

Aid workers free in Darfur after 'kidnap'

AFP, Khartoum

Two Sudanese staffers of Libya's Kadhafi Foundation who had been reported kidnapped in Darfur are free, Sudan's state minister for humanitarian affairs told AFP yesterday, saying they had never been abducted.

"I have just contacted the security people at El-Fasher (capital of north Darfur). The two Sudanese from the Kadhafi Foundation were freed after half an hour. It was a misunderstanding," Abdel Bajit Gilani said, adding that they had never been kidnapped but declining to elaborate.

Sudanese intelligence services also insisted that the two men had not been abducted, according to a senior official with the UN-African Union peacekeeping force.

The source told AFP that the intelligence services informed the joint force that the two men had been briefly detained by a group of armed men in the suburbs of El-Fasher on Wednesday, questioned and then released.

There were no further details on why they had been seized.

Kadhafi Foundation officials earlier reported that the men, whose names were not given, had been kidnapped. They maintained their insistence on this, even after Gilani's announcement.

The pair were project leaders for the Association of the Brothers of the South, an arm of the foundation run by Kadhafi's son Seif al-Islam, association director Mashaallah Zaoui said.

They were snatched as they supervised projects in Darfur, Zaoui said, without giving other details.

On Thursday the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

announced that one of its employees, Gauthier Lefevre, a Frenchman who also holds British nationality, had been abducted in Darfur.

Rab personnel tortured Masum after he had asked about the identities of the Rab men who were plain clothes.

Talking to The Daily Star, Masum narrated how brutally the Rab personnel tortured him.

"They beat me up from my legs to my head and threatened to kill me," Masum said, adding, "They also mounted pressure on me to say that I am a drug peddler and threatened that they would kill me if I did not say that I am a drug peddler."

The Daily Star tried several times to contact Flight Lt Anis for his comment but he could not be reached.

The New Age authorities yesterday held a meeting at the office where they condemned the incident and demanded exemplary punishment to the Rab personnel involved.

The meeting also blamed Rab for "planting some bottles of Phensidyl under Masum's bed" and condemned "Rab threats to have him killed in crossfire".

Talking to The Daily Star, Rab Director General Hassan Mahmood Khandaker said the probe committee has been formed to find out facts and take measures against the Rab members involved.

The muggers fired shots at Sachin Chandra Barman, 24, of Securex Private Ltd at Nurer Chala, Badda, at about 6:15am while he was returning home. They took away his mobile phone set, wristwatch and money, said Sachin's family members and police.

Locals took him to a clinic. Later, he was shifted to the DMCH where the on-duty doctor declared him dead at about 9:45am.

In another incident, criminals fired shots at Khairul Islam, a mineral water trader, and took away Tk 12,000 from him early in the morning.

He was admitted to the DMCH.

Besides, a gang of muggers stabbed a kabab shop employee and snatched away Tk 3,400 from him at Bibi Bagicha early yesterday.

Hizb ut-Tahrir men

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regard, he added.

Home Minister Sahara Khatun on Thursday said the organisation has been banned because of its activities that go against the state, the government, people and democracy.

Asked about their activities against the country's laws, Bangladesh chief coordinator of the outfit Mohiuddin Ahmed, an associate professor at Dhaka University's Institute of Business Administration, yesterday said, "Democracy or any rules - whatever you mention is imposed by the western world."

Under section 18 of the anti-terrorism act, becoming or claiming to be a member of a banned organisation is an offence punishable with imprisonment for up to six months or fine or both.

Even supporting a banned organisation or asking anyone to support it or organising or conducting or helping organise a rally of such organisation, or addressing it is also a crime.

Telecast or broadcast of such rallies on radio and television or printing information with a view to making any banned organisation active or seeking support for it is also an offence.

Anyone found guilty of such offence will be sentenced to imprisonment for two to seven years and in addition may be fined.

If anyone, except for the parents, spouse and children of such offenders, provide them with shelter knowing their offences, the person will also suffer jail term.

In the last few years, Hizb ut-Tahrir appeared in Bangladesh as one of the most controversial Islamist organisations because of its vigorous provocative campaigns against not only the government's role, but also against the US, Britain and some other countries.

Its campaigns often provoked people into violence against the outfit's "enemies", a source in a law enforcement agency observed.

Despite its campaigns through leaflets and posters, the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh came to the notice of law enforcers after the grenade attack on the then British high commissioner to Bangladesh Anwar Choudhury at Hazrat Shah Jalal's Shrine in Sylhet on May 21, 2004.

Tahrir men had put up anti-British and anti-US posters around the shrine two days before the attack and this made investigators suspect about the organisation's involvement with the attack. The outfit has since been alleged to have militant links at home and abroad, said an official.

So far law enforcers arrested many of its leaders and workers for carrying out similar provocative campaigns across the country but could not take any legal action.

action.

Hizb ut-Tahrir is a pan-Islamist group whose goal is to establish a global Islamic caliphate. It has been banned in a number of countries, mainly in Central Asia and the Middle East.

Tahrir's Bangladeshi chief coordinator claimed that they have units at all divisional headquarters and have around 10,000 members.

Apart from four banned militant organisations, law enforcers had prepared a list of 30 others, including Hizb ut-Tahrir, for their suspected link to militancy in the country a couple of years ago.

However, the high officials of the law enforcement agencies told The Daily Star on different occasions that they were not in a position to launch a crackdown on the suspected organisations as it requires government policy in this regard.

For these listed organisations, some are large, but all of their activities are apparently limited to mosque- and madrasa-based discussions and Islamic invitation.

The law enforcers observed that the objectives and statements of many of these organisations are identical to those of Jama'at ul Mujaahideen Bangladesh and Harkatul Jihad al Islam. But this is not enough to take stern actions against them since such activities are allowed in the country unless they commit serious crimes as the JMB and Hujid.

The other outfits on the list include Islamic Democratic Party, Hizb-ur-Towhid, Allahr Dal, Islam Samaj, Al-Haraf al-Islamia, Jama'atul Faliya, Towhid Janata, Bishwa Islam Front, Juma'atul Sadat, Shahadat-e-Nobuwat, Jama'at-e-Yahia al Turat, Joyshe Mostafa Bangladesh, Woarat Islam Front, Jamaat-as-Sadat, al Khidmat, Harkat-e-Islam al Jihad, Hizbul Islam Samaj, Muslim Millat Sharif Council, World Islamic Front for Jihad, Joyshe-e Mohammad, Hizbul Mahadi, Kalama, Dawat, Islami Dawati Kafala, Islami Martyrs Brigade, Dawat-e-Islam, Tanjim, Hizb-e Abu Omar, and Jadiq al-Qaeda Bangladesh.

Kid killed

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her husband Farhad and she were involved in the brutality.

Police also said detained Mahinur admitted that she kidnapped Moni on Tuesday morning while Moni was playing and later her husband strangled Moni to death for the gold ring.

Earlier, she tried to mislead police saying that her husband went Sirajganj along with Moni.

But the local people recovered the body of the victim from under the bed of the couple as the decomposed body was stinking.

European Development Days is an annual forum organised by the European Commission and the country holding the Presidency of the EU - currently Sweden.

Rab regrets

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tortured Masum at his rented house at Jatrabari and also after taking him to Rab-10 headquarters at Dhaka.

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Russia's liberals criticise arrest of oil tycoon

AFP, Moscow

Russian liberals have called for President Dmitry Medvedev to free jailed oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky and criticised him for a lack of progress in the case during his presidential term.

Speaking at a press conference yesterday in Moscow attended by Khodorkovsky's parents and lawyers, liberal politician and former world chess champion Garry Kasparov harshly criticised Medvedev.

He said any hopes that Medvedev would take a softer line on the Khodorkovsky case after taking over from Vladimir Putin as president last year had evaporated.

"Few people realized that Putin would actually be playing the role of good cop," Kasparov said at a news conference marking six years since Khodorkovsky was arrested on October 25, 2003.

"There hasn't been any progress in the case of Khodorkovsky and (his former business partner Platon) Lebedev at all, in fact everything has got worse."

Khodorkovsky is serving an eight-year sentence for

fraud and tax evasion. He is now facing a second trial on fresh charges of embezzlement of millions of tons of oil and money laundering that could see him jailed for another two decades.

Seven prominent activists including Lyudmila Alexeyeva, the chairwoman of Moscow Helsinki Group, signed a letter addressed to Medvedev calling for him to end the trial and free Khodorkovsky and Lebedev.

The letter also called for the ROs to send soft copies of all the documents to the EC.

The information extracted from the soft copies was posted on the commission's website before the December 29 election.

Recently, while examining the documents in detail, the EC officials found 39 lawmakers with anomalies in the statements they furnished.

National Board of Revenue has taken a list of those lawmakers from the EC Secretariat, said EC sources.

Besides, the EC Secretariat has asked the ROs and district election officials concerned to examine the original documents submitted by the 39.

Requesting anonymity, a senior EC official said all the documents are preserved at the offices of ROs, who are also deputy commissioners, and it may take a few days to complete the scrutiny.

"I don't believe that Medvedev's support will save us today, I don't believe that this battle in the corridors of power, which we don't know much about, will end in our favour," she said.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin "hates Khodorkovsky personally," she said.

Passengers still

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Member of the committee and BRTA Director (Engineering) Rafiqul Islam told The Daily Star, "No decisions have yet been made. We have set some conditions for both the owners and drivers and if they properly follow them their proposals will be considered."

The drivers must have to go to the places told by passengers. They were also asked to run their auto-rickshaws on meters without charging any extra money, he added.

Islam also said that the route permits would be cancelled if they fail to follow the instructions.

Four-stroke three-wheelers were introduced in 2003 in the city. The fare rates were revised twice earlier in May 2007 and April 2008. Owners, however, have never complied with the official fare chart much to the suffering of consumers.

The drivers must have to go to the places told by passengers. They were also asked to run their auto-rickshaws on meters without charging any extra money, he added.

In 2007 the fare for the CNG-run auto-rickshaws for the first two kilometers was raised to Tk 15.00, up from Tk 12 and fare for each subsequent kilometre was fixed at Tk 5.50.

Waiting charge was also increased to Tk 0.75 per minute from the previous Tk 0.50 while the daily deposit was fixed at Tk 450, up from Tk 300. The minimum fare for short distance was fixed at Tk 15.

The government in 2008 again revised the fare for CNG-run auto-rickshaws and taxicabs after an increase in compressed natural gas (CNG) price.

As per the rate fixed in 2008 the current approved fare for the first two kilometers is Tk 14, up from Tk 13.5, and for each subsequent kilometre Tk 6, instead of Tk 5.5 with waiting charge Tk 1 per minute, up from Tk 0.75.

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