

Sunny gets 37-yr jail in arms case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced military commander of the banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) Ataur Rahman Sunny to 37 years' rigorous imprisonment (RI) in a case for possessing firearms and ammunition.

The court also heard a case against him under the Explosive Substances Act but did not give its verdict. Sunny pleaded guilty in both the cases.

Earlier on February 9, a Barisal court sentenced him to 40 years' RI in a case under the same Act for killing two judges in Jhalakathi on November 14 last year.

Judge Mohammad Monzurul Bachhid of the Fourth Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court yesterday gave the verdict in the case filed under the Arms Act.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) produced Sunny and six others before the court at 11:30am

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REB subscribers victims of 'unusual' expansion

Consumer base doubles in 5 yrs, but supply one-fourth of demand

SHARIER KHAN

While the government has miserably failed to increase power generation significantly, the Rural Electrification Board (REB) has doubled its consumer base to 3 crore from 1.5 crore in the last five years, most of whom do not get power even for a few hours a day.

The REB now demands 1,900 megawatt (MW) power a day on an average due to the high growth of power distribution network. But it gets only around 500 MW for 3 crore consumers who use 6 million meters (connections) through the 70 Palli Bidyut Samities (PBSs), and they pay very high tariff and line charges.

Consequently, the PBSs are facing the wrath of agitated consumers across the country. "The Kansat incident is only the tip of the iceberg," said a highly placed REB source.

"There is no satisfactory power supply but the PBSs are charging for the power lines because each of the PBSs has financial liabilities of over Tk 100 crore which it must repay to the government within five years. The consumers may want to pay more to get uninterrupted power supply. But they don't want to pay a single taka for dysfunctional service," the source added.

Sources say the REB's unusual expansion of power distribution

network in the last five years has mainly served the purpose of ruling coalition politicians, and vendors who supply overpriced power distribution equipment. But the 70 PBSs under the REB are now facing massive financial liabilities due to such expansion.

The REB is annually spending between Tk 400 crore and 500 crore to expand the power distribution network. "This cost could be easily halved by dropping some overpriced items like concrete poles and locally manufactured transformers," said a REB high official. "And the government should have complemented this growth by adding at least 800 MW to 1,000 MW power to the national grid,

exclusively for the REB consumers."

Meanwhile, the 30-year-old REB's image with the international community is also getting tarnished and donors have nearly stopped funding its development schemes for the last two years.

This situation arose because only 15 or 16 out of the 70 PBSs now earn profit and the remaining ones are being subsidised by the government.

Ironically, the REB buys power from the PDB at a very low rate of Tk 2.05 per kilowatt hour and sells it for Tk 3.5 to Tk 4, which is the highest individual consumer rate in the country.

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FIGHTER PURCHASE

\$9m spending unexplained

SHAKHAWAT LITON

A Bangladesh Airforce report reveals at least \$9 million expenditure remains unaccounted for in the recent procurement of 16 Chinese F-7 fighters.

In the report, submitted to the parliamentary standing committee on defence ministry last Sunday, the airforce headquarters claims a \$24.3 million extra-expenditure over the basic price of the fighters due to the "increased costs of other items and shipment of the aircraft by sea".

But, the report itself mentions that the vendor's offer for the "other items" and shipping, in addition to its budgetary offer for

the planes, was \$15.4 million. This extra-amount later rose by \$9 million for unexplained reasons in a revised deal, which the airforce claims had brought down the price.

The shipping cost is also becomes irrelevant, as the report itself says that instead of transporting them by ship, Bangladesh pilots flew in eight of the fighters on March 29.

"Since our pilots flew the aircraft in to Dhaka, at least 3 million dollars should have been saved in shipment cost," a former airforce chief told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity. He termed the procurement process highly objectionable.

The \$117.9 million cost the

airforce reports is also very much higher than the \$93.6 million Water Resources Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, who looks after the defence ministry's parliamentary affairs, told the Jatiya Sangsad on February 22.

Though the unusual cost hike has become a subject of much talk, speculation, and rumour, the defence ministry remains mum and is yet to clarify the issue to end the scandal.

Senior officials at the ministry have been discussing the issue since a Daily Star report last Monday mentioned the price discrepancy, sources said, adding the ministry has not decided yet

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A policeman, left, clubs a Jubo Mahila League activist in front of photojournalists on Dhanmondi Road-27 in the capital during the opposition-called hartal yesterday. Another policeman grabs the scarf of a Jubo Mahila League activist and she tries to snatch his shotgun.



PHOTO: STAR

Clashes mark hartal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sporadic clashes between the police and pro-hartal activists in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country left over 100 people injured during yesterday's dawn to dusk shutdown enforced by the mainstream opposition parties.

Educational institutions, markets, shops and many private offices remained closed as the countrywide hartal caused severe disruptions to city life.

Awami League (AL) led 14-party opposition alliance along with the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and five left parties called the shutdown, protesting the Kansat killings, police attacks on journalists in Chittagong, price hike of essentials, and demanding reforms in the caretaker government and electoral systems.

The law enforcers arrested 14 activists of the opposition parties on charge of violent picketing in the city.

Motorised vehicles kept off the roads while rickshaws moved unhindered in the capital and

other major cities. Bus communications between the capital and other districts remained suspended while rail and launch services operated as usual.

The opposition combine brought out separate processions in the capital and elsewhere in the country supporting the shutdown.

CLASHES IN THE CAPITAL
Over 70 people including women activists of the opposition combine were injured in clashes with police at different parts in the city. As the pickets threw brickbats at police, police fired rubber bullets and teargas shells and charged batons to disperse them.

Demonstrators set fire to a number of vehicles and damaged a police vehicle in the city.

Tofail Ahmed, Rashed Khan Menon, Moynuddin Khan Badal, AKM Rahmat Ullah and other leaders of the opposition combine brought out a procession from Gulshan-1 roundabout at 7:30am. The police intercepted the procession in front of Titumir College as it

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Nepali protesters defy king and curfew

3 more marchers shot dead

AFF, Kathmandu

Police shot dead three people and wounded scores more yesterday as tens of thousands of pro-democracy demonstrators defied shoot-on-sight curfew orders in Kathmandu, a doctor and witnesses said.

"Three of at least 40 injured protesters brought into the hospital have died," said Dr. Deepak Regmi from Kathmandu's Model Hospital.

"Most of the injured had bullet wounds. About 12 are in serious condition," he added. "We are struggling to treat so many people. Because of the curfew we do not have many doctors."

"More injured are coming in but they are having to lie on the floor." Some 35 people were injured in

the capital's northern suburb of Gongabu when police beat back a huge crowd with bamboo sticks, an AFP reporter said.

At Kalanki, on the west side of the capital, police using self-loading rifles aimed and fired in the direction of the massed protesters, a photographer said.

Witnesses and a human rights activist said they saw at least one man dead, as well as a woman and child apparently lifeless.

Tear gas was also fired and at least three men had been beaten unconscious during a baton charge, the photographer added.

Thousands upon thousands of pro-democracy activists shouting slogans against King Gyanendra

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ATTACK ON JOURNOS Govt decides to form judicial probe body

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday decided to form a one-member judicial enquiry commission to probe the police atrocities on journalists at Bir Sreshtha Shaheed Ruhul Amin Stadium in Chittagong on April 16.

A seven-member body was also constituted to suggest compensation and treatment for the journalists after assessing the damage.

Following successful talks between the Sangbadik-Sramik-Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SSKOP) and the government, who had been boycotting the coverage of Bangladesh-Australia second Test match, withdrew all agitation

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CONTEMPT OF COURT

Moudud explains need for updated law

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK and SHAMIM ASHRAF

As crosswalks of people including jurists are strongly criticising the government's move to protect its officials from strong punishment for contempt of court, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed yesterday opposed the idea of dismissing government servants for being contemptuous of the court.

"Why should a government servant who has been serving for 25 to 30 years lose his job for committing an act that could be counted as a contempt of court?" Moudud asked.

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Law Minister Moudud Ahmed

Grisly 'sacrifice'

7-year-old boy slain to 'protect' building

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

She had a dream -- if she does not offer a child's blood to the six-storey house her husband was building, it would collapse. She persuaded a young welder of the construction crew into kidnapping and slaughtering a 7-year-old boy on the second floor of the building. The blood bath, she believed, would appease the spirit at the construction site at Rupnagar, Pallabi, in the city.

The fortyish woman, Anwara Begum, has three children of her own. Her husband Habibullah is a senior official of Islami Bank working at its head office. She promised Ratan, the 25-year-old welder, Tk 50,000 as reward for

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim



Shazneen Tasnim Rahman

SHAZNEEN'S 8TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY
APRIL 23, 2006

Shazneen would have now been a young woman of 23 years, well on her way to take on the challenges of life. However, that was not to be!

It is that time of the year that returns to remind us of the most dreaded and fateful day of our lives, 23rd April 1998, the day our beautiful, sprightly and loving Shazneen fell victim to the most murderous and vile acts that snuffed the light of her young 15 years life.

The six perpetrators involved in the heinous crime were convicted to death by the Learned Trial Court on 2nd September 2003. The case has now come up before the Honourable High Court Division where it is being heard. We can only hope and pray to Allah for justice.

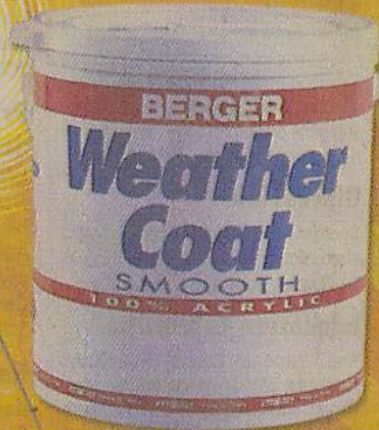
We are indeed indebted to you, our relatives, friends and well-wishers, for the sympathy, support and prayers which have sustained us over the last eight years. Please accept our heartfelt thanks and gratitude.

Relatives, friends and well-wishers are requested to join us at a Milad-Mehfil to be held **tomorrow, Saturday, April 22** after Asr (5:30pm) at House No. NE(J)4 Road No. 83, Gulshan-2, Dhaka.

Latifur Rahman, Shahnaz Rahman and family

One Time Paint for Many Seasons

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THE SCIENCE OF WEATHERPROOFING

SAFTA MEET

Roadmap to reduce tariff okayed

India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka to lower duty 40pc this year

JASIM UDDIN KHAN

The first Safta Ministerial Council (SMC) meeting approved the time-based roadmap suggested by the Committee of Experts (CoE) to start tariff concession under the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (Safta) from this year.

According to the CoE roadmap, the developing countries--India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka--will lower the customs duty by 40 per cent in 2006 for products originating from the least developed countries--Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and the Maldives--under the Safta.

The developing countries will

lower the duty by a further 30 per cent in 2007 before eliminating it in 2008.

The least developed countries, on their part, will lower the duty by five per cent in 2006, another five per cent in 2007 before phasing it out between December 31, 2008 and December 31, 2015, for products from the developing countries.

According to the roadmap, the developed countries will slash the duty by 10 per cent from July 1 and a further 30 per cent from December 31.

The decision of the committee is needed to be approved by the appropriate authorities of the

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