

Mugging spree

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while hijacking a timber-laden truck in Mirpur on July 17 -- at Pongu Hospital at around 10:00pm Sunday night.

Shafiqul and Mostoba said muggers snatched away Tk 55,000 and three mobile phonesets from them.

Delwar Hossain, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Kafur Police Station said the shop-keeper of Brothers' Furniture claimed that the muggers also took away Tk30,000 from cash and fired several rounds of gunshots.

Khokan, a customer, accompanying the two injured said four muggers, riding on two motorcycles, shot at Shafiqul and snatched the money and mobile handsets. When Mostoba tried to catch the muggers, they stabbed him.

On the other hand, Mohammad Maniruzzaman, OC of Jatrabari Police Station, said Ratul, 22, was shot when his accomplices started shooting at police forcing them to retaliate. He received two bullet shots on his two legs.

Besides, Rafiqul's family members claimed he is a retired sergeant of Bangladesh Air Force. They also claimed he is president of Sayedabad-Balughat Bus Owners' Association and also an owner of "Landmark" contraction firm.

"He was returning home at Mirpur-10 along with his manager Zahirul Islam Zahir around 2.00 am on July 17," Rafiqul's brother-in-law Manzurul Karim Khan told The Daily Star "A speeding truck hit his motorcycle. Then he had an altercation with truck driver and slapped him."

He added, "Patrol police came to the scene when the truck driver and his helper shouted saying dacoits had attacked them. The policemen laid Rafiqul and his manager

Opposition claims 'massive fraud' in Mauritania polls

AFP, Nouakchott

Mauritanian's opposition Monday denounced 'massive fraud' during Saturday's presidential election and issued a challenge to former junta leader Mohammed Ould Abdel Aziz, who claims victory.

The National Front for the Defence of Democracy (FNDD) coalition said that a working commission was currently gathering evidence of the fraud, to present it to the constitutional council, according to spokesman Mohamed Ould Mouloud.

"This verification operation will doubtlessly enable us to provide tangible evidence of the massive fraud and to register our complaint within the legal delay," Ould Mouloud said.

Moudud

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recommended withdrawal of a case filed against one of the BNP bigwigs considering it to be "politically motivated" and meant for "harassment".

One of the six cases filed against former law minister and BNP leader Moudud Ahmed during the caretaker government is now awaiting withdrawal. The MPP also recommended withdrawal of a corruption case filed during the previous AL regime against former food minister and BNP leader Mir Shawkat Ali.

BNP chairperson and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia and her family members had also submitted applications for withdrawal of 20 cases filed against them during the caretaker government regime. Other BNP leaders and activists had filed petitions for withdrawal of 80 more cases filed against them during the same time.

However, the government is yet to decide about the cases filed against Khaleda Zia and her family members.

"I'm king to The Daily Star MPP Mohammad Abdullah said, "I scrutinised the dockets and case documents and made the recommendation for the case withdrawal."

In his recommendation, the MPP said all the cases were filed just to harass them and to tarnish their image in the political arena.

The joint forces arrested Moudud on April 13, 2007 and later a case under Section 25(B) of the Special Powers Act, 1974 for smuggling in contraband foreign liquors.

Five more cases were filed against him.

Meanwhile, the government decided to withdraw over 243 cases filed against Sheikh Hasina and other political leaders. But it rejected the petitions for withdrawal of 25 cases as those were filed on charges of theft, robbery, murder and rape.

Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia and many other political leaders had petitioned for withdrawal of 2,781 cases filed against them.

on the ground taking them to a little distance and shot."

But Shahjahan Khan, acting OC of Mirpur Police Station said alleged criminal Rafiqul Alam and his accomplice threw the driver and helper out of the timber-laden truck.

He said Rafiqul sustained bullet wounds during a gun battle between police and his accomplice while they were fleeing with the truck.

Police recovered a pipe gun, a knife and three machetes from Rafiqul and his accomplice's possession, he added.

Shahjahan Khan said the truck was coming from Kustia.

Jalil may quit

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Sheikh Hasina seeking permission to get involved in the preparations for the national council, sources said. He became very frustrated after the AL chief did not respond to his message, they added.

Party insiders said AL Joint General Secretary and LGRD Minister Syed Ashraful Islam is coordinating preparations for the national council although the party constitution does not allow him to do so. As per the party constitution Jalil was supposed to carry out the responsibility.

According to the AL constitution, if the general secretary is absent from work, his/her functions and responsibilities shall be vested in the joint general secretaries on orderly basis. In this case, AL's first Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader was supposed to coordinate the council as acting general secretary. However, he has been made convenor of the council management sub-committee.

After his release from jail before the ninth parliamentary elections, Jalil was assigned to the post of general secretary but was not allowed to function. Annoyed by the party leadership in several occasions saying that the party constitution was being violated.

"I think something serious has happened between the party chief and Jalil rather than his letter and criticism as there is no problem with four other senior leaders Amu, Razzak, Tofail and Suranjit," said an AL leader seeking anonymity. The situation could have been handled in a different manner, he added.

Ministers asked

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however disputed that Hasina had vented frustration at the meeting. Rather, he said, it was a very cordial discussion.

The cabinet approved raising the retirement age for workers and employees to 60 years, up from 57. It also discussed increasing benefits for the government officials.

Hasina, also president of AL, sought everyone's cooperation to make July 24 council successful.

SOHELA ISSUE

At the meeting, the prime minister said it was sad to see Tanjim Ahmad Sohel Taj resign the post of state minister for home affairs, highly placed government sources told The Daily Star.

She wanted to know from her colleagues what they thought was the reason Sohel had stepped down.

"I need to know why he has resigned," a minister quoted Hasina as saying.

No-one said much in reply. Sohel Taj, also AL lawmaker from Kapasia, on Sunday confirmed that he tendered resignation on May 31.

Talking to The Daily Star from the US that day he said his resignation took effect immediately as far as the constitution is concerned.

Asked to explain the reasons behind his decision, he only said things did not work out the way he wanted.

The sources said the prime minister told the cabinet that she has very good relations with Sohel and his family. "He is young and bright and supposed to lead the country in years to come," one source quoted her as saying.

A member of the ministerial council told The Daily Star, "Sohel was given an important position like state minister for home because she [Hasina] wanted him to be groomed for the future leadership."

Shab-e-Meraj

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prayers seeking divine blessings.

The Islamic Foundation and different other religious organisations held discussions, milad mahfil and Quran Khwani highlighting the significance of the night.

Law suit

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Some of those who had earlier filed cases against The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo are BNP Secretary General Khondaker Delwar Hossain, Salauddin Qader Chowdhury, parliamentary affairs adviser to the then prime minister Khaleda Zia, former energy adviser Mahmudur Rahman, former housing and public works minister Mirza Abbas and former BNP lawmaker Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu.

They had filed 16 defamation cases and civil cases against The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam, Prothom Alo Editor and Publisher Motiur Rahman and several other senior journalists for news items concerning them on different dates.

On April 2 in 2006, Delwar filed a defamation case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka against Mahfuz Anam, Motiur Rahman and two others for news reports about him.

On February 6 in 2007, Mahmudur Rahman filed a defamation case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka against Mahfuz Anam, Motiur Rahman and two others for news reports about him.

He also filed a damages suit on March 12 the same year against the same persons with the Fourth Joint District Judge's Court claiming Tk 25 crore as compensation for a report relating to him.

Moreover, former BNP lawmaker from Khagrachhari Abdul Wadud Bhuiyan filed 19 defamation cases in a day against the Prothom Alo editor and publisher, and its local correspondent.

On June 11 in 2003, Salauddin Quader Chowdhury filed a defamation case against Mahfuz Anam, Motiur Rahman and Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil for a report about him.

Mirza Abbas and Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu filed five defamation cases against Mahfuz Anam, Motiur Rahman and several other journalists for news items on different dates during the BNP-led alliance rule.

Besides, Khamba Ltd, a private firm, a Jamaat leader and a Jatiya Party leader filed separate defamation and civil suits for news reports on different dates.

Former additional attorney general Abdul Wadud Khondaker (late) filed a defamation case against Mahfuz Anam for a news item.

Indian HC

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Relations at a hotel in the city yesterday.

"We have to be circumspect in issuing visas particularly when we know that around 25,000 Bangladeshis do not return after entering India every year. Those who enter unrecorded are many more. Our concern about illegal migrants cannot be brushed aside," said Pinak.

"Bangladesh government could, perhaps, consider discussing this issue with us," Pinak said at the seminar jointly organised by the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) on the occasion of visit by a 50-member high-powered Indian business delegation.

Harsh C Mariwala, vice-president of FICCI, is leading the delegation.

The Indian High Commissioner said inadequate connectivity is a major impediment to the economic development in the region. "It adds to cost in doing business which needs to be addressed without delay," he added.

He continued that better connectivity could also include linking of national power grids, construction of gas pipelines, improved telecommunications links and information highways.

"It is encouraging to note that Bangladesh's exports to India have expanded more than five times--from \$62 million in 2000-01 to \$358 million in 2007-08. This indicates that the business community in Bangladesh is increasingly looking towards India, and is tapping potential market access opportunities. We welcome this trend," Pinak said.

Two-way trade has grown and crossed \$3.7 billion mark in 2007-08, he said.

As per statistics from the Indian Ministry of Commerce, in 2007-8 fiscal year Bangladesh's import from India was \$2.918 billion and export to India \$257.12 million.

The Daily Star, Prothom Alo

FROM PAGE 1
maligned his industries in order to prevent the materialisation of his companies' ambitious growth plans.

We thoroughly reject this accusation and firmly state that we strongly adhere to the highest standards of ethical journalism and its norms. We have never reported on Beximco group of Companies without relevant proof and carried their versions and comments.

The fact is that Bangladesh has long suffered from the culture of loan default that has forced banks to charge one of the highest rates of interest in the world, preventing thousands of entrepreneurs from borrowing and investing. The default culture has been one of the biggest, if not the biggest, impediments to the growth of private sector in the country.

In perpetuating the malaise of default culture Beximco has been one of the oldest and by far the biggest player, being among the biggest defaulters over last two decades, totalling thousands of crores of takas.

Most naturally therefore Beximco Group of companies deserves and receives a very strict scrutiny from the conscious and independent media of the country as it does from The Daily Star and Prothom Alo among others.

The recent media attention was focused on them when DSE investigated the sudden share trading of a Z category company, Bextex, just before its AGM and declaration of dividend.

Regarding Salman Rahman's terming our reports as not correct on the point of declaration of dividend and asset re-evaluation, our reports were based on what the Dhaka Stock Exchange mentioned in its website, which can be still viewed today. Neither The Daily Star nor Prothom Alo had made its own judgment.

About the allegation of insider trading, we never accused Salman F Rahman or Beximco of indulging in it. Our report pointed out the unusual trading on that stock by two banks in close proximity of dividend declaration.

Our report only brought out these facts to alert the public which we thought to be our journalistic duty to protect the interest of the investors. In the report we also mentioned that some people had called it a clever investment decision while others doubted it as insider trading. We must keep in focus the fact that Beximco owners were earlier directors of the said banks in question and had taken out crores of taka through over a hundred fake accounts in the 1990s which the Bangladesh Bank later detected. Both Salman and Sohel F Rahman had to step down from the boards of the banks as a consequence. Our attention to this company's share trading was also

drawn from the past record of Beximco when it along with other companies was accused of the 1996 share scam by the Securities and Exchange Commission. The share scam case against Beximco is still in court.

About his allegation on mentioning Bextex shares as junk, we would like to point out that junk shares refer to Z-category or low-performing shares in Bangladesh. The only financial newspaper in the country, The Financial Express, also refers Z-category shares as 'junk shares'. It is also an international practice as evidenced by international rating agencies using the word "junk" to describe stocks or bonds that lose investment grade. In such ratings, the raters cite weak earnings that may lead a company to defer dividend payments on securities. In a March 5, 2009 report, Fitch Ratings cut its ratings on UBS' preferred shares into junk territory and said it may cut them further. Fitch cited increased risks in the European bank's shares.

About Salman Rahman's allegation of negatively projecting Beximco Pharmaceutical's deal with Gem Global, we reported that this Cayman Islands-registered company is of little repute and has cases against it in Hong Kong. Its sudden involvement in our capital market with hot money naturally deserves media attention, which we did with the purpose of protecting our investors and the country's economy.

Salman Rahman in his written statement made reference to Transcom Group and its owner Latifur Rahman. The public clearly knows that The Daily Star and Prothom Alo are run by professional editors and the owners have nothing to do with the content of the paper. That is why these two papers have earned the readership support that they have. The hint that our reporting could be a result of anything other than professional journalism is totally untrue.

As for Salman F Rahman's response to the Amar Desh question that The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo were the architects of the 'Minus Two' theory, we categorically deny it and consider it as his desperate attempt to divert public attention from the doings of his own companies. For example, a DSE website post on July 13 mentions that the SEC has formed an enquiry team to enquire certain unusual trading of shares of Bextex Ltd on the stock exchange.

We reiterate our commitment to uphold 'public's right to know' and protect the interest of investors and that of the economy.

(Mahfuz Anam) (Abdul Quayum)
Editor Joint Editor
The Daily Star on behalf of
Motiur Rahman
Editor
Prothom Alo

their involvement in various militant activities, have jumped bail.

Three other leaders Maulana Sheikh Farid, Maulana Abdul Hye and Mufti Shafiqur Rahman are accused in the Ramna Batamul blast case and are now on the run.

Members of an intelligence agency had picked up Sheikh Salam on March 23 at his home in Bashundhara Residential Area in connection with the CPB rally blast that killed five people at Paltan Maidan on January 20, 2001.

The government outlawed Huji in October, 2005. The militant group carried out several bomb and grenade attacks between 1998 and 2004. It is also blacklisted by the US and the UK.

Abdus Salam led a group of Afghan war returnees to launch Huji at a press conference at the National Press Club on April 30, 1992.

PM asks

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there are many secretaries and ministers who had taken primary education from such primary school teachers. "Then how such teachers can be declared disqualified?"

Earlier, years back, court had declared 21522 teachers disqualified, as they did not have PGCE.

The cabinet meeting also approved The Local Government (UP) Act 2009, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Novo Theatre Act 2009, Bangladesh Labour (Amendment) Ordinance 2009, and The Mobile Club Act 2009.

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Act quick

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living in the surrounding areas.

The HC bench of Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain and Justice Quamrul Islam Siddiqui passed the order upon a writ petition filed by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA).

Bela's counsel Advocate Iqbal Kabir Litan said yesterday that unscrupulous traders are quarrying stones from the three rivers at Jafong and Bholaganj areas in Sylhet, damaging the land and natural ecosystem of the rivers.

The writ petition was filed as public interest litigation seeking directions from the HC upon the government to stop the operation of the mechanised excavators, and also to remove the same from the rivers to protect natural ecosystems of the rivers, and the lives, property and livelihoods of the people living in those areas.

Iqbal Kabir pointed out that after the HC direction, traders can continue quarrying stones from the rivers in the traditional way, which is without the use of mechanised excavators.

Save rivers

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factories at city's Hazaribagh, dyeing factories, and Water Supply and Sewerage Authority are behind pollution. We need to take concerted efforts to address this issue," Prof Sayeed told reporters at the Jatiya Sangsad media centre after the meet.

Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, chairman of Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, said the government has to make a promise that it will protect the rivers and environment.

He also stressed the need for setting up a single authority to deal with environment and river issues.

The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam said, "We need a clear, transparent and comprehensive legal framework to save the rivers and environment."

He demanded a firm declaration from the government to protect the rivers and environment from pollution.

"We don't want a single inch of river banks to be grabbed or a single gallon of river waters to be polluted anymore," he said.

Bela Director (Programme) Syeda Rizwana Hasan said the environment issues did not get priority on the agenda of any governments. She recommended that the sub-committee take steps to amend the constitution giving priority to environment.

She added, "The existing laws are often not enough to protect our rivers and environment as we seldom see their strict application."

The Bela director recommended amending the laws, if necessary, to give exemplary punishment to offenders.

Laskar leader

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Daily Star that they are quizzing Obaidullah about all the attacks, including AL rally on August 21, Ramna Batamul and Udichi blasts, and Huji's links to the attacks.

He said Obaidullah is denying his involvement in all the attacks in Bangladesh and claiming himself an 'ideological leader' of Laskar-e-Taiyeba.

"But he keeps mum when we ask him about the relationship between Huji and Laskar-e-Taiyeba," the DC-DB said adding, "He is a strong-hearted militant leader and therefore it is hard to extract information from him about his financial support and his network."

Monirul Islam, however, said Mufti Obaidullah had close relationship with Huji leaders Moulana Tajuddin, Mufti Hannan, Mufti Abdur Rouf and Moulana Abdus Salam.

Sources said intelligence personnel are conducting drives at different Huji dens to nab the Laskar-e-Taiyeba leaders as leaders of both the organisations are ideologically the same and they have close links to each other.

DB Inspector Ruhul Amin, investigation officer of the case filed against Mufti Obaidullah, told The Daily Star that they, along with Obaidullah, conducted drives at different places of Savar, Gazipur, Keraniganj and other areas adjacent to the capital.

He also said several teams are conducting drives to nab the accomplices of Obaidullah.

Mufti Obaidullah had been serving as a teacher of a madrasa in Shibchar of Madaripur district using his fake identity. Earlier he was a teacher of four other madrasas in Moulavibazar, Munshiganj, Jessore and Dhaka.

Now he is being quizzed under the Taskforce Intelligence cell after being taken on seven days' remand.

Our Madaripur correspondent reports: Shibchar police are verifying the identities of the teachers of different madrasas to find out whether Obaidullah has any other associates there.

Officer-in-Charge Abdul Jalil of the police station said they are looking into whether any other madrasa teachers are linked to the Laskar-e-Taiyeba.

Mumbai attacker

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no firing from the police side."

Prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam told reporters outside court that Kasab had realised "the cat was out of the bag" after 134 witnesses gave evidence against him since the trial began in April.

DNA, fingerprint and closed-circuit television evidence was also produced in court.

Nikam linked the confession to the forthcoming trial in Pakistan of five men accused of involvement in the attacks, including key Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) operatives Zazar Shah and Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, the alleged mastermind.

LeT, a banned, Pakistan-based Islamist group, is said to have trained, equipped and financed the November 26-29 attacks, which targeted luxury hotels, Mumbai's main railway station, a popular restaurant and Jewish centre.

The attacks, which injured more than 300 people and left 26 foreign nationals dead, frayed already strained relations between India and Pakistan and sparked international condemnation.

Ashok Chavan, the chief minister of Maharashtra state, of which Mumbai is the capital, welcomed Kasab's guilty plea and told the NDTV news channel: "All those involved in the 26/11 attacks should be hanged."

Sadashiv Chandrakant Kolake, 35, was hit by shrapnel from a grenade at CST station. He lost his job as a hotel waiter while he was receiving treatment for his injuries.

"Everybody knows he (Kasab) did it," he told AFP. "He should be punished."

Before the trial, Kasab's lawyer Abbas Kazmi told AFP in an interview that he faced a "nearly impossible task"

EC moves

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in the task.

Non-resident Bangladeshis have been demanding opportunities for becoming voters forlong.

Following Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's recent announcement that expatriate Bangladeshis will be registered as voters, the EC decided to proceed with the plan again.

On electoral reforms, the EC asked its officials to prepare a report comparing the differences between the ordinance through which changes were brought to the RPO by the immediate past caretaker government and the bill that was passed in the parliament in February this year ratifying the changes in the RPO. The RPO bill passed in the parliament however also brought some changes in the provisions of the ordinance.

The EC Secretariat officials said on completion of the comparison, proposals will be drafted for amending the RPO again.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda on Sunday said the amendment proposals will be drafted in light of the experience gathered through holding of the last parliamentary election.

The CEC last afternoon also said the commission will send a proposal to the government to extend the July 25 deadline for political parties' submission of ratified constitutions to the EC, before the current deadline is over.

India, US agree

FROM