda was also critical of Awami League's coffin procession. "How can you expect something good from a leader who seeks ten dead bodies against one?" she questioned.

Bomb scare at DU turns a hoax

DU CORRESPONDENT

Moviegoers at the Teacher Student Centre (TSC) auditorium of Dhaka University yesterday felt the chill down their spines from a bomb alarm, which was proved a hoax.