

AL storms out of JS

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discussion on prices of essentials in the current session, which will continue until December 2 with a long Eid break.

The AL demanded discussions on price spiral of essentials, 'crossfire' deaths in the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) custody, grenade attacks on AL's Bangabandhu Avenue rally, monga and the verdict in the jail killing case, adjourning the House's business.

But the ruling party rejected the demands except a general discussion on price hike. Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar will decide when the discussion will take place.

After yesterday's business, the speaker invited the AL lawmakers to apprise them of the Bac decision on general discussion. An AL delegation headed by Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid met the speaker at his chamber and again demanded discussions on the Rab activities, custodial deaths and crossfire in particular.

On September 14, the main opposition staged a walkout of the House in protest against speaker's refusal to hold discussions on grenade attack adjourning regular business of the House. The AL, however, decided later to join the current session.

The AL parliamentary party (ALPP) at a meeting yesterday morning decided to stage "unprecedented" protest in the current JS session against failures of the BNP-led coalition government to control skyrocketing prices of essentials, meeting sources said.

The AL lawmakers may continue to raise protest on some crucial issues through call attention notices and point of order. The parliamentary party will sit again on Sunday to discuss the latest development and review its strategy, sources said.

Walking out of the Bac meeting, Opposition Deputy Leader Abdul Hamid told reporters that ruling party leaders had obstructed them from speaking at the meeting. Even the finance minister undermined them giving 'unparliamentary' speeches.

Asked about the allegation, Saifur Rahman at first declined to comment and asked reporters to talk to the speaker who chaired the meeting. But after a volley of questions from the reporters he said, "What allegations? It was our right what we have said."

BAC MEETING
Joining the Bac meeting, Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid demanded discussions in the House on a number of issues including the August 21 grenade attacks. But Speaker Jamir Uddin

Sircar claimed the issue was already discussed in the last session in accordance with a decision of the Bac on September 12.

Hamid and Abdus Shahid then challenged the speaker's claim and said there was no such decision at Bac meeting. They asked for producing the proceedings of that meeting.

In response, the speaker told the opposition members: "There is no precedent for giving the business advisory committee meeting proceedings."

"At this point Saifur Rahman interrupted the speaker and told us that we have no right to get the proceedings," said Abdul Hamid. "We did not get such proceedings during your term and we will not give you this time," Hamid quoted Saifur as saying.

The finance minister frequently prevented us from speaking at the meeting and the way he talked was 'indecent,' said Hamid, a former speaker.

At the meeting Abdus Shahid asked the speaker to tell under which provision the August 21 grenade attack was discussed in the last session where the treasury bench members in their free-style speeches accused the AL of the attack.

"You rejected our demands of House adjournment for holding the discussion saying that the matter is sub judice, then how you allowed discussion on it?" he posed the question.

The Bac decided that the current session will be continued until December 2 with a 23-day break from November 5 to November 27 for Shab-e-Qadr and Eid-ul-Fitre.

The House will sit at 1:30pm until November 4 and at 4:15pm from November 28.

YESTERDAY'S SESSION
Yesterday's business started at 1:45pm, 15 minutes behind schedule, and was adjourned 30 minutes later after speaker's welcome address, nomination of a five-member panel of chairmen and adoption of an obituary reference.

The obituary reference was adopted at the death of BNP lawmaker KM Abu Taher, five former lawmakers and an official of the parliament secretariat. Both treasury and opposition bench took part in a short discussion on Taher.

Opposition deputy leader Abdul Hamid and Abdul Kader Siddique of Krishak Samik Janata League said normal death has become a rare case these days amid downslide of law and order. "Abu Taher is lucky as his death was normal," Hamid said.

The House will resume at 1:30pm on Sunday.

Tigers

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The umpires extended the match for half-an-hour anticipating a third-day finish, but Mohammad Rafique (30) and Tapash Baisya (15) added 37 runs for the unbroken ninth wicket stand to defy the visitors an early joy.

Bangladesh will have to score another 153 runs to make the Black Caps, who declared their first innings on 545 for 6, bat again.

The hosts, who were 82-3 in the first innings overnight, added exactly 100 runs before being bundled out shortly after lunch and were forced to follow-on. But the home side suffered an all-too-familiar batting collapse before stand-in captain Khaled Mashud's third half-century (51 off 87 balls) inspired a fightback by the tail.

Rafique hit some lusty blows -- five fours and a six against a very attacking field setting -- with Baisya giving him company in the final half-hour's play.

Vettori, who grabbed 6-70 in the first innings, was once again the wrecker-in-chief and accomplished his second 10-wicket haul when he took 4-77 in the second essay. The Left-arm spinner, who captured eight wickets in Dhaka including six in the second innings, appeared unplayable with his bounce and turn to help Stephen Fleming's men take 15 wickets on the day. Wiseman has so far taken five wickets in the match.

The rot began early in the morning when Mohammad Ashraful decided to go down the wicket and hit over the top even before setting his eyes in. It was only the second delivery of the day when he drove Wiseman into the safe hands of Nathan Astle. Top scorer for the Tigers with 67 in the first Test, Ashraful finished the Test on a pair when he was dismissed by Vettori in the second innings for a four-ball duck.

Overnight 45, Javed Omar completed his fifth Test fifty and became the second Bangladeshi batsman to cross the 1,000-run mark in Test cricket after Habibul Bashar, who has 2,079. But the opener gave up soon when he was caught by Scott Styris off Wiseman on 58.

With two fours and three sixes in his 40-ball 32, left-hander Rafique also played an entertaining knock in the first innings, but that was nowhere near to getting his side past the follow-on mark.

Arafat

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U.S. ally, who see him as an obstacle to peace.

Doctors from Jordan arrived at Arafat's battered compound in the Israeli-encircled West Bank city of Ramallah to carry out tests and Arafat's wife Suha planned to return home from France after years apart, officials said.

An Egyptian medical team was also expected.

Raanan Gissin, a spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, said in Jerusalem that Israel would allow Arafat to travel anywhere for medical treatment as a humanitarian gesture.

Asked whether Israel would permit Arafat to return to the West Bank should he leave, Gissin said: "If the doctors will say that he needs to come back after he receives treatment, Israel will not impose any restrictions on that."

Israel had said it could not guarantee Arafat's return if he ever left Ramallah, but Sharon shifted course after speaking on the telephone with Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurie late on Wednesday.

Arafat, a short, stubble-bearded Palestinian icon usually seen in his trademark black-and-white Arab headdress, has named no successor in the decade since emerging from exile under interim peace accords.

Should he die, speaker of parliament Rawhi Fattouh would replace him as Palestinian Authority president for a 60-day period during which elections would be held.

Arafat's incapacitation or death could raise fresh questions about Sharon's unilateral plan for withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank in 2005, a move that has caused political turmoil in the Jewish state.

Sharon has said that with Arafat in power, Israel has no negotiating partner, forcing him to go it alone to "disengage" from conflict with the Palestinians.

Gissin said it was premature to speculate on the fate of the pullout if Arafat died, but if any new Palestinian leadership met "its obligation to fight terrorism" and institute reforms "we can reconsider our overall disengagement plan".

Israel accuses Arafat of fomenting violence after peace talks collapsed four years ago, an allegation he denies.

At Arafat's compound, his cousin, security chief Mussa Arafat, said the president "ate cornflakes this morning and was able to walk to the bathroom." Other officials said Arafat had managed to say his morning Muslim prayers.

Medical sources said he had been suffering frequent relapses and sometimes appeared dazed and did not recognise those around him. Officials denied Israeli reports he has cancer.

Arafat has for many years suffered from shaking -- symptomatic of Parkinson's disease. Aides, however, have said it was the result of a 1992 plane crash.

Arafat shared a Nobel Peace prize with Israeli leaders Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, but peace talks on a final agreement for a Palestinian state collapsed in 2000 and bloodshed followed swiftly.



PHOTO: STAR

Commuters get stuck in a long traffic tailback on the road at Kalabagan that stretched as far as Mirpur Road in the capital yesterday thanks to traffic mismanagement ahead of the Eid.

9 more controversial

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almost all the selected candidates.

The RU advertised four posts for the five-year honours-and-masters courses of three languages--two posts for Persian and one for Sanskrit and Urdu each. The selection committee, however, chose four candidates for the Persian language, three for Sanskrit and two for Urdu.

Among the four candidates selected for Persian language, two each are from ruling BNP's student front Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami's student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS).

Ummeh Qulsum Minni, who is among the selected, is Women Affairs Secretary of present RU unit of JCD, while Ataur Rahman is President of Shah Mokhdum Hall unit JCD and a member of the former convening committee of RU JCD.

The two others -- Shahidul Islam and Nasir Uddin -- are well known on the campus as cadres of ICS who are still active in the party politics.

JCD leader Ataur is an accused in the case filed early this year by ICS men for the January 13 and 14 violence on the campus that left an ICS activist killed and more than 50 students injured.

Shahidul Islam is also an accused in a campus violence case filed in 1996 by the then JCD leaders.

Minni, Ataur, Shahidul and Nasir were found in political processions, meetings and demonstrations on the campus in recent months, said sources adding that they had played roles in many terrorist activities.

Among the three candidates for Sanskrit language, Nuruddin Badshah has links with BNP while Jubli Biswas is wife of Prof Dr Nikhil Ranjan Biswas, a teacher of the department.

Chosen Urdu language candidates Osman Gani and Sharifullah also have connections with the politics of ICS.

Language department Chairman and a member of the selection committee Prof Dr Md Nurul Huda refused to comment on the allegations adding that no more details could be given before the syndicate opens the sealed list for endorsement.

Dhaka asks Delhi

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The BDR, meanwhile, foiled at least two more push-in attempts by the BSF along the Panchagarh and Benapole borders shared with West Bengal.

State-run news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) reported that at least 2,000 Bangla-speaking Indian nationals have been herded across the border by the BSF to push them into Bangladesh.

"We have had reports that they (BSF) are herding Indian Bangla speakers along the border in preparation for pushing them into Bangladesh," Morshed said. "There is an internationally accepted system of repatriating citizens of a country staying illegally in another country."

"But to shove people by their necks into another country is beyond all international rules and regulations," Morshed maintained.

He explained that under that internationally accepted system, if a country is aware of illegal entrance into its territory by a foreign national, then they would be found out and repatriated through official channels.

Morshed is set to fly to New Delhi on a two-day visit on October 31 to convey the official invitation for the 13th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) Summit to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

He is also expected to meet his counterpart Natwar Singh.

The foreign ministry letter follows BDR recommendations for a diplomatic solution to the recent rise of push-in of Indian nationals, sources say. The BDR report containing the recommendations was sent to both the home and foreign ministries Tuesday.

The BSF has made more than 10 push-in attempts since the start of this month alone, sources add.

BSS adds: The BDR foiled another push-in attempt by the BSF along the Panchagarh border last night amid rising tension. The border guards have been kept on high alert.

The BSS quoted a BDR official as saying that not only is the BSF yet to agree to hold a proposed flag meeting with the BDR, they also have brought nearly 180 Bengali-speaking Indian Muslims across the 757 Ghaghra border outpost in Panchagarh.

The BDR officials put at 2,000 the number of Bangla-speaking Indian nationals herded to different points across the border.

2 toll-takers

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from Bamongari of Mirpur upazila. Locals said a gang of eight went to extort Tk 1 lakh from the house of Mir Safi Mondol, a rice trader on Wednesday night. As the family members cried for help, villagers rushed there and ringed the house.

When the gang tried to flee the house, locals chased them and caught the two. They beat them to death, said witnesses.

Later, police recovered the bodies with a gun and three round bullets from the scene.

A case was filed in this connection yesterday.

In village Daulatkhalil of Daulatpur upazila, a seven-year-old girl was violated at about 5:00pm.

Police said when the girl, a student of class two in Daulatkhalil Primary School, while shepherding her goat to home from a nearby field, Anzu Ali 22, son of Gaffar Ali, forcibly took her to a sugar cane field and raped.

Later passers-by found her unconscious and bleeding.

Police yesterday sent the girl to Kusthia General Hospital for medical test. She was under treatment there till yesterday, police said.

A case was filed, but police could not arrest the culprit.

Law soon

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floodplains and other water bodies will now need approval from concerned institution or ministry.

The law titled the Rivers, Floodplains, Wetlands Conservation, Development, Reclamation and Landfill Control Act, 2004 will empower the authorities to take legal action against its violators.

The law will be tabled before the cabinet on December 17 after its review and scrutiny.

Food and Disaster Management Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain, Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah Al Noman, State Minister for Land Ukil Abdus Sattar Bhuiyan, State Minister for Environment and Forest Jafrul Islam Chowdhury and other high officials attended the cabinet meet.

2 wild elephants

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which had strayed away from a herd of about 20-25, came in contact with the live electric wire Monday night. The next night, a female elephant was electrocuted in the same way at another field, 200 yards away from the previous scene.

The elephants, believed to be a couple, were buried near the village after conducting autopsy and their tusks, weighing about 15 to 17 Kg, were sent to the local Forest Department office for preservation.

Deputy Commissioner Mohsena Ferdousi and Divisional Forest Officer Mia Abdul Latif visited the scene.

Local UP Chairman Yunus Ali Dewan said incidents of wild elephants foraging the rice-paddies in Nalitabari area have increased in last two years. The predators also killed seven people injuring over 50 others, and damaged houses, trees and crops worth about Tk 2 crores during last few years in the frontier district, sources said.

Environment NGOs including Social Development Organisation (SDO) and Sherpur-Plus Organisation (SPO) in separate statements protested killing of wild elephants by electrocuting.

International Nature Conservation Union (IUCN) country representative in Bangladesh Prof Ainun Nishat said the elephants were virtually trapped in Bangladesh due to unplanned interventions by the Indian authorities in the frontier areas erasing their movement tracks.

The Wildlife Society of Bangladesh demanded arrangement of corridors in the frontier for safe return of the "unwanted" elephants to their original habitat.

The organisations asked the government to take measures for declaring the Garo Hills a safe haven for wild animals. (BSS/UNB)

Mehedi's family

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BCC Mayor, out of business and political rivalry, had teamed up with a central Jubo Dal leader and successfully conspired to kill Mehedi, they alleged.

The central Jubo Dal leader, who is also a ruling party lawmaker, sent Mehedi to Barisal after assuring him that everything was done for his safety, but he was killed the day he returned to Barisal, added the agitated family members.

They claimed there was no specific criminal charge against Mehedi and a court had acquitted him of murder, a charge brought against him out of political vengeance.

Referring to recovery of arms and ammunition, they said it was all cleverly arranged by the Rab members.

In Charge of Rab sub unit in Barisal, Captain Mahdi, who led the drive against Mehedi, yesterday denied the allegations.

BCC Mayor and the central Jubo Dal leader could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Grisly murders

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found the bodies inside the trawler, which drifted onto the shore.

Nurul Alam, the lone survivor who came to the coast in another fishing boat, told the owner of the trawler that a dozen pirates attacked them at about 8pm Wednesday when the fishermen were sailing home.

"The gang killed 14 of us and threw the bodies into the ice chamber beneath the deck where we preserve fish. Then they nailed the wooden deck and fled with Hilsa worth Tk 1.5 lakh and fishing equipment," he said.

Hug said he had survived the grisly pirate attack by hiding in a toilet of the boat. The pirates hit the fishermen with sharp weapons before herding them into the ice chamber, he said.

Thirteen of the victims were identified as Mujibur Rahman, 35, Fazal Ahmed, 40, Abul Hossain, 42, Abdul Mannan, 15, Monjur Alam, 38, Md Ridwan, 18, Nurul Huda, 50, Nurul Kabir, 20, Md Haroon, 30, Jamal Hossain, 35, Md Idris, 34, Abul Kashem, 32, and Md Alam, 36.

All of them hailed from Sundari

Para village of Rajakhali union in Pekna upazila of the district. They set sail for fishing in the Bay on October 18.

All the bodies were sent to Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Acting Deputy Commissioner Aminul Islam after visiting the bodies asked the police to take necessary steps so that such incident do not occur in future.

Piracy is common in the Bay of Bengal, the source of fish for thousands of fishermen in the coastal areas.

Shahadat Ali, owner of the trawler, told the BBC Bangla Service last night that he came to know about the incident from a fisherman who survived. He however could not tell about the whereabouts of the survived fisherman.

The deputy commissioner told BBC that preliminary information indicated that it was an incident of piracy. "But things would be more clear if we find out the survived fisherman. We are now looking for him."

Uproar in Florida

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By "they," she meant Governor Jeb Bush -- a brother of the US president -- and other Republicans officials.

Bush supporters, on the other hand, accuse their rivals of sending in fake voter registrations.

The battle is all the more bitter as Bush and his Democratic rival John Kerry are in a deadlock in the southeast state.

And both sides bemoan the fact electoral authorities appear to be overwhelmed by the sheer number of people taking advantage of early voting that started on October 18 and is meant to ease the pressure on November 2.

In Palm Beach county, the focus of much of the five-week recount controversy in the last presidential, voters wait as long as three hours to cast their ballots.

Other than the long wait, poll workers and legal observers at a West Palm Beach voting office say they've noticed no irregularities. But like their counterparts in neighboring Broward county, they too field numerous questions about absentee ballot requested weeks ago but not yet received.

"There is a lot of anxiety about absentee ballots. There's an urgency," Sid Dinerstein, the county's Republican party leader, told AFP.

He said the long lines also are a problem -- he himself planned to vote early but turned back when he realized he'd have to wait for hours.

Democrats claim Florida authorities failed to plan properly for the election and did not send enough machines or pollworkers.

They largely blame the governor and Secretary of State Glenda Hood, both Republicans.

"Every single decision they make favors the Republican party," said Carol Ann Loehndorf, Democratic party chairwoman for Palm Beach county, pointing out that a low turnout would favor Republicans. Democrats have more registered voters in Florida than their rivals, but Republicans tend to have a better turnout.

Touring voting offices in Palm Beach county this week, Hood shrugged off such criticism.

"I'm very impressed with the organization and people's attitudes, that they're willing to stand in line for four hours to vote," said Hood, who oversees the state elections office.

Juliette Saintelien, for one, said she was determined to make her vote count. "We need to get Bush out. I don't mind if I stay here all night," she said, earning herself smiles and nods from other Kerry supporters.

Several hundred thousand people have already cast their votes across the state, taking about 10 minutes each to fill out the ballots, which include a slew of amendments, judicial and legislative races.

Inside the West Palm Beach voting office, voters sat behind 14 voting machines, using their fingers to mark their choices.

The touch-screen machines replace the infamous punch-card system

Escalating food price

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percent in August this year compared to 4.1 percent in August 2003.

The ADB in its 'Quarterly Economic Update' (QEU) Bangladesh September 2004' released yesterday said the escalation in food prices is the driving force in accelerating the inflation.

Price pressures are likely to heighten further in the coming months due to the combined effects of the devastating floods, which destroyed standing crops and vegetables and disrupted transportation, and the onset of Ramadan, the bank projected.

"Devastating floods caused extensive damage to the economy. For FY2005, GDP growth is estimated at 5 percent, 0.5 percentage point lower than the preceding year," said ADB Bangladesh Country Director Toru Shibuchi while launching the QEU at a media briefing at the bank's resident mission in the capital.

The pre-flood projection of GDP growth for FY2005 was 6 percent.

Speaking at the briefing, Rezaul Karim Khan, a senior economist of the bank, said the deluge affecting about 38 percent of Bangladesh caused extensive damage to standing crops, physical and social infrastructure, environment and livelihood of some 36 million people.

The flood damages are primarily estimated at about \$2.2 billion or 3.9 percent of the GDP.

Speaking at the briefing, Rezaul Karim Khan, a senior economist of the bank, said in August 2004 the annual average inflation increased to 5.9 percent from 4.6 percent in August 2003, and can even go up to 6.5 percent.

On a point-to-point basis, inflation increased to 5.5 percent in August 2004 from 5.1 percent in August 2003, he said, adding price pressures are expected to exacerbate more due to the international price spiral, the aftermath of floods and onset of Ramadan.

In contrast, non-food prices have registered a decline from 5.2 percent in August 2003 to 4.4 percent in August last.

In FY2005, industrial growth is likely to be 6.3 percent, or 1.4 percent lower than the 7.7 percent growth in FY2004, the update said, adding the slippage in growth will be mainly because of flood-induced dislocation of production of the small and medium scale enterprises.

On foreign trade, the update said the surge in exports continued in FY2005 with year-on-year export rising by 26.4 percent in July-August 2004, mainly due to robust performance of knitwear and garments. The impacts of forthcoming Multi-fibre Arrangement phase-out and the flood

damages to knitwear and other export oriented manufacturing are yet to be reflected in export growth, the bank observed.

In case of balance of trade and payments, the QEU however apprehends that the current account in FY2005 is expected to post a deficit of 1.5 percent of GDP compared with a surplus of 0.3 percent in the previous fiscal. The bank is of the opinion that, despite pressures, the fiscal and current account deficits would likely be within manageable limits.

The foreign exchange reserves further increased to \$3.1 billion, or 3.5 months of imports equivalent, on September 30 providing ample cushioning against external shocks, it added.

Rezaul K Khan said the agriculture growth during FY2005 would slip to 2 percent from the steady 2.7 percent during the preceding year due to the flood-induced setback in summer crops, vegetables, fisheries and animal husbandry.

The service sector, mainly reflecting the deceleration in growth in industry and agriculture, this year is also likely to show a slightly lower growth at 5.5 percent instead of the 5.7 percent in the previous year, the QEU added.

The ADB update also emphasised the country's need to upgrade its infrastructure and address governance issues, including law-and-order and corruption.

Tangail JCD leader killed

UNB, Tangail

District Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) Vice-President Abdur Rouf was shot and hacked to death by unknown assailants in front of his Par Digulia residence in the town Wednesday night.

Rouf was going out at about midnight when 5 or 7 gunmen shot on his head from a close range. As he fell down, the assailants hacked him to ascertain his death.

Locals and police said Rouf was accused in nine criminal cases including the murder of JCD leader Rouf Bappi. He used to spend nights in others' houses.

Rumi Chowdhury, a close aide of Rouf, was shot dead in a similar style on October 14 in his College Para home in the town.

Blaming Awami League for the murder of Rouf, JCD activists brought out procession, held rally and damaged some shops and passing vehicles.

Special Public Prosecutor Abdul Latif Talukder and advocates Mahbub Ahmed, Sahara Khatun, M Sajwar Hossain, Mohammad Ali, Kamrul Islam and Abdur Rahman Howlader opposed it. They prayed for fixing the trial date in accordance with the law.

On hearing both sides, the judge set November 2 for trial of the case.

Earlier, the tribunal issued warrants of arrest against absconding Dipu and 17 others.

Gunmen shot and killed Ahsanullah Master at a rally of Awami Svecchhasebak League, the volunteer front of Awami League, at Noagoon near the legislator's house in Tongi on May 7. Schoolboy Omar Faruq Ratan was also killed and at least five others were wounded in the incident.

The slain lawmaker's brother, Motiur Rahman, filed a case with Tongi Police Station the following day, accusing 17 for the assassination.

The Criminal Investigation Department on July 10 brought charges against 30 and charged Sarker with masterminding the assassination. The charge sheet cites 78 people as prosecution witnesses.