

Man found

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Seeing the door closed from inside around 8:30am yesterday, neighbours knocked on it. As nobody responded, they peeped through the window to find Ranjit hanging from the ceiling and Rita and Shishir lying on the floor.

They then broke open the door and recovered the bodies.

Shishir's neck was found twisted while Rita's mouth slobbered, police inquest report said. The bodies were sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsies.

Rita's brother Robin Malik, however, termed the incident a planned murder to capture Ranjit's property. Ranjit had a feud with his brothers and mother over their family properties, Robin claimed.

Ranjit was recently admitted to Apon Niramoy Kendra, a rehabilitation centre in Manikganj, and returned home a day after the Eid following three months of treatment, said Satya Gopal, a neighbour.

He said Ranjit often beat his wife after taking drugs. Three months ago, Rita went to her father's house with the child after one such incident. Ranjit brought her home last week.

"As far as we know, he gave up drugs after returning from the rehabilitation centre," Satya said.

Ranjit got married around seven years ago. He suspected his wife of keeping an extra marital affair, neighbours said.

Attack on GB

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Bank's board of directors, who were elected by the bank's subscribers. There are rare instances in the society where village women are serving as elected members of a board of directors in a big organisation," reads the statement.

Such active participation of women in this decision making stage is a big example for women's empowerment, it said.

"They are even part of Grameen Bank's Nobel prize family. If they wish, they have every right to discuss with the country's women organisations any issue," the statement said.

"In light of the recent initiative of bringing changes in the Grameen Bank board of directors, they apprehended that they might be suspended as they are general women from village and that is why they wanted to sit with women organisations," it said.

"Attack on them proves that their apprehension in this regard was valid."

"Their democratic rights have been taken away by the attack and such incident is also a threat to women's empowerment," reads the statement.

Gowher slates

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due to opposition from Paschimbanga Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee," Gowher said at a lunch meeting organised by Bangladesh German Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Dhaka yesterday.

He said journalists should not portray the country's image negatively rather they should write about success stories.

"Please you do not always see the glass as half empty. Yes, the glass is definitely half empty. But we should see it as half full," Gowher said referring to the media criticism about the Teesta debacle.

The adviser asked his audience not to lose heart and promised that the Teesta deal will be signed.

"It will happen and it will absolutely happen," he said.

He said the Indian prime minister has already said that water would be shared on fair and equitable basis.

Gowher said Bangladesh has achieved a lot from Mammoohan's September 6-7 visit.

He listed the protocols on exchange of enclaves and border demarcation, duty-free access of 46 Bangladesh products to India as some of the gains for Bangladesh.

He said Bangladesh has made an opening to reach the Indian market of 1.1 billion people and foreign investor will now see Bangladesh as a gateway to India.

"So, they want to set up factory to get the duty free access to the Indian market," he added.

Ferries run

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A roll-on roll-off (RoRo) ferry with a capacity of carrying around 24 vehicles cannot carry more than 10 vehicles due to low navigability said Zillur Rahman, assistant general manager of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation's (BIWTC) Daulatdia office, yesterday.

Goods-laden trucks are standing in long queues for minimum three days, he added.

Abdul Matin, deputy general manager of BIWTC at Aricha ferry sector said propulsion system of each ferry operating on the river has been hampered due to low navigability which could have been prevented by timely dredging of the channel across the route.

Around 1000 trucks were seen queued up on both sides of roads approaching Paturia and Daulatdia, report our Manikganj correspondent.

The Paturia-Daulatdia channel has only six feet of water whereas a ferry needs eight feet deep water to ply, the BIWTC official said.

Meanwhile, 'Kumari', a K-type ferry carrying nine

vehicles ran aground near Daulatdia ghat early yesterday within the first five minutes of its journey. The ferry services on the route remained normal despite the stagnation. It was rescued nearly nine hours later.

A UNB report from Dhaka adds: Government has formed two taskforces for monitoring the action taken to ease ferry movement on Paturia-Daulatdia and Mawa-Kawrakandi routes and preserve waterway.

The bodies, each consisting of six members, have been formed following frequent disruptions in ferry movement on the two routes due to low navigability and hidden shoals in the Padma river, said an official release yesterday.

The committee members were asked to stay at their respective ghats until situation on the river routes becomes normal.

Engineer Firoz Ahmed, member of BIWTA has been made convener of the taskforce formed to monitor the Paturia-Daulatdia route while engineer Gyan Ranjan Shill director (admin) of BIWTA will address the Mawa-Kawrakandi route.

'Coffee Group'

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leaders belonging to both sides of Bangladesh's perennial political divide.

Some US diplomatic cables leaked on August 30 this year by the whistleblower website WikiLeaks show that key missions in Dhaka coordinated their efforts to respond to the pre-1/11 political crisis and the primary vehicle for cooperation was the Coffee Group.

The Coffee Group was comprised of the mission chiefs of the US, the UK, Canada and Australia, the United Nations representative, the head of the European Commission delegation and the German ambassador representing the European Union presidency.

Japan was also invited as the situation warranted. The group used to meet frequently on an ad hoc basis, said a cable dated January 11, 2007.

But for their engagements with different political parties in Bangladesh, Awami League and BNP used to accuse them of being biased to the other side (the respective opposition).

In the November 30, 2006 cable, the then US ambassador Patricia A Butenis said during her meeting with the BNP chief Khaleda Zia the previous day, the latter bristled "You diplomats all support the Awami League," and insisted the caretaker government was completely neutral and that AL's demands were endless and pointless.

Butenis, however, reminded Khaleda that AL accuses her of being pro-BNP, and that "our focus remains on the integrity of the process without fear or favour for any political party."

Khaleda and her party colleagues reiterated their view that Awami League was violent, vengeful, perfidious, and that there was "not one iota of trust" in AL, the cable reads.

The US envoy noted she did not represent the opposition Awami League, but like the UN, the EU, and other diplomatic missions in Dhaka, they had concerns about the framework being put in place for the upcoming election.

It is evident, she stated, that the former ruling party (BNP) continues to exert great influence on the chief adviser and that the caretaker government is not acting neutrally or effectively to resolve obvious obstacles to a successful election.

Khaleda said her party could accept modifications in the candidate registration dates in the election schedule, provided polling day remains on or about January 22. She expressed confidence in winning the election because, Khaleda said, the October 28 blood-letting unleashed by the opposition reminded apprehensive Bangladeshis of the AL's propensity for violence and

confrontation.

The Coffee Group, however, had been clear that it did not endorse AL's position. "Our messages to the AL have been unambiguous: the violence must end; fostering chaos and instability will harm the country's image and economy; and we do not support military intervention or any other extra-constitutional military solutions to the crisis," read a cable.

Butenis had also expressed concern to Sheikh Hasina about the latter's hesitation to engage in constructive talks, and urged her to be ready to negotiate.

Prior to the 1/11 change-over most the Coffee Group participants had issued statements locally urging full participation in the elections and calling on all sides to avoid violence, another cable says.

"The (Coffee) group agrees, Washington and London should approach Bangladesh's major multi-lateral development partners -- the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Asian Development Bank -- to request similar statements, within their own institutional constraints."

According to the cable the Coffee Group plus Japan were scheduled to meet with then BNP secretary general Mannan Bhuiyan and AL general secretary Abdul Jalil on January 11, 2007 to reinforce their concerns.

On January 10, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon issued a statement calling on all sides to compromise and refrain from violence.

A US diplomatic cable says in days leading to the would-be cancelled January 22 polls, many election observation missions including that of USAID-funded National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute, the Commonwealth and European Commission had been cancelled. The 34-member Election Working Group, the domestic observation organisation set up by the Asian Foundation, had also announced it would not undertake a national election monitoring initiative under the prevailing circumstances.

According to the leaked cables, the international community's efforts to help resolve the political impasse received intense coverage in the Bangladesh press.

In her comments in a January 11, 2007 cable Butenis wrote, "We have declined to be drawn into a discussion of the constitutionality of holding or postponing the election, emphasizing instead that the problem is political in nature and can only be solved if the two parties agree. We stress to both sides the damage done to Bangladesh's economic status and democracy by the parties' refusal to compromise."

Titas pushed

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The action concerning them started late last month when the managing director of Titas Gas company, a subsidiary of Petrobangla, went abroad on a long personal tour.

Protesting this, the unions are staging demonstrations on the premises of the company offices every day.

Explaining his action, Petrobangla Chairman Hussain Monsur said, "The government is committed to establishing a graft-free administration. I have acted in that line. I will not back out from my position."

He also said about 40 people still serving in Titas Gas own Tk 5 crore each. "They have also made confessions to the Anti-Corruption Commission about their corrupt practices."

But a check back with Titas sources found that none of them had ever made any such confessions.

When the chairman was contacted again, he declined to say if there are corruption charges against the three. "When we transfer someone, we take into account many issues ... I have no personal reservations about anybody. I have just taken action for the welfare of the organisation."

General Secretary of Titas Gas Employees Union Saiful Islam said, "The situation in the company has changed completely since this government took over. In a rare joint effort, the present management and the union worked together for the progress of the organisation... For the first time, the management has realised that such unity is needed."

Padma Bridge

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At Sunday's meeting, Guerrero said the bank will take its decision after discussing the matter at its headquarters in Washington.

The government has short-listed five firms for appointment as consultants including Canadian company SNC-Lavalin Group Inc. The names of those short-listed have been sent to the World Bank for its approval.

The Canadian authorities are investigating the SNC-Lavalin Group Inc for corruption following a WB referral.

Guerrero told the government that the bank cannot approve the appointment of consulting firms until the Canadian authorities dispose of the allegations against SNC-Lavalin.

The minister told her that the probe against the accused firms may take two to three years to be completed, and the government cannot wait that long to begin the construction.

The WB official said they have received some other allegations as well.

Muhith said, "The prime minister and I have emphatically told the World Bank vice-president to inform the government about the companies against whom they have allegations. The government will begin construction of the bridge without those companies."

Besides the proposal for appointing consulting firms, tender documents for the construction work and river training have been sent to the WB for approval. But none of those has been approved yet.

The minister said both he and the PM will go to the US separately this month. They will have talks with the WB officials there on the issues regarding Padma Bridge.

If the matter is settled by this month and the bank accepts the government proposal, preparatory work for construction of the bridge will start next month.

It, however, might take till January to begin the construction, which was earlier expected to get underway by October.

Asked about speculations that the WB will not fund the bridge as long as Syed Abul Hossain stays communications minister, Muhith said, "I don't know of anything like that. Maybe it all is being spread."

Metro rail stops at air force red signal

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Jica already accepted a modification earlier, after it had completed feasibility study on a proposed alignment, and told the government that it will not accept further modification.

Although experts told top air force officials that the current elevated alignment across Bijoy Sarani will not hamper air traffic to and from Tejgaon Old Airport close by, air force officials do not agree with them. The airport is currently used by the air force and army aviation.

The air force has been pressing to move the current alignment to Khamar Bari from the Bijoy Sarani-Crescent Lake crossing, saying if the metro rail runs across Bijoy Sarani, it will cause serious problems in emergencies or war situations.

Experts earlier carried out an extensive study on the current route alignment and put it in the 20-year-long Strategic Transport Plan for Dhaka city. Cabinet approved the alignment on March 8 this year.

According to the original plan of the government, construction of the metro rail also known as Mass Rapid Transit (MRT)-6 was supposed to start this year and be completed in three years.

Under the circumstances, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sat for a meeting with experts, ministers, and air force officials at the cabinet division of Bangladesh

Secretariat yesterday to find a solution.

Dr SM Saleuddin, additional executive director of Dhaka Transport Coordination Board, gave a presentation on the current route. Prof Shamsul Hoque of the civil engineering department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology gave another presentation on the route's Bijoy Sarani point.

Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain, and Air Marshal Shah Mohammad Ziaur Rahman discussed the problem.

"We could not resolve the problem today, but will sit again tomorrow for a solution," Prof Jamilur told The Daily Star after the meeting.

Jica representatives have been invited to today's meeting for persuading them to accept another modification, if that becomes necessary.

Prof Jamilur also said Japan might not accept further change in the alignment, and that might put the metro rail construction in an uncertainty.

Meeting sources said the prime minister hinted that she looks at the air force's demand as a minor modification, and might not have any objection to it. She wants to keep Tejgaon Old Airport operational, they added.

The metro rail to be constructed from Uttara Third Phase to Sayedabad is cru-

cial, as it will transport around 60,000 passengers in an hour during peak time from one corner of the capital to the other, says the Jica study.

It was the government who first delayed the progress of the project by modifying the alignment on February 1 this year for its conflict with Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover.

According to that modification the metro rail route from Uttara Third Phase to Teachers Students Centre (TSC) of Dhaka University via Pallabi, Farmgate, and Sonargaon Hotel will remain unchanged. But from TSC, the route will be diverted towards Curzon Hall, National Press Club, Bangladesh Bank, up to Kamalapur Railway Station.

The route from TSC was supposed to touch Central Shaheed Minar, Fulbaria, Gulistan, and Tikatuli before reaching Sayedabad in the original plan.

Jica expressed disappointment over the last modification as well, since every alignment modification requires new feasibility study on the new section.

JICA GIVES DEADLINE
A Jica delegation meeting Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain in his office yesterday asked him to give the final decision about the route within this month.

"We will take a decision after learning about the government's position on the alignment," one member of the delegation said, requesting anonymity.

Investors take to streets

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The fund crisis is caused by several factors, such as single party exposure to investment and shorter periods of time to adjust to the overexposure; inactiveness of institutional investors; the low entry of fresh investors; and a tendency to quit of many retail investors.

"As per donor agencies' prescription, several central bank initiatives at different times have limited the financial institutions' exposure to investment. Controlling the single party loan exposure is one of the major reasons behind a dearth of liquidity," said Akter H Sannamat, a chartered accountant and market analyst.

A financial institution is not allowed to invest over 10 percent of its total deposit in the stock market, while it cannot give loans worth more than 15 percent of the invested amount to a single party, including its subsidiary.

If any institution is overexposed, it will have to adjust the investment or loan within December.

"The central bank is doing this by terming the capital market risky. But it does not think about a default situation in the financial sector.

Default loans would be higher than the amount invested in the capital market," Sannamat said.

The problem should be solved through collective efforts among the central bank, Securities and Exchange Commission, stock exchanges, merchant banks, asset managers and the listed companies association, he added.

"Unless the problems are solved in a coordinated manner, the market can be forced to go up for a day or two. It will not sustain," he added.

Lanka Bangla Securities, a leading stockbroker, said a dearth of liquidity has loomed over the market.

"Investors were at the end of their tether due to the consecutive losses of the index. They finally became panicked when the benchmark index dived below 6,000 points," the brokerage house said in its regular market analysis.

After yesterday's fall and protests, SEC is also worried.

It sat with Dhaka and Chittagong bourses in an emergency meeting and sought recommendations on how to rejuvenate the market.

The bourses requested the regulator to ensure institu-

tional investors' active participation by resolving financial institutions' investment exposure and timeframe adjustments.

They also urged SEC to re-allow random money netting facilities instead of existing selected money netting facilities, and reduce the trading cycle period from T+3 to T+2 to increase the transaction volume.

The bourses said they will also submit a set of written recommendation to the regulator on Thursday.

SEC would also hold a series of meetings on the current situation with different bodies in the next three days, starting today. The first would be with Bangladesh Merchant Banker's Association.

Tomorrow, the regulator will sit with asset management companies and on Thursday, with the SEC advisory committee.

In a separate meeting, the merchant bankers urged SEC to allow them to raise their paid-up capital so that they can break the liquidity stalemate and invest more.

They also recommended for increasing the timeframe to adjust the stock market overexposure up to 2014.

Dredging gone hibernating

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negligence" of BIWTA's dredging department. On an average, the department spends around Tk 25 crore a year to keep the channels navigable. It also hires private dredgers for a fee of Tk 100 for dredging every one cubic metre of silt from the riverbeds.

According to sources in the dredging department, it is during such emergencies that freshly injected funds for dredging expenses go unaccounted for.

"The situation is rapidly deteriorating with the water receding in the rivers," said Md Mosharraf Hossain Howlader, BIWTC general manager (commerce), hinting that ferry services might be disrupted again.

But BIWTA Chairman Abdul Maleque Miah told The Daily Star that BIWTC deliberately stopped operation of ferries without any valid ground whatsoever. "We measured the depth of the particular channels and found those navigable. There is no reason why BIWTC officials should have stopped the services that caused huge economic losses as well as suffering to thousands of

people," he said.

Every year, when water starts to recede, shoals appear very rapidly. BIWTA has now deployed three dredgers at Paturia and two at Mawa to keep the channel navigable.

According to the chief engineer of central zone of Water Development Board (WDB), Humayun Kabir, the Jamuna and the Padma bring down billions of cubic metres of sediment from upstream. The Jamuna is one of those rivers in the world known to have quick silt deposition. Within hours, shoals may form on its bed.

Officials at Mawa and Paturia ferry terminals also blamed the natural conditions changing the course of the Padma. Water started receding much faster this year than it did last year. They said the dredging department with ultra modern equipment could have easily predicted the problem long ago and solved it.

Contacted, Mohammad Abul Bashar, WDB sub-divisional engineer, confirmed that water level of the Padma at Bhagyakul was 5.40 metres yesterday against 6.54 metres on the same day (Sep-

tember 12) last year. At Aricha point, the water level was 8.7 metres yesterday against 9.36 metres on the same day last year.

A former BIWTA official told this correspondent that the whole operation of dredging goes without any planning or coordination with BIWTC officials.

"The dredging operation is mainly for crisis management without any planning or monitoring. It is only during this sort of emergencies that misappropriation of lot of funds is reported," he said on condition of anonymity.

Asked, BIWTA Chief Engineer (dredging) Abdul Matin said the fierce current in the Jamuna and the Padma is hampering dredging work.

"The problem arises at a place where the channel is only a few hundred metres wide, and to dredge this part we have to restrict two-way movement of traffic," he said.

On an average, up to 5,500 vehicles are ferried every day across the two rivers. BIWTC earns about Tk 2.5 crore a week from the ferry services, according to its General Manager (accounts) Mujibur Rahman.

He said Jica will be very disappointed if the government brings further modification in the alignment.

Jica Director Tomohide Ichiguchi, who led the four-member delegation, said his country will be able to provide the fund by January next year if Bangladesh clarifies its position within a month.

The communication minister said the metro rail project will be delayed if the alignment is modified again. "The loan sanction process of Jica will also be delayed by one year," he added.

Road march

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rally in the capital soon.

As per the party's decision, Khaleda will lead the programmes and address a number of street rallies, public meetings and party workers' meeting on way to the divisional headquarters from the capital.

Earlier on Saturday night, the national standing committee of the main opposition discussed the agitation programme.

Mohammad Shahjahan, joint secretary general of BNP, told The Daily Star last night, "We will try to hold our programmes peacefully but nothing will go unchallenged if the government tries to obstruct us."

An organising secretary said a committee will be formed soon to finalise the venue of the rallies and public meetings.

Party leaders said they will do their best to make the chairperson's tour a success by involving the grassroots in the preparation.

During the programme, the chairperson and senior leaders will sit with local unit leaders to make the local level leadership active. Senior leaders will also work to resolve internal conflict at the district and upazila level.

Earlier in April at a meeting of the party's central executive committee, the chairperson said she would visit most of the districts, and local units have to organise the tours.

She had also warned that the units, which would fail to arrange the programme, would be dissolved.

A liaison committee was formed to oversee the activities of the four-party alliance.

Ganges water

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India's independence but now the Ganges water sharing treaty signed with Bangladesh needs to be reviewed, Nitish said.

Asked whether he supports formation of a committee to address the dispute over the Teesta water sharing, he said, "It is unfortunate that the states are being overlooked ... we don't have any say in such accord."

The chief minister continued that Farakka barrage was constructed and an accord was signed on sharing of Ganges water with Bangladesh and as the water was being regulated to Bangladesh, a unit of state-owned National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) shut down, affecting power supply to Bihar.

On Paschimbanga Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's stand on the Teesta water-sharing, he said "An affected state has raised the issue of its interest... it has the right to rake up it."

S African youth leader guilty of hate speech

AFF, Johannesburg

A South African court found Julius Malema, the ruling ANC's youth leader, guilty of hate speech yesterday for singing an anti-apartheid anthem whose lyrics mean "shoot the white farmer".

"The singing of the song by Malema constituted hate speech," Judge Collin Lamont said in a ruling that banned him and his party from singing the lyrics.

"Those words are derogatory, dehumanising," he said, adding that in post-apartheid South Africa, all citizens are called to treat each other equally.