

Syrian human rights head arrested

AFP, Damascus

The head of the Committees for the Defence of Democracy, Freedoms and Human Rights in Syria was arrested yesterday at his home in the northwestern city of Banias, lawyer Khalil Maatouk told AFP.

"Security services arrested rights activist Daniel Saud today at his home in Banias and took him to an undisclosed location," Maatouk said.

The move came after President Bashar al-Assad on Thursday decreed an end to emergency rule, in force in Syria for nearly 50 years.

"This signifies that the security services are continuing to act" as they did before the emergency law was lifted, Maatouk said.

Blast kills nine-year-old Pakistan child

AFP, Peshawar

A bomb killed a nine-year-old Pakistani child yesterday and wounded a teenager outside the house of an anti-Taliban elder in a restive northwestern area, police said.

The bomb exploded in Shahukhel village in Hangu district, which borders the lawless Orakzai tribal district, a known Taliban hideout, district police chief Abdul Rashid told AFP.

He said the device was planted outside the house of a tribal elder who organised a village force against the Taliban.

"The bomb hit two passer-by children. One of them died," Rashid said, adding that the blast seemed to be the work of Taliban militants. The child who died was nine years old and the one wounded was 13, he added.

No one has so far claimed responsibility for the attack.

More than 4,200 people have been killed across Pakistan in attacks blamed on Taliban and other Islamist extremist networks based in the tribal belt since government troops stormed a radical mosque in Islamabad in 2007.

Custodial death

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DMCH around 11:00am after he fell sick.

According to family sources, Raja had a feud over a land with his maternal uncles. They bribed police to detain him.

Police picked him up before filing any case and then showed him arrested in a pending murder case, claimed family members.

Later he was remanded for three days and tortured inhumanly.

Anwara Begum, mother of the deceased, told The Daily Star that her father had five kathas of land at Begumganj lane of Narinda area. Her brothers denied giving her share of the land.

They beat up Raja following a row over the land on April 11 and on that night police detained him from Sutrapur area, she added.

Raja told his cousin Mohammad Bappi at the hospital that law enforcers tortured him in remand. He also showed injury marks in his hand and legs.

Contacted, Sub-inspector Jahangir Kabir Khan of Sutrapur Police Station said Raja was accused in a case for killing an Ansar member Anisur Rahman on March 12. Three gunmen shot dead Anisur at a security check post at Sutrapur.

"We arrested him on April 12 from Sutrapur in that case and took him on a three-day remand from April 14 to 16," added the SI, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case.

Jahangir denied allegations of taking bribe and torturing Raja, claiming Raja was injured in a clash with his relatives before police picked him up.

Raja's maternal uncle Din Islam Bhutto said they did not beat him but heard of his death in police custody.

Food security

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She also expressed her firm determination to develop the entire Rajshahi division socio-economically.

Moreover, Sheikh Hasina said elections in future would be held with electronic voting system so that no-one can rig people's votes.

"We must ensure maximum production on our lands," she also said adding in case of inadequate production, necessary amounts of food grain would be imported.

She also called for shunning the practice of hoarding food grains, for the larger interests of the people.

The PM asked the district government officials to give their best efforts to implement the development projects at the earliest possible time.

"Our only aim is to serve the people. Do not forget that our salaries come from people's taxes," the Premier said.

She asked the law enforcing agencies to remain vigilant so that young people do not get involved in any crime or slip into drug addiction and none can traffic women and children through the border.

"We are providing as many jobs as possible to the youth as they can utilise their time," she said.

The PM also reiterated a firm committee to completely rooting out militancy and other type of terrorism.

Hasina was also critical of those who are against the present national education policy.

"Religious education has been made compulsory. As the policy has been formulated consulting with all quarters in the society, so I do not understand why some are protesting the education policy," she remarked.

The PM said the budgetary allocation given for Chapainawabganj district must be utilised properly.

Crazy idea

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a national crisis arises, the authorities would have to postpone the upcoming chemistry exam on April 21 and she would get a few days more to prepare for the test.

The problem was there was no national crisis. So Suhana from Kafrul conveniently decided to "create" a national crisis.

Without thinking about consequences, the girl used her mobile phone to call up the officer-in-charge of Kafrul Police Station on his mobile phone on April 18 around 9:30pm and dropped a metaphorical bomb: "a group of terrorists have planted time bombs in five important places".

She categorically said at 9:30am on April 19 a bomb will explode at Aarong, at 9:37am at Novo Theatre, 9:53am at Mohamadpur, 10:15am at Abahony Playground and at 10:49am at Rifles Square.

She also told the OC that her husband plotted the

attack. She called police because she was unable to stop her husband from doing what he was planning to do, she told the OC over the phone.

Ever since, police found her phone switched off. The law enforcers were compelled to conduct a thorough search in the mentioned places and they soon realised it was a bomb hoax.

So the Detective Branch of Police tracked her address from her phone number and arrested Suhana at her home Friday around 9:00pm.

A student of a college in Mohamadpur, Suhana is not married. Assistant Commissioner of DB (North) Mohammad Sulaiman, who later interrogated her, said she got the crazy idea from a film.

Police arrested her under Section-54 (used for arresting people whose activities law enforcers believe suspicious) and sent her to jail. A police press release puts her age at 19.

Govt limits sale

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of unscrupulous people took advantage of the price gap of OMS rice and that on retail market by illegally selling it to the traders.

However, it was found out that all the illegally sold out rice, seized by law enforcers from Dhaka and some other districts in last one month, did not belong to the OMS operation. Rather a substantial part of the rice reaching the retail markets was originally distributed as ration for law enforcers and paramilitary force, the minister added.

Food ministry officials confirmed that in an OMS stocktaking review meeting on Thursday, it was decided to alert other government departments dealing with such ration operations against such pilferage and misuse.

Law enforcers seized over 6,000 sacks of rice, meant for subsidised sale under PFDS, from Dhaka, Gazipur, Rangpur and a few other districts in last one week. A Food Department probe body headed by its Director (Procurement) Badrul Hasan submitted a report on Thursday showing that the seized sacks contained rice not only from OMS operation but also from police and BGB ration.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, the food minister couldn't give the exact statistics offhand but said to make the PFDS foolproof, his ministry is planning to distinguish rice sacks meant for various purposes (OMS, test relief, food for work, forces' rations, etc) by marking those with separate features.

Earlier, the government went for a massive OMS drive from January this year by allotting three tonnes of rice a day to some 14 to 17 dealers in each of the districts in the country. Under the drive, the poor could buy up to five kilograms of rice per family per day at a subsidised rate of Tk 24 a kg, while the coarse

rice sold well over Tk 30 a kg on the retail markets.

At the same time, the government directed the intelligence agencies to report on the uptrend of rice market in the country. A food ministry source confirmed that law enforcers were asked to go for the seizure drive against illegal traders of PFDS grains in some districts on the basis of intelligence reports.

Brac Executive Director Dr Mahabub Hossain, who follows rice market trends regularly, earlier told The Daily Star, "The higher the gap between market and OMS prices, the higher is the chance of pilferage and rent-seeking."

Former director general of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies Dr Hossain suggested that the difference between the two prices should be Tk 5 a kg.

Though the government once decided to hike OMS rice price from Tk 24 to Tk 25 a kg in February, it backed out thinking the prices of rice on wholesale and retail markets would come down gradually.

The food minister on Friday visited almost a dozen OMS selling points from Jatrabari to Mohamadpur and Kamrangirchar to see for himself the status of the subsidised rice distribution.

Razzaque said he found people in the queues expressing satisfaction at the way rice was being sold to them. He considered that despite some incidents of unauthorised trading, the overall impact of OMS drive has been good on the market. It gave some cushion against high rice price, added the minister.

Asked about there involvement of some food officials as far as illegal transfer of OMS rice is concerned, the minister said, "There may be a few like that and we'll make sure they're taken into task through due departmental procedures."

Russell murder

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seen at a seven-storey building in the capital's Mohakhali where Rapid Action Battalion men recovered Russell's mobile phone on Wednesday, said Rab officials.

He and Jotirmoy Sarkar Joy, another final-year student of RMC, killed their friend Mahbub Alam Russell on April 5 so they won't have to return Tk 4.50 lakh they had borrowed from him, according to confessions of Joy who was arrested on Friday in Tarash of Sirajganj.

A few hours after his arrest, Joy showed the law enforcers the place on RMC campus where they had buried Russell's body after killing him by injection.

Motiar Rahman, officer-in-charge of Lalpur Police Station in Natore, yesterday said Joy would be produced before a magistrate's court today.

The abduction case against him and Sabbir has been turned into a murder case.

Russell's father Mokbul filed the case on April 15.

A student-cum-businessman, Russell, 24, had been friends with Joy since college days. After passing HSC examinations from Dayarampur Cantonment College of Natore in 2005, Joy got enrolled in RMC and Russell in Rajshahi College. Russell was introduced to Sabbir by Joy.

Meanwhile, Russell's body was buried at his village home in Lalpur around midnight yesterday. His family members have demanded proper investigation and a speedy trial of the murder case.

Constitution

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The special committee will seek their opinion on the fifth amendment of the constitution in light of the Supreme Court's verdict and on other issues as well.

Awami League chief and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is billed to join the talks on April 26.

Leader of the Opposition and BNP Chairperson Khaleida Zia, invited to the dialogue tomorrow, is unlikely to take part in the dialogue.

Heads of political parties having representation in the current parliament -- Jatiya Party, Workers Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Liberal Democratic Party, Bangladesh Jatiya Party, National Awami Party and Ganotantri Party -- have been invited to share their views tomorrow afternoon.

Former chief justices Kamaluddin Hossain, Mustafa Kamal, Habibur Rahman, Md Taffazzul Islam and Mohammad Fazlul Karim and eminent jurists Dr Kamal Hossain, Dr M Zahir, M Amir-Ul Islam, TH Khan, Rafique-ul Huq, Mahmudul Islam, Rokanuddin Mahmud, Ajmal Hossain QC, Abdul Baset Majumder and Attorney General Mahbubey Alam are among the invitees to attend the discussion.

Older

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Any destitute aged 65 years or above is eligible for old-age allowance of Tk 300 a month under a government programme, said UP officials.

"I do not know why I haven't yet got any old-age or widow allowance," she said with tears welled up in her eyes.

"The UP chairman and members pledged several times that I would get allowance. But I am yet to get it," she said.

Tushree UP member Abdul Mazid said, "I do not have the authority to issue any allowance cards, but the chairman has."

UP Chairman Saidur Rahaman Talukder said, "I tried to give her an old-age allowance card but I could not issue it for shortage of cards."

However, the chairman could not explain how the elderly woman's stepson had been getting old-age allowance at the age of 55.

Madan Upazila Social Service Officer Abdul Hai Bhuiyan said the UP chairman and members prepare the list of allowance recipients and he sends it to an upazila committee for approval.

Show disloyals the door

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The demands and suggestions came at a closed-door session of yesterday's daylong meeting of the executive committee held at Mahanagar Natya Mancha with Khaleida Zia in the chair, meeting sources said.

In her speech wrapping up the executive committee meeting around 10:00pm, the BNP chairperson said she has assigned Nazrul Islam Khan [party's standing committee member] and Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir to make a list of inactive leaders, and she will take action on the basis of the list.

"Don't mind if one is dropped from the committee. Those who will be included in it, will get the position because of their performance," she said.

Agitation programmes including road march will be organised towards the end of next month, and the party will have to resist any obstacles to that, Khaleida said.

She will attend rally in every district as part of the agitation programmes which must be organised and implemented by the district unit committee concerned. Otherwise that committee will be dissolved, said the BNP chairperson.

Responding to the demand from many leaders for announcing tougher agitation programmes, the leader of the opposition said, "Please tell me only that which you will be able to implement. Don't misguide me... You [party leaders] wanted tougher programmes [in the past] but you became tired after only one hartal."

Khaleida went on, "I will work day and night, and visit every district. The district committee concerned will be dissolved if it fails to make the agitation programmes a success. If the party does not move forward strongly, it will not be possible to oust the government."

The former premier said, "They [govt] are destroying the country. Should we sit idle? BNP is the party [founded by] of a freedom fighter, and it will be able to protect our country," she said.

She expressed her frustration over the speeches of some party leaders at the closed-door session.

Earlier in the morning, Khaleida inaugurated the meeting calling upon party leaders to resolve all sorts of conflicts among them and work together for waging a tougher movement against the government.

"We should be more united as the country and people are passing through a critical juncture. Coordination has to be enhanced between the party and its front and associate bodies."

"People's support for us (BNP) will increase as quickly as we can get united. So, solidarity and unity in the party must be ensured at any cost," she said.

During the closed-door session, a number of district unit leaders of the party, who are also on the central executive committee, demanded removal of "inactive leaders" from the central committee, and suggested making Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir secretary general (now acting secretary general).

Some lawmakers said a deputy leader of BNP's parliamentary party is necessary to ensure the party's better performance in the House.

Some members of the executive committee said it would be better if Tarique Rahman (now staying in London) returns to the country towards the end of the present government's tenure, and not now.

Kurigram district BNP President Tasvirul Islam and former lawmaker Newaj Halima urged the party chairperson to make Fakhru secretary general.

Lawmaker Rehana Akhter Ranu stressed announcing Dhaka city committee of the party, and appointing a deputy leader of the party's parliamentary party. She sought removal of inactive leaders from the central committee.

Nasiruddin Asim, human rights affairs secretary of BNP, said the party would not be affected even if one thousand leaders are ousted for hatching conspiracy against it. "If the party fails to take action against conspirators, they will create problems for it in the next elections."

Barisal city BNP President Mujibur Rahman Sarwar said, "We cannot forget that many leaders were involved in conspiracy after 1/11 changeover."

Kushtia district unit President Syed Mehedi Ahmed Rumi, Bhola unit President Gohar Nabi Alamgir and Comilla (south) unit General Secretary Aminur Rashid Yasin said it will not be a wise decision to bring Tarique Rahman back to the country right now.

Faridpur district unit President Shahzada Mia requested the chairperson to form a sub-committee to resolve internal conflicts of the party before going for an anti-government move-

ment.

Lawmaker Nilufer Chowdhury Moni said a "clique" at the party chairperson's Gulshan office tries to impose their decisions regarding district unit committees, and they did so for Jamalpur district unit recently.

The chairperson's advisory council member Shawkat Mahmud suggested launching a tougher movement for mid-term election.

Earlier at the inaugural session of the present executive committee's second meeting, Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir placed a report of secretary general, and Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi placed condolence proposal.

Chairperson's Press Secretary Maruf Kamal Khan read out a message from Tarique Rahman.

In his message, Tarique said he hopes the tough times faced by the country will soon be over through a people's movement.

"From afar, I feel motivated and encouraged thinking about your struggle," he added.

2 ex-NSI

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Rahim were interrogated by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) over the last four days in the case filed under Explosive Substances Act.

Metropolitan Magistrate Md Erfan Ullah passed the order after CID's Special Superintendent of Police Abdul Kahar Akand also investigation officer (IO) of the case produced them before the court with a five-day remand prayer.

Meanwhile, the court rejected six petitions filed by the accused.

The defendants' lawyers submitted four separate prayers for granting them bail and for cancellation of the remand prayer. Relatives also filed two other petitions to arrange a meeting with the two former NSIDGs.

Earlier on April 18, another Dhaka court placed the two accused on a four-day remand over the case.

Akand prayed for the remand of the DGs, as the defendants had close ties with Lutfozzaman Babar, former state minister for home, who is currently detained on charges of being involved in the grenade attack on the Awami League rally.

Besides, on April 7, chief of Harkatul Jihad (Huji) Mufti Abdul Hannan made a confessional statement saying that the two former DGs were behind the attack.

Retired yet

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continue service until an extension was endorsed. "We asked him only to attend office and not to do any office work," he added.

But Sobhan has acted as director general for several times, went on two foreign tours and transferred officials. He also issues office orders, holds meetings and uses the ADG's official vehicle.

Being informed, the state minister said legal action would be taken against him if he is holding the office unlawfully.

Mesbah ul Alam, secretary to the MoEF, dubbed the matter anomalous.

The government has not granted him an extension of service under special privilege of being a freedom-fighter, he mentioned.

Asked about the ministry's inaction, Alam said a file was placed before the minister and the latter is aware of it. The minister has endorsed Sobhan's application, seeking an extension, to the ministries of liberation war and establishment.

In a contrasting stand to the minister's endorsement, his ministry in a letter to the establishment ministry last month said Sobhan does not qualify for an extension as per an order of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

The PMO order in last November said if a government official were a genuine freedom fighter, he would get a two-year extension of service.

According to the order, a genuine freedom fighter official is one who declared it at the time of joining or holds a certificate signed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina or whose name was published in Muktibarta (an approved list of freedom fighters) or a gazette.

A government servant has to apply formally for an extension one month prior to retirement and also should inform the authorities, said Shamsuddin Ahmed Bhuiyan, deputy secretary (Rules) of Establishment Ministry, quoting retirement act.

"Holding on to a public office beyond expiry of service without an authorised extension is unlawful and a punishable offence," he added.

Both the retiring servant and administrative authority will be liable to punishment for misconduct and dishonesty for suppressing information of retirement, under the Public Servant (Discipline and Appeal) Rules and other circulars, noted the bureaucrat.

On expiry of service, a government official first goes into retirement and his Post Retirement Leave (PRL) counts from the following day.

Sobhan was supposed to go on PRL on June 14 last year, but he continued in service claiming his name was gazetted on July 25 last year as a freedom fighter.

"There is nothing illegal with my continuation in the service and holding the office of ADG, as the government has assigned me to different duties and did not stop me from discharging those," insisted Md Abdus Sobhan.

Asked about staying on duty without government's endorsement of extension, he replied, "It is my right as a freedom fighter."

Reforms delayed

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the conference room of his ministry.

"Restructuring of SEC is extremely difficult... The stockmarket has reached such a stage that it is impossible for a person to sit there and learn the subtleties of the market regulations," observed Muhih.

Many of the editors criticised the government for failing to take any step against the market manipulators, though the probe committee submitted its report weeks ago.

The probe committee, led by Khondker Ibrahim Khaled, submitted its investigation report to the finance minister on April 7. The report recommended removal of SEC chairman and its high officials.

River pillars

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river bank do not ensure 50m of foreshore.

Bapa, at a press conference held at its office, demanded to earmark the actual area of rivers and to evict all encroachers.

Gazipur district administration has done a 'worst job ever' in saving the rivers and the environment, they stated.

Among others, Shahjahan Mridha, joint secretary of Bapa, Sharif Jamil, Alamgir Kabir, Professor Moazzem Hossain, executive member, Mohidul Hoque Khan and M Sirajul Islam Molla also accompanied the team.