

Humayun Azad

FROM PAGE 1
as saying. "There is absolutely no evidence of any violence," he said. "He died of natural causes."

The spokesman said tests for poisons or toxins had been undertaken and the results would be available in a few weeks.

Bangladesh High Commissioner in Berlin Alimul Haque told The Daily Star yesterday by phone that Munich police informed the High Commission upon receipt of Azad's postmortem that his death was natural.

But Azad's distraught family alleged foul play in reaction less than a week after he sought safety in Germany in the wake of a death threat in June. Latifa Kohinoor, wife of Azad, demanded an inquiry and alleged: "He was killed in a conspiracy. I don't believe it was a normal death. He was killed in a planned way."

The 57-year-old who was surviving with his wife, son Anannya Azad and daughters Mouli Azad and Smita Azad, wrote more than 60 books of poetry, novels, articles and comparative literature and was a staunch feminist and a fearless critic of human rights violations. Azad received the Bangla Academy Award in 1996.

A German Embassy official in Dhaka told the family that the German authorities asked the Bangladesh High Commission in Germany to arrange for sending Azad's body back home after he was found dead on his bed at Munich University dormitory shortly before 11:00am German time.

"We are an 11-hour drive from the spot but getting in touch with Munich. We are now waiting for instructions from the foreign ministry to send his body back home," Alimul said.

FANS IN SHOCK
Hundreds of people representing a broad spectrum of society gathered in and outside Azad's house on Fuller Road in Dhaka, turning the area into a dismal scene of mourners. Teachers, students, journalists, publishers and other professionals found themselves flashing back to their days with the scholarly writer.

He survived a brutal attack on the night of February 27 near Bangla Academy when he was going back home from the Ekushey Book Fair, an annual event in memory of Language Movement martyrs.

His family at the time blamed the attack on hardline Islamists believed to be angered by his latest book "Pak Sar Zamin Saad Baad" which was set in the 1971 War of Independence from

Pakistan. It triggered controversy in and outside political and academic circles for his bitter criticism about fanaticism.

He recovered from his critical injuries after long treatment at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Dhaka and Bumrung Hospital in Bangkok.

DEATH COMES TO LIGHT

Since Azad did not turn up for the appointment with the president of PEN (International) Association of Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists and Novelists, the president's son went to his room but no-one answered the door.

The apartment authorities called the officials of emergency service who opened the door to find Azad in 'deep sleep'.

Back in Dhaka, Head of German Cultural Section Guido Genrich, Information Officer Mujtaba Morshed and some senior teachers of Dhaka University, where he was a professor of Bangla, went to Azad's house at about 9:00am yesterday and broke the news to his wife and children.

A source in the German Embassy said the embassy received the information from Germany Thursday afternoon and went to Azad's house at about 8:30pm to convey it to his family.

But Azad's wife and children were in hospital to see the ailing younger brother of Azad at the time and the officials did not break the news to his younger daughter Smita, as there was no senior family member at home.

His son Anannya and daughter Mouli told reporters that they had telephone conversations thrice with their father, with the last on the night of August 9. He was in good health, they said.

RIFLE ALLEGATIONS

"The conspirators murdered him in Germany as they failed in Bangladesh," Azad's wife Kohinoor alleged and questioned why the death news was censored much later.

Anannya, a student of class X, escaped from his abductors on the Dhaka University campus last month, whom he linked to the February 27 attempt on Azad's life.

The abductors tried to extract information from Anannya about his father's next visit abroad before he ran away from two hours of captivity.

Private news agency UNB quoted Mouli as saying Azad's body will be donated to Bangladeshi Medical College Hospital as he wished.

CPB demands

FROM PAGE 12
should have done is to dredge big rivers on a regular basis," the CPB leader maintained.

On flood protection strategy, CPB leader Prof M M Akash said, "As a flood-prone and lower riparian country of the subcontinent, Bangladesh should go for an 'open flood control' system like regular dredging of rivers and interconnecting water bodies to facilitate unhindered flow of flood water."

"But the 'cordon approach' [currently pursued in the country] like building dams and embankments in certain areas would never bring any positive result," the professor observed.

The communist party also asked the government to act immediately to save the water bodies in and around the city from the land grabbers.

Selim lambasted the government for spending crores of taka for beautification of the capital when the city dwellers are suffering from post-flood hazards including the mosquito menace.

The CPB leader claimed the relief provided by the government was not only inadequate, it failed to reach a large number of the flood victims.

The party demanded for continuing the Vulnerable Group Feeding programme until the next harvest season.

CPB President Manjurul Ahsan Khan said Bangladesh should start dialogues with the neighbouring countries immediately to formulate and agree on a regional co-operation on flood control.

Party leaders Ruhin Hossain Prince and Samsuzzaman Selim were also present in the conference.

6-hr hartal

FROM PAGE 1
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, credited with leading the nation to independence in 1971, was killed, with most of his family members on August 15, 1975.

AL during its tenure in power from 1996 to 2001 used to officially observe the day as the National Mourning Day. The BNP-Jamaat-led coalition government scrapped the day and its official programmes after returning to power in October 2001.

AL central working committee meeting of July 14 with its President Sheikh Hasina in the chair decided to observe hartal on August 15 to protest the government decision.

According to the programme, leaders of AL and its front organisations will lay wreaths at the portrait of the slain leader at the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the city at 12:01pm, a minute after the hartal ends. The national flag will be at half-mast at the offices of AL and its front organisations across the country.

Extortionists

FROM PAGE 1
Medical College Hospital (DMCH) at 3:25pm where the on-duty doctor declared him dead.

"Some extortionists, Raja, Sheikh Kamal and Nazeel, have been demanding Tk 20 lakh as toll from Abdul Motaleb, owner of the companies, for last one and a half months by phone," Mohammad Chand Miah, Motaleb's father-in-law, told the reporters yesterday.

"They also threatened to kill Motaleb if he refused to pay the toll. Yesterday's murder might be a part of the threat to panic Motaleb," he added.

Meanwhile, Uttara police recovered a decomposed body of a youth aged around 30 from a ditch at Armytek in Moshair on Thursday at 10:40pm. The body was stripped naked and stuffed inside a tin trunk with hands tied back and a rope wrapped around the neck, police inquest said.

Morgue sources said the almost decomposed body suggests that criminals had killed the man a couple of days ago.

Nunu

FROM PAGE 1
threats to the airport, educational institutions and other government offices.

People and vehicles thinned out in the city streets despite the deployment of additional security personnel from the armed police and paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles at important establishments including Hazrat Shahjalal's Shrine, scene of at least two fatal explosions one of which injured British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Anwar Choudhury.

Every visitor to the shrine was scanned with metal detector before Juma prayers yesterday.

President, PM

FROM PAGE 12
She demanded a probe into the death of Azad in Germany and recalled that he had been receiving continuous death threat after the attack on him on February 27 this year.

"No previous authorities met out such punishments as I have done since taking over. In just one year, I reduced the percentage of inmates' involvement in jail crimes from 9 percent in 2002 to 5 percent in 2003. My work has made the inmates happy, so I don't bother negative criticism," he said.

Protesting the poor quality of rations and medicine, prison guards of Dhaka



PHOTO: STAR
Activists of International Kathme Nabuat Movement's Khulna unit bring out an anti-Ahmadiyya procession in the southwestern city yesterday.

Bacteria solution

FROM PAGE 12
hazards.

Millions of people, mostly in the rural areas, have developed various symptoms of poisoning from drinking arsenic-contaminated water from tubewells for decades.

The study by Farhana Islam, supervised by other researchers, showed the special group of bacteria gains energy by respiration (breathing), using the metal iron and arsenic containing minerals in the earth sediments.

The young scientist said, "Our results show that these are the special anaerobic bacteria, as they don't need any oxygen to support their growth. They are known as metal-reducing bacteria. We are very interested in iron-reducing bacteria that use iron as their growth substrate, and can also use arsenic when the iron is used up."

The bacteria cause changes in the mineral structure of the sediments, leading to release of arsenic into groundwater, the study says.

Farhana, who studies in the Department of Earth Sciences and Williamson Research Centre for Molecular Environmental Science at the University of Manchester, told The Daily Star, "We are looking at how these processes of breaking down the mineral can

be reversed so that the groundwater is safe to drink."

She elaborated, "With our results, we found that maximum amount of arsenic was released from contaminated sediment into groundwater in the absence of oxygen."

There were several hypotheses concerning the release of arsenic into the groundwater systems of West Bengal in India, where the researchers worked. Some suggested a role for aerobic bacteria (arsenopyrite oxidation), some suggested a role for metal-reducing bacteria while others considered the problem to be driven by geochemistry.

The scientists from Manchester University conducted experiments in their laboratory with sediments collected directly from an area of West Bengal affected by arsenic.

"We were the first group to combine geochemical, mineralogical and microbiological/molecular biology techniques to study this system, and have presented the first direct evidence to support a role for metal-reducing bacteria in arsenic release from the sediments. The organisms identified as playing a key role are iron reducing bacteria that can attack arsenic once they have exhausted iron as a growth element," Farhana explained.

The bacteria transfer electrons to iron oxide rust coating the sediments, causing changes in the characteristics of the minerals. And when the iron runs out, the bugs start to utilise other metals, such as arsenic, which occurs naturally. The chemistry of the arsenic is changed and the reduced arsenic is able to dissolve into groundwater.

By doing this, the bacteria transfer electrons to iron oxide rust coating the sediments, causing changes in the characteristics of the minerals. And when the iron runs out, the bugs start to utilise other metals, such as arsenic, which occurs naturally. The chemistry of the arsenic is changed and the reduced arsenic is able to dissolve into groundwater.

The scientists from Manchester University conducted experiments in their laboratory with sediments collected directly from an area of West Bengal affected by arsenic.

Farhana said instead of using oxygen, the anaerobic bacteria gain their energy by respiration (breathing) using iron-containing minerals in the sediments, a process called iron reduction.

Explaining the process of arsenic contamination, Farhana said instead of using oxygen, the anaerobic bacteria gain their energy by respiration (breathing) using iron-containing minerals in the sediments, a process called iron reduction.

Newspaper Ethnos called to the athletes on its front page to "Tell Us the

Olympics opening

FROM PAGE 1
year ban, were visited in hospital by Olympic officials who ordered them to appear at a disciplinary hearing on Friday afternoon just hours before the start of the Games.

"There will be an announcement from the hospital shortly as to whether their health will permit them to attend," said Manolis Kolimbidis of the Greek Olympic team.

"At this moment it is too early to say (if they'll compete). They have splinters in their arms and serious bruising on their legs. But they are in good health, they don't have any serious problems," he added.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) was left in a state of confusion by the bewildering sequence of events.

One IOC member, requesting anonymity, said: "There is a great deal of confusion. We know there was an accident last night but people are wondering what actually happened. There is suspicion and confusion and disappointment."

"We don't know what to believe. A shadow has been cast over the whole thing."

The news hit Greece like a thunderbolt from the gods.

People burst into tears on hearing what happened as Greece was all set to take centre stage with the launch of Athens 2004 before a television audience of billions around the world.

To some, it looked like hubris to the fiercely proud Greeks.

"Everyone was talking about how great it all is, how beautiful the city and the stadiums are and of course now this happens. It's like they've put a curse on us," said IT technician Manolis Kalatzis.

Morning television and radio shows discussed nothing but the overnight drama in tones ranging from the sympathetic to the paranoid.

Newspaper Ethnos called to the athletes on its front page to "Tell Us the

Int'l probe

FROM PAGE 12
AAMS Arefin Siddique demanded an international probe into Azad's death.

"We want to know how Azad passed away and we hope the German government will give us the information," he said while talking to this correspondent at Azad's residence.

The writer's wife Latifa Kohinoor and other family members and relatives also demanded an international investigation into his death.

Latifa alleged that 'conspirators' killed him abroad after they failed to kill him in the country.

Rashed Khan Menon, president of the Workers' Party of Bangladesh, resented that the Bangladeshi embassy in Germany failed to inform Azad's family in time of the news of his death.

"Islamic fanatics involved in the attack on Azad in February last might have had a hand behind his death," Menon said.

The witnesses said gunman seized the journalist from a hotel in mainly Shiite Basra. Hours later a video tape released in the city showed a hooded gunman standing next to the journalist and threatening to kill him if the attack on Nafaj was not stopped.

AFP says, about 20 masked gunmen, some wearing police uniform, stormed into the Al-Diyafa hotel at about 11:00 pm (local time).

Another hotel employee at the front desk said the journalist was registered as "James Andrew working for the Sunday Telegraph."

A British military spokesman in Basra would not confirm the kidnapping saying "we are working with the local authorities to establish the facts."

The incident comes one day after a shadowy Shiite group calling itself Abu al-Abbas warned that it would kill all those cooperating with British troops in apparent retaliation for the US assault on Nafaj to the north.

"We will kill everyone working with British troops including contractors, interpreters and others," said a statement from the group received by AFP.

Quoting public polls, Kerry aides say their boss is leading Bush, often narrowly, in 24 states plus the District of Columbia for a total of 316 electoral votes. They say Bush's presidency is hanging by a thread. "This is not a good place for the incumbent to be," said Kerr pollster Mark Mellman.

That may be true, but some Democrats would rather not hear about raised expectations.

You always have to strike a balance between recognizing a good moment and setting the bar so high that in a couple of weeks, particularly after the Republican convention, you've created an image that you've lost momentum," said Greg Haas, a Democratic strategist in Ohio who advises Columbus Mayor Michael Coleman.

Warming up for the GOP convention, Bush has accused Kerry of sending "mixed signals" on Iraq (news - web sites) and Cheney has mocked the Democrat for supporting a "more sensible" war on terror.

Bush's acceptance speech will be laced with policy initiatives, some of them new, in a bid to persuade voters that he has a second-term agenda for the economy, health care and other issues that Democrats consider their own.

Just as Kerry convinced some voters that he's tough enough to lead the nation at war, Bush hopes to show the electorate that he's capable of directing the nation back to peace and prosperity.

Sylhet bomb blasts

FROM PAGE 1
quarters has transferred the cases to the CID, he however said the CID was yet to receive the docket.

Asked then what were they doing in Sylhet, CID officers said they are collecting information.

When The Daily Star inquired Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police, Sylhet Range Ali Imam Chowdhury about the progress made in the nearly one-week investigations into the three cases, he refrained from making any comment, saying the cases had been handed over to the CID.

On the other hand, a CID official, requesting not to be named, said, "There is no complications here. It is obvious that the cases would be transferred to the CID and a CID official would be assigned with the investigations. But police are likely to continue the probe until a CID officer is given the task."

Police are trying to evade their responsibility, although the CID are yet to receive the cases officially, he added.

The relation between police and Munshi At