

BGB man

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confirmed The Daily Star about the handover through a short message service (SMS).

"BGB Havilder Lutfur Rahman, who was in the custody of BSF (Indian Border Security Force) near Comilla border, was handed over to BGB in Akhaura at 3:00am," the SMS read.

Some Indian smugglers abducted Lutfur Rahman, commander of Bouara Border Outpost, around 6:45am Friday following a clash with BGB men at Dalkia village in Sadar Dakkhin upazila of Comilla. The clash left a smuggler dead.

On Friday, BGB officer Maj Istiaque said the clash erupted when a gang of Indian smugglers led by Shah Alam had been bringing illegal phensedyl syrup into Bangladesh through Tripura border. Acting on a tip off, a BGB patrol team intercepted the gang.

While fleeing, the miscreants left behind a carton of 50 bottles of the contraband drug.

When the border guards were returning to their outpost with the seized drugs, the smugglers equipped with local arms swooped on the BGB team from behind. They injured Lutfur Rahman with a sharp weapon prompting BGB to retaliate.

The patrol team shot six bullets.

Shah Alam, of Tarapukuria village in Sipajjala district in the Indian state of Tripura, was injured in the clash. He succumbed to his injuries on the way to an Indian hospital.

Following the death, the smugglers allegedly with some more villagers from Shah Alam's village abducted Lutfur Rahman and beat him up. BSF men rescued Lutfur and took him to their camp.

Meanwhile, a two-and-a-half hour long flag meeting between BSF and BGB aiming at bringing Lutfur back ended inconclusively yesterday afternoon.

'Robbers' stab

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tried to resist the gang that got on the vessel at "A" anchorage around 3:00am.

He was rushed to two private clinics consecutively, which refused to treat him fearing police hassles, Mizanur said.

Finally, the critically wounded Marko was admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital around 11:00am, he added.

MV Hana arrived at the port on January 17, carrying over 40,000 tonnes of cement clinker.

No envoy

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The Pretoria mission can play an important role in increasing Bangladesh's trade and export in other African countries around South Africa as there is no other Bangladeshi mission in that region, said foreign ministry officials.

They observe that as purchasing power and consumerism are increasing, countries around South Africa now hold potential markets for Bangladeshi products like garments, jute and jute products, pharmaceuticals and leather products.

The importance of South Africa has increased manifold following the establishment of an economic bloc, the BRICS, a group comprised of five major emerging economies-- Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Asked about the delay in appointing a high commissioner, a senior official of the foreign ministry said this was nothing but sheer negligence of the higher authorities.

Saturday talks

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They also talked about what challenges they are facing from rivals such as India under the new preferential tariff system. They said if the government provides proper and timely policy support for the backward linkages, they can help garment exporters earn \$20 billion-\$40 billion a year in future.

Wiki, Google-led

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Smith, a Republican from Texas, said he would postpone consideration of the House bill in committee "until there is wider agreement on a solution."

"I have heard from the critics and I take seriously their concerns regarding proposed legislation to address the problem of online piracy," Smith said.

"It is clear that we need to revisit the approach on how best to address the problem of foreign thieves that steal and sell American inventions and products," he said.

The announcements by Reid and Smith came amid eroding congressional support for the bills intended to crack down on online piracy of movies and music and the sale of counterfeit goods.

Wikipedia shut down the English-language version of its online encyclopaedia for 24 hours Wednesday to protest the legislation and hundreds of other sites joined in the protest.

Google blotted out the logo on its US home page with a black banner and published an exhortation to users to "Tell Congress: Please don't censor the Web!"

Google said more than seven million people in the United States had signed an online petition against the bills.

The draft legislation has won the backing of Hollywood, the music industry, entertainment giants like Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, the National Association of Manufacturers, the US Chamber of Commerce and others.

But the bills have come under fire from online companies and digital rights groups for allegedly paving the way for US authorities to shut down websites accused of online piracy, including foreign sites, without due process.

On Thursday, US authorities shut down Megaupload.com, one of the world's largest file-sharing sites, and charged seven people in what they called one of "the largest criminal copyright cases ever brought by the United States."

The shutdown of Megaupload triggered a wave

of retaliatory attacks by the online hacktivist group Anonymous, which temporarily disabled the websites of the Justice Department, FBI and Recording Industry Association of America.

In his statement, Reid said "counterfeiting and piracy cost the American economy billions of dollars and thousands of jobs each year, with the movie industry alone supporting over 2.2 million jobs.

"We must take action to stop these illegal practices," he said. "We live in a country where people rightfully expect to be fairly compensated for a day's work."

White House spokesman Jay Carney said Friday that Congress needs to find a solution "that both deals with online piracy and continues to ensure a free and open Internet."

The decision to delay the bills was welcomed by a wide range of groups.

"There is more still to be done to ensure the bills do no harm to technology innovation and the growth of the Internet," said Robert Holleyman, president and chief executive of the Business Software Alliance.

"Millions of Internet users let it be known that their rights and use of the Internet should not be easily tampered with, and Congress has wisely signalled it has heard their concerns," said Ed Black, president and chief executive of the Computer and Communications Industry Association.

In a joint statement, the American Federation of Musicians, American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, Screen Actors Guild and other groups said they hoped there would be a "new tone" in the debate going forward.

"We would hope a new tone can be set that does not pit the creativity and innovation of our directors, actors, performers, craftspeople, and technicians against those innovators in other industries," they said.

"We believe an Internet that does not allow outright stealing has to be the Internet of the future or all the promises it holds will be unrealised."

Saving war criminals

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and an opposition leader also have come up with their reaction to the putsch that, according to an army statement, has been foiled successfully.

On Thursday, an unprecedented press conference, a military spokesman announced a group of religious fanatics, comprising mid-ranking officers and their retired colleagues, was involved in a "coup attempt" to topple the government.

The prime minister said elections are the only way to change a democratic government and any short cut to power is a thing of the past.

She and her party always believe that only the people can decide who will run the country, said Hasina, also the ruling Awami League president. The government is making stronger the Election Commission and the polls held during its tenure were free, fair and peaceful.

The premier called upon the opposition leader, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, to join parliament sessions and air grievances against the government.

"She had threatened that we wouldn't be in power after December [last year]. We can now understand what their speeches and statements really meant if we analyse those," she said without mentioning the main opposition BNP or its chief.

Sheikh Hasina thanked the army for its timely move that, she said, had saved the security force and the nation.

Senior AL leaders including Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Syed Ashrafur Islam, Obaidul Quader, Mahbul Alam Hanif, among others, were present at the meet.

Also yesterday, talking to journalists after a programme at the city's Judicial Administration Training Institute, Law Minister Shafique Ahmed said any civilian linked to the overthrow plot would face trial for

Biswa Ijtema

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1:00pm, seeking peace, progress and welfare of the Muslim Ummah.

The first phase of the Ijtema was held on January 13-15 and the second phase began on January 20. Devotees from 32 districts of the country are taking part in the second phase and those from the 32 other districts had joined the first phase.

Islamic scholars from different countries delivered sermons on various aspects of Islam on the second day yesterday of the congregation.

As in the previous years, weddings without dowry were held at the Ijtema venue. Eminent Islamic scholar from India Zobayerul Hasan conducted 96 marriages after Asr prayers.

Couples, who had listed their names in the wedding register, got married through a traditional ceremony of the Tablig Jamaat that organises the Ijtema. Relatives of the bridegrooms and the brides were present at the ceremony.

The second day of the congregation started with a sermon from religious scholar Mohammad Ehsan from Pakistan just after Fazr prayers. The process continued throughout the day with the participation of Zobayerul Hasan and a number of Islamic scholars from Bangladesh.

The Ijtema has been taking place in Bangladesh since 1946.

MOBILE COURT
Three mobile courts fined around Tk 50,000 and filed 20 cases against owners and managers of different restaurants around the Ijtema venue for selling adulterated food and creating an unhygienic atmosphere.

Islamists win

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The Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) won 235 seats in the new People's Assembly, or 47.18 percent, committee head Abdel Moez Ibrahim said.

The ultra-conservative Salafist Al Nur party is in second place with 121 seats or nearly 25 percent, while the liberal Wafd Party follows with nearly nine percent.

The FJP secured 127 seats on party lists and its candidates won another 108 in first-past-the-post constituency vote, according to the results announced yesterday.

The landmark election was the first since the overthrow of veteran president Hosni Mubarak in February last year. It was launched in November and carried out in three stages.

The People's Assembly, or lower house of parliament, is made up of 498 elected MPs and 10 appointed by the ruling military.

It will hold its first session on Monday. Once elections for parliament's upper house, or Shura Council, are concluded in February, the two chambers are to choose a 100-member panel to draft a new constitution.

A new president is then to be elected by June under the timetable set by the military rulers who announced that candidates can register for the presidency from April 15.

But there is widespread belief that the SCAF, to which Mubarak handed over power, will continue to hold on to some sort of power after the transition.

The military has been the backbone of Egyptian politics ever since the fall of the monarchy in 1952, and every president since has emerged from the top ranks of the armed forces.

Contractors

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the inquiry, the sources said.

The inquiry report will be placed before the ACC next week for approval of inclusion of the report in the commission proceeding urging to null and void the allegation, as no corruption was found, the sources also said.

On September last, the commission decided to conduct inquiry into the alleged corruption in appointing contractor and advisers for construction of the bridge upon request of the communications ministry following suspension of \$1.2 billion fund by the World Bank.

ACC appointed Shiblee and Zahidul as inquiry officers respectively for probing corruption charges in appointing contractors and advisers for the construction.

Dhaka tipped off by Delhi

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been reminiscent of bloody military takeover in the wake of the country's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, 36 years ago," the British newspaper wrote on Friday.

"Sources said a reported tip-off from India helped the army pre-empt the bid by middle-ranking serving officers with active support from retired army men.

"It is believed that New Delhi alerted the Hasina government, which enabled the Bangladesh army to trace the plotters by tracking the cell phone call records."

A report of Bangla daily Anandabazar Patrika said "Indian intelligence also played a role in foiling the military coup".

Indian cantonments have been warned and intelligence has been instructed to closely monitor the situation so that "its ripples do not affect India", the Indian newspaper reported on Friday.

It said that the Indian government believes "the objective of the failed military coup was New Delhi".

"The military coup sought to thwart the friendship created between India and Bangladesh since the Hasina government came to power," the news item said.

The daily said Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has "decided to provide all forms of assistance in case of efforts to remove Sheikh Hasina from power through any undemocratic process".

Intelligence reports from both countries pointed out that Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh, Jamaat-e-Islami and BNP has been working together in this regard, it read.

Intelligence officials have also indicated that some extreme fundamentalists were planted in the army

during the BNP-led four-party alliance government for "special reasons", Anandabazar Patrika said.

"Former Prime Minister's son Tarique Rahman's name has also emerged as the head of the entire incident."

India Today, a weekly news magazine, also reported about Tarique Rahman's possible link to the plot.

"Investigations point towards former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's exiled son Tareque [Tarique] Rahman's role in trying to trigger a mutiny within the army with an aim to remove its top brass and the government that wants better ties with India," it reported yesterday.

The Indian magazine reported that the rebels circulated notes among fellow officials describing the Hasina government as "Indian agent" and claiming that "senior army officers are on India's payroll and New Delhi wants to convert Bangladesh into a protectorate".

English daily Times of India on Friday reported that "Indian agencies have had inputs about a possible coup in Bangladesh for the past few days".

In another report yesterday, the Indian newspaper said the "failed military coup may have been more serious than what has emerged in public".

It said at least some senior army officers, including a major general, were aware of the plot as they were regularly briefed.

Citing Indian officials, the newspaper said the attempt is a warning of the "fragility of Bangladesh's democracy" and "possible Islamisation that is creeping into the army ranks".

Meanwhile, talking to Zeenews.com, Smruti S

Pattanaik, an Indian expert on Bangladesh, has said the Bangladeshi military is not interested in direct takeover of power.

"Its involvement in peace-keeping mission under UN is a major international constraint," said Pattanaik, "However, it does not want civilian government's interference in its institutional affairs".

She believes that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina needs to "take strong disciplinary actions against the conspirators" to stop "Islamist infiltration of the army".

Italy PM in Libya to boost ties

AFP, Tripoli

Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti arrived in Libya yesterday to revive a treaty of friendship and to offer his nation's expertise in training police in the North African country, an AFP correspondent said.

Monti, on his first visit to Libya since the fall Moamer Kadhafi, is leading a delegation of high-ranking officials, including Foreign Minister Giulio Terzi and Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola.

During his talks with senior Libyan officials, Monti is expected to sign a series of bilateral agreements, including one that will offer Italy's services in training the police force of the new Libya, officials said.

Monti will also open a consulate in Libya and hand over the sculpted head of the first century Domitilla Minor, which was smuggled from the Libyan town of Sabratha in the 1960s and recently auctioned at Christie's, Libyan sources said.

Pranab, Ashraf

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citizen near the border.

While Mukherjee asked the media in Kolkata not to blow it "out of proportions", Ashrafur in Dhaka said his government is not "much worried" about such incidents along the Indo-Bangla border area.

Their statements came after the footage of a Bangladeshi cattle smuggler being stripped and tortured by, what appeared to be, Indian border guards in Murshidabad was shown by several media.

Yesterday, Indian Border Security Force shot dead a Bangladeshi in Benapole of Jessore.

Hot on the heels of an outcry over the brutality shown in the footage, the Indian finance minister told reporters, "Such incidents often take place at the border. There is no need to blow them out of proportions."

Mukherjee said the governments of India and Bangladesh would resolve the issue through discussion, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

According to the victim, Habibur Rahman, a 22-year-old cattle smuggler from Chapainawabganj, BSF men in uniform stripped and tortured him

on December 9 last year as he refused to pay them a bribe.

The video clip, which was aired on some Indian TV channels, including NDTV, earned strong criticism of the BSF personnel from people in both countries. The BSF authorities have already suspended eight of its personnel in connection with the incident and ordered a fully-fledged probe.

Bangladesh has already protested the "violent action" by BSF and urged India to thoroughly probe the matter.

Asked to comment on BSF's torture on Bangladeshi citizens, LGRD Minister Syed Ashraf yesterday said, "Many such incidents are taking place in the bordering areas of the countries--cattle lifting, drug smuggling and many other things. This is nothing new. These happened in the past, are happening now and will also happen in future."

Ashrafur was talking to reporters after inaugurating the orientation programme for the newly appointed zila parishad administrators in the capital. His statement drew flak from opposition BNP.

"Cattle lifting, drug smuggling and many other crimes take place in border areas. We hear about these from people who live along the border and also from those who live elsewhere."

Asked if torture and killings at the border were provocative, he said, "The state is not too much concerned about it. It is not right that the state shall focus only on these issues, leaving aside all other businesses."

However, BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday criticised Ashrafur's remarks about the government not being worried.

"Fie on Syed Ashraf! Fie on the government which has failed to ensure security of the people and to raise any protest against the incidents," said Fakhrul during a discussion at Diploma Engineers Institute in the capital.

"Our brothers are being killed one after another continuously. Felani's body was hung to the fence. But our government is silent," he said.

Because of the government's subservient policy, the country's sovereignty has been compromised, he claimed.

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Youth shot dead

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the spot, he said.

On information, Benapole port police rushed to the spot, recovered the body and sent it to Jessore General Hospital morgue for an autopsy, said Hasan Hafezur Rahman, officer-in-charge of the station.

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) Director General Maj Gen Anwar Hossain, however, told The Daily Star last night that they are investigating the incident to ascertain whether the victim was killed in BSF firing "as primary investigation raises some suspicion".

He added that the bullet-hit body was found around 60 yards inside Bangladesh.

The BGB border outpost has already protested the killing after holding a flag meeting with the BSF outpost concerned, he said.

The killing happened days after the release of a video clip that showed some BSF men were brutally torturing a Bangladeshi citizen in Murshidabad district of Paschimbanga on January 9 as he allegedly refused to pay them a bribe.

The BSF authorities on January 18 suspended eight jawans and ordered fully-fledged investigation into the matter.

India on December 20 last year regretted the killing of four Bangladeshi nationals by BSF members on December 16 and 17, saying that it has taken various steps, including strict control on opening fire, introduction of non-lethal weapons, round-the-clock intensive patrolling.

According to rights group Ain O Salish Kendra, 39 Bangladeshis were killed by

the BSF in 2011, while Odhikar puts the number at 31.

The foreign ministry statement issued yesterday says such killings are taking place despite assurances at the highest level of the Indian government of exercising maximum restraint by the BSF.

The reaction of Bangladesh comes in continuation of earlier communications expressing deep concern and dismay of the government of Bangladesh at the recurrence of such incidents of deaths at the hands of BSF members.

The Indian authorities concerned have been urged to conduct a thorough investigation into the incident and to take action against those responsible, the statement added.

Unusual

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"We are fortunate to have detected it [the plot] at an initial stage. We are more cautious now."

The army at a rare press briefing on Thursday said a group of fanatic retired and in-service officers at the instigation of some non-resident Bangladeshis sought to "disrupt democracy by creating anarchy in the army, cashing in on religious fervour of others."

At the briefing, Brig Gen Muhammad Mashud Razzaz said the court of inquiry was formed on December 28 last year to investigate the plot.

Sources said the army came to know about the conspiracy early December last year. Two retired army officers, who are now in detention, communicated with each other in October last year to hatch the plot.

The three-member court of inquiry headed by an officer of the rank of brigadier general has been given the responsibility to track down the "entire network and all the people involved in the plot" both in and outside the army. The two other members are from the rank of colonel, said the sources.

Meanwhile, the army is taking the help of its officials at Bangladesh missions abroad to trace the non-resident Bangladeshis, who were involved in the plot.

The court of inquiry is being provided with necessary information by other departments and the army's intelligence agencies including the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), Military Intelligence and the army security unit, said the sources.

A court martial will be formed to try the people behind the plot after the court of inquiry submits its probe report, said the sources.

Besides, the court of inquiry will make suggestions, and advise the force on how to deal with or prevent such incidents in the future.

An extensive probe is being conducted in the cantonments and other places to get full details of the recent plot to topple the democratic government.

"We are carrying out a probe to find out the people involved in the plot," a senior army official told The Daily Star, preferring anonymity.

The official said the army is yet to find any trace of Maj Syed Mohammad Ziaul Haque alias Major Zia, one of the masterminds behind the conspiracy.

"We are trying to capture him," said the official.

US CONDEMNS THE PLOT
The USA has strongly condemned any attempt of a "military coup" in Bangladesh, and said it would strongly oppose any interruption of democracy in Bangladesh.

"We strongly condemn attempts by individuals or groups to overthrow democratically elected governments and would strongly oppose any interruption of Bangladesh's democracy, Emily J Horne, the State Department spokesperson, said in Washington on Friday in response to a question on reports of a plot to topple the democratic government in Bangladesh.

40-year-old

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using their party posts.

Khaleda Zia on January 1 at a JCD meeting had declared that the new committee will be formed soon with a combination of "young and experienced" leaders.

Her announcement triggered a leadership race in JCD. The aspiring leaders, mostly aged around 40, have been trying to convince some influential BNP leaders to secure the top posts in the committee.

Talking to The Daily Star, many JCD activists said they want to see young leadership as their main rival Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) has already fixed a maximum age limit of 29 for its central committee.

"To strengthen the organisational activities and make it more powerful, there is no alternative to young leadership in Chhatra Dal," said SM Obaidul Haque Nasir, senior joint convener of JCD Dhaka University unit.

Sources inside JCD have claimed that BNP Senior Vice-chairman Tarique Rahman, who is currently undergoing treatment in London, has already suggested the party high command to form the new JCD committee.