

# Evidence destroyed

FROM PAGE 1

Sagar Sarowar, news editor of the private television channel Maastanga, and his wife Meherun Runi, a senior reporter of ATN Bangla, were killed in their West Rajabazar flat in the capital on February 11.

Two weeks on, police have yet to name a suspect or arrest anyone. Home Minister Shahara Khatun told reporters on the day that she had instructed the law enforcers to arrest the assailant(s) within 48 hours.

The journalist community has been demanding the arrest of the person(s) involved in the killing.

Hasina appreciated journalists for their "united movement," urging them to give information to the intelligence agencies about the killing and also refrain from swarming to crime spots in future for the sake of investigation.

Hasina, who is also president of the ruling Awami League, was speaking at a meeting with her party's Sylhet district unit leaders at her Gono Bhawan residence.

The prime minister termed "unexpected" the interview of Mahir Sarowar Megh, the five-year-old boy of the slain couple, by journalists, saying that Megh had been exposed to risks by such acts on the part of the media.

"Nothing can be more inhuman than this... asking the child [Megh] again and again to relate the whole incident soon after the killing of his parents was just nuisance and this kind of journalism should be stopped."

"Interrogation is a job for detectives, not journalists."

Referring to the agitation

by journalists, Hasina said such programmes would create awareness among the people.

Journalists can now launch such programmes as there is "full freedom" of press in the country, she said, adding that the community had never dared to act in such a way during the BNP-Jamaat coalition government of 2001-2006.

Had the journalists protested the killings of the 16 journalists, including Manik Shah and Humayun Kabir Balu, during the period, this killing [of Sagar and Runi] might not have happened, she noted.

An irritated Hasina also alleged journalists sometimes published news with completely false information and presented some others in a fabricated manner. This kind of journalism must not be welcomed.

Touching on the Teesta water sharing issue with India, the prime minister said talks on the matter were underway.

"Besides, we've told the Indian government that there must be a joint study on the Tipaimukh Dam. They must include members of the Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission in the study."

The government is working on the bilateral issues with India by fully protecting the interest of the country, she said.

Referring to the BNP's movement, Hasina said the main opposition party was planning to assume power through a "dubious path".

"The Awami League will go to power if people want. And if people don't want that, the party won't go to power."

Hasina said the Election Commission under the current government had conducted more than 5,200 polls at different levels, which were free and fair.

"We never intervened in the activities of the Election Commission... It carried out its duties independently."

## Blast kills 16 at Peshawar bus station

DAWN ONLINE, Peshawar

A car bomb ripped through a bus station yesterday, killing 16 people, including two children on the outskirts of the north western city of Peshawar, officials said.

The attack happened on the road towards the garrison city of Kohat near the lawless tribal belt, a stronghold of militants blamed for violence plaguing both Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan.

"It was a car bomb blast. Sixteen people have been killed and 32 injured, we are investigating whether a suicide bomber was involved or not," senior police official Kalam Khan told AFP.

TV footage of the site showed site where the wreckage of a car lay alongside other badly damaged vehicles, and ambulances and rescue workers raced to ferry the wounded to hospital.

Doctor Rahim Jan told AFP that 16 bodies had been brought into Peshawar's main Lady Reading hospital and that 35 people were wounded.

## India orders

FROM PAGE 20

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had raised the issue with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Indian Water Resources Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal yesterday told reporters that RC Jha, chairman of Central Water Commission (CWC), would look into the reasons behind the collapse of gates 13 and 16 and suggest corrective measures.

Jha was asked to submit his report to the ministry within the next 15 days.

Until the gates are put in place, a member of CWC will remain at the barrage site over the Ganges River, said Bansal.

The Farakka Barrage has 108 sluice gates.

The probe will also ascertain whether the collapse could have been anticipated and the reasons for delay in repairing the gates.

Sources said Jha will also probe whether the collapse was an accident or "done purposely".

On Wednesday, Mamata said West Bengal state government had noticed the leakage from the two broken sluice gates June last year but no action has been taken yet to plug it.

She said under the 1996 Indo-Bangladesh agreement on sharing of Ganges water, Bangladesh will get 33 percent water and the rest will be for India but "we found that because of the leakage, Bangladesh is getting 88 percent water and as a result, West Bengal's rivers, including the Bhagirathi, are suffering from water shortage".

Besides the dry rivers, she said, it is affecting the power plants and water supply in the state. "The thermal power plant is being shut down due to the water crisis. In addition to that, many ships are not being able to move from the ports," she added.

"It is scandalous. I demand a high-level enquiry into it," Mamata had said.

## Spellers

FROM PAGE 20

nervousness, and made silly mistakes.

Nonetheless, there seemed no lack of talent among the spellers, especially the 15 that qualified for the divisional round (second round).

The whole idea of the contest, organised by champs21.com, which provides education materials online, is to find the best speller in the country.

The five schools that hosted the contest yesterday are Cambrian School and College, Banani Bidyaniketon, Holy Cross School, Bangladesh International School and College, and Canadian International School.

From Cambrian, Rafid Mostafa, Khondaker Mushfiqur Rahman and Nafiu Nawar, all tenth graders, crossed the first round hurdle.

Ruksana Alam Rekha of class nine, Illin Binte Alamgir of class seven and Sabiha Tabassum of class 10 will compete in the divisional round from Banani Bidyaniketon.

From Holy Cross School, it was Susan Tani Sarcar, Nabila Rubaiyat and Jannatul Mawa, all class 10 students, who went through.

Zuhrat Mahfuza Inam and Rifat Zabeen Khan of class 10 and Nafisa Nawal of class seven will fight in the divisional round from Bangladesh International School and College.

And from Canadian International School, it is Labib Ahabb Rahman of class eight and Raaf Zafar and Nafia Jahan Mirza of class seven.

A minimum of 500 students from Dhaka will take part in the divisional round.

Those who have not participated in the school contest can still qualify for the divisional round by playing the Spelling Bee game on www.champs21.com.

# Ghulam Azam

FROM PAGE 20

proves Ghulam Azam's health is deteriorating as claimed in his bail petition.

It said being 89 years old is no ground for bail, especially when he stands accused of crimes of this magnitude. It said the detainee had been in custody since January 11 this year, which is not unreasonably long.

Ghulam Azam was not brought to the tribunal yesterday from his prison cell at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University hospital. The court excused him from being present due to his old age and physical weakness.

He is facing 62 specific charges of crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War. He is one of the front men who actively helped the Pakistani occupation forces' attempt to foil the birth of Bangladesh in 1971.

Ghulam Azam's first bail prayer was rejected on January 11 when he appeared before the court. The court sent him to jail then.

In yesterday's order, the

tribunal noted the points made by Ghulam Azam's counsel Abdur Razzaq during his argument for the bail.

Razzaq gave an elaborate list of ailments that Ghulam Azam is suffering from, his limited capability of movement and lack of suitable treatment facilities at the BSMMU. He also argued about unreasonable detention and that there was no reason to believe that his client would be convicted.

The court's order also noted the submission of Chief Prosecutor Ghulam Arief Tipoo, who pointed out that the grounds for this bail prayer were pretty much the same as Ghulam Azam's first bail prayer.

He said Ghulam Azam had effectively been the "mastermind and springboard in steering the paraphernalia of Jamaat" and other organisations like the peace committees and Razakars, Al Badr and Al Shams.

The tribunal in its order said Ghulam Azam has been accused of mobilising his party and its student cadres into establishing the Al Badr, Al Shams, Razakars and the

Peace Committees across the country, which perpetrated numerous criminal activities. He also allegedly incited a mass killing and he reportedly demanded arms from Pakistan government during the war for Razakar units, the order said, noting the charges against the former Jamaat chief.

On the treatment facilities at BSMMU, the tribunal said the BSMMU was among the best hospitals in the country and there is no other place that can provide better treatment.

"The prayer for bail is thus rejected," the order concluded.

After the order was passed, Abdur Razzaq began a submission seeking permission to supply home-made food for Ghulam Azam in the prison cell.

The tribunal pointed out that the matter of food has nothing to do with the court. It said it was a matter of prison regulations and the defence counsel should first seek permission from the jail authorities, and the tribunal may rule on the matter later.

The matter was left pending for March 1.

## Ruling party

FROM PAGE 20

fallen sick in the country," he said.

"There is a security problem for people in the absence of the rule of law in this country. We do not want to see impunity enjoyed by some of the people," he said. "The system is like a democratisation of corruption."

Forty years into independence is enough time to establish the rule of law in the country and yet the political parties are still urging the people to wait and wait, he said.

Echoing the views of Huda, Dr Kamal said the ruling party wants to control everything, even the police, military, media and administration.

As the chief guest, Prof Rehman Sobhan, chairman of Centre for Policy Dialogue, said four free and fair elections were held in Bangladesh. And this is a reflection of the country's making significant progress in democratic practice.

In terms of economic and human development, Bangladesh has made advances among South Asian countries, he said.

BEI President Farooq Sobhan moderated the programme. Scholars, academicians, researchers and diplomats attended the book launch.

## Elections

FROM PAGE 1

wrapped up its five-day visit with the press conference yesterday.

During the visit, the delegation discussed political, social and economic issues with the prime minister, leader of the opposition, deputy speaker, chief election commissioner, National Human Rights Commission chairman, Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus and representatives of civil society.

Lambert said the main political parties and the Election Commission should discuss as soon as possible the ways to conduct free and fair elections.

Responding to questions about the general elections scheduled for 2014, Lambert said they had heard arguments for and against the caretaker government system.

Since the constitution has been amended through scrapping the caretaker system, both the major parties should hold open discussions in parliament on their new proposals, and the opposition should be given the chance and space to speak and discuss their proposal openly and seriously, she observed.

Asked if they think a fair and impartial election is possible under a partisan government in the context where the two major parties do not trust each other, Lambert said, "We are not looking at the wholesale trust; we are rather looking at the trust in the election process."

Mentioning the delegation's meeting with the new Election Commission, she said the chief election commissioner's intention is to bring political parties very close to reaching a consensus on the way of conducting the elections in a free and credible manner. The Election Commission is also extremely important for that.

Queried whether BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia had told them if her party would not participate in elections except under a caretaker government, she said, "They are very concerned at the removal of the caretaker government [system] and what may come in its place. They are looking for a solution."

Lambert, however, said the BNP chief did not say her party would not join the election sans caretaker but stressed the need for non-partisan interim measures before the polls.

The other members of the delegation are Thomas Mann (European People's Party), Niccolò Rinaldi (Alliance of Democrats and Liberals), Salvador Seda i Alabart (European People's Party), Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar (Socialist and Democrats), Nirj Deva (Conservatives and Reformists) and Slavi Binev (Non-attached).

# Border firing to go on

FROM PAGE 1

by BSF along the border with Bangladesh cannot stop completely.

The BSF chief, however, made it clear that firing will be the last resort and that the force has put in a number of measures to avert casualties.

His remarks came a day ahead of a meeting between Indian Home Minister India P Chidambaram and Bangladesh Home Minister Shahara Khatun. When the two ministers meet, Shahara is expected to raise the issue of BSF firing and killing of Bangladeshi civilians along the border.

Yesterday the BSF director general said, "They [BSF personnel] will fire with the available weapon... it may be non-lethal, it may be lethal... every patrol company will have both weapons but if a person is under attack and he is holding a rifle, he will fire his rifle."

"Even that firing he will do as far as possible with the intent not to kill but if casualties occur... we will have to tolerate it as an inescapable alternative," he said.

"It gives me no pleasure in killing any civilians. We have the best of relations with Bangladesh. We want to improve those relations... but we certainly cannot sacrifice the lives of our officers and men and we also have to complete our mandate, which is border guarding and, therefore, we are trying to strike a difficult balance between completing our task with as little force as possible," Bansal said.

He said the BSF is sending a fresh lot of non-lethal weapons to 23 border posts along the Bangladesh border. However, he claimed that since the time BSF decided to exercise "restraint" while dealing with cross-border movements, criminals have become bolder.

"They are coming in larger numbers... sometimes even 300-400 at a time. They are breaching the fence with the confidence that they can get away with it... Cattle smuggling is being attempted with much greater openness," Bansal said.

"Some people say these are cattle traders and that BSF is killing them. My question is what trade is done in the middle of the night? From dusk to dawn, on the entire Bangladesh border we declare curfew and no movement is permitted. Whether Indian or Bangladeshi, he has no business to be there... So,

to say that these people are innocent traders is not a very convincing argument," he said.

The DG said the BSF has asked the Border Guard Bangladesh to ensure strict vigil in vulnerable areas during the nights.

He claimed that since Chidambaram's visit to Bangladesh in July last year and subsequent order to exercise maximum restraint on the Bangladesh border, shooting incidents have come down by "about 70 percent".

Meanwhile, Home Minister Shahara Khatun reached New Delhi yesterday afternoon leading a 12-member delegation including Gowher Rizvi, international affairs adviser to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Tariq A Karim, and Home Secretary Mustaq Ahmed.

Before the talks with her Indian counterpart, Shahara is expected to call on Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at his residence around 10:00am today.

Home secretaries of the two countries held a preparatory meeting yesterday at the Indian home ministry ahead of the talks between the two home ministers.

Meanwhile, an official statement of Indian government last night said Chidambaram and Shahara would have one-on-one meeting before the delegation-level talks today.

Issues on security, border management and enhanced cooperation between the police and law enforcement agencies of the countries will be high on the agenda.

India's National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon, Home Secretary RK Singh and Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai would be in the Indian delegation.

The meeting of the home ministers of Bangladesh and India take on the added significance with the presence of Gowher Rizvi and Indian National Security adviser Shivshankar Menon, said officials who regularly attend ministerial-level talks between the two sides.

This clearly indicates that the home minister-level talks would focus on all issues relating to security cooperation between the two sides, especially the drives against terrorists and criminals.

Sources have said India is likely to ask Bangladesh to consider imposing night

curfews along the border to prevent movement of people as India has done.

## Gone beyond

FROM PAGE 20

lying on a pile of sand," Arab said.

"All I wanted was my son's release at any cost," Arab said breaking into tears.

Locals say they found the body at around 6:45am at Puratan Sonakandi village adjoining Baliartek village where the boy lived with his mother.

On February 21, Nafiz, a kindergarten student, went out to buy candy from a nearby shop around 5:30pm. But the boy did not return till late night and a frantic search also failed to trace his whereabouts, said his grandfather Bachchu Miah.

The kidnappers finally called a neighbour around midnight and demanded Tk 5 lakh for his release. The criminals also asked the family to go to Munshiganj with the ransom to get back the boy alive, added Bachchu.

After the kidnappers' call, the family tried desperately to know exactly where in Munshiganj the criminals had asked them to go.

"But we found the phone switched off each time we tried to call them," said the boy's grandfather.

The abductors again called around noon the next day to the mobile of Habib Mollah, a resident of Sonakandi village, and reiterated the demand.

This time the kidnappers specified a spot in Munshiganj, but when the family went to the district as early as possible, they found no such place there.

In the meantime, the family informed the Rapid Action Battalion and police, but both the forces failed to trace the kidnappers.

Nafiz's body was found near the house of Habib, whom the kidnappers called demanding the ransom.

"I started preparing to return to Bangladesh as soon as I heard the news without informing anyone about it," added Arab who has been working in Kuwait for 18 years. He last visited the family around five months ago.

He suspects involvement of some of his villagers in the abduction.

Police later recovered Nafiz's body and sent it to Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue for autopsy.

Morgue sources say the boy was strangled and might be tortured before his death.

Moynuddin Khan, officer-in-charge of Keraniganj police, said they are investigating the incident.

# Gas price hike soon

FROM PAGE 20

prices of natural gas.

Sources at the ministry said Petrobangla has proposed raising the prices to Tk 800 a month from Tk 400 for a single-burner gas stove and to Tk 1,000 from Tk 450 for a double-burner stove.

"People use double-burner stoves at Tk 450 a month while the cylinder gas consumers spend Tk 2,500 a month. This type of discrimination is unacceptable," said Hossain Monsur, chairman of Petrobangla.

The gas tariff of domestic consumers last rose in August 2009 by 11 percent.

Chairman of Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) Syed Yusuf Hossain told The Daily Star that his organisation has not yet received any proposal from Petrobangla on raising gas prices.

After receiving the proposal, the commission will hold a public hearing in the presence of stakeholders and the media, he mentioned.

Yusuf, however, noted that there cannot be any justification to increase the prices in areas where residents only receive gas supply for four to six hours a day.

"Domestic users in Gulshan, Baridhara, Banani, Dhanmondi, Uttara, Lalmatia and other posh areas in the capital get uninterrupted gas supply round the clock. Tariff could be hiked for those areas," he argued.

For industrial users, the government should look into the possible impact on the production of the units, maintained the Petrobangla chief. "The small and medium enterprises could see their competitiveness dented if the gas prices are increased."

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ance of improving supply management to cut down on wastage of the utility. "Only raising prices as a way of easing pressure on subsidies will not work."

According to Petrobangla's proposal, natural gas tariffs for power plants will be raised to Tk 3.28 a cubic metre from Tk 2.82, for fertiliser factories to Tk 3 a cubic metre from Tk 2.58 and for industrial users to Tk 6.71 a cubic metre from Tk 5.86.

For privately-owned smaller power plants, prices will be hiked to Tk 6.36 a cubic metre from Tk 4.18 and for commercial consumers to Tk 12.36 per cubic metre from Tk 9.47.

The country now produces around 2,060 million cubic feet of gas a day against the demand for more than 2,500 mcmcf, as energy ministry statistics show.

# Another witness fails

FROM PAGE 20

Nizamul Huq started yesterday's proceedings before the prosecutors could even tell the court of them having no witness. The prosecution had mentioned 68 witnesses to testify in the case.

"It has become a common submission from the prosecution," the judge added. Prosecutor Haider Ali, who is dealing with the trial of Sayedee, agreed meekly. He, however, did not mention why there was no witness.

The same prosecutor on February 7, after producing a witness who could not even remember anything specific related to the case and had finished his deposition in two minutes, told the tribunal that the prosecution team was trying very hard to produce witnesses.

"This is not an easy task. It is in fact really hard," he had told the tribunal.

Yesterday, Justice Nizamul Huq asked the prosecutor to give the court a definite date when his team would be able to produce the next witness.

"We cannot give a confirmed date at the moment," replied Haider Ali and asked the court to fix a convenient date for the tribunal.

"But it is your witness. You tell us [when you can produce him]," the tribunal responded.

Prosecutor Haider Ali then consulted with Helaluddin, investigation officer of the case, and told the court that the next witness would be produced next Monday.

The tribunal chairman then reminded the prosecutor that the court had passed an order ensuring witness protection. "You choose a date after [February] 28 and make sure it is a firm date," he said and fixed March 4 for recording the 28th prosecution witness' testimony.

He also told the prosecution to bring as many witnesses as possible to Dhaka, keep them in their custody and produce them one after another before the tribunal

to avert untoward adjournments.

On February 2, the proceedings against Sayedee had to be adjourned after three witnesses in the custody of the prosecution left, saying they were going to visit relatives and did not return.

This month the prosecution has produced only four witnesses, including former lawmaker from Narail Saif Hafizur Rahman, senior journalist Abed Khan, one person who could not remember anything specific, and another person who only confirmed the seizure of some newspaper articles by the investigation agency.

The court has finished recording the cross-examination of witness Hafizur Rahman, while that of Abed Khan is still pending.

Sayedee is among the six Jamaat and two BNP leaders facing war crimes charges at the tribunal.

CONTEMPT PETITION AGAINST JANAKANTHA Tajul Islam, a counsel for Sayedee, yesterday appealed to the tribunal to bring contempt of court charges against the Bangla daily Janakantha.

He referred to a report of the newspaper under the headline "Pakistani soldiers stabbed my brother to death in presence of Sayedee", a line which was "picked up" from the deposition of the 27th prosecution witness.

He alleged that it was "prejudice" and is sending the "wrong message to the people". In fact, the witness had said that he had heard from a then Pakistan army collaborator that Sayedee was in the car which was used to drive the witness' brother to the killing spot, said Tajul.

He said it was not an isolated incident as another report was published in the newspaper with a similar misleading headline.

Tribunal Chairman Justice Nizamul Huq responded by saying that many such

reports were being published and the tribunal was ignoring them.

Tajul, however, argued that the tribunal had not ignored all the reports as contempt of court proceedings were brought against an English newspaper while a Bangla daily was cautioned.

The tribunal then asked the reporters present in the courtroom to inform the Janakantha reporter to be present in court on Sunday. MOJAHED'S CHARGE HEARING DEFERRED The International Crimes Tribunal yesterday postponed until