

Girl found dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered the body of a Class-III school girl from in front of his home at Mohammadpur in the capital last evening.

The deceased was identified as Momena Akhter, 9, daughter of Abdul Mannan Hawlader.

Abdul Matin, sub-inspector of Mohammadpur Police Station, quoting family members said Momena went out of her tin-roofed house at 3:00pm to play with her friends.

As she did not return home within half-an-hour, her mother went outside the house and made a frantic search for Momena in the area.

Later, locals found Momena lying dead in front of her Poolpar Battala residence at about 6:30pm.

On preliminary investigation, police found scratch marks on both sides of her neck.

"It seems that the girl might have been killed," SI Matin told The Daily Star.

The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Rajshahi

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"We need to keep boro fields under water continuously but we only get water from deep tube-wells after every 15 days because of power crisis," he said.

Enamul Haque, a deep tubewell operator of Karimpur village of Mundumala, said they witness land shedding 10 to 12 hours daily. Some 130 bighas of land under his deep tubewell scheme gets water every 15 days.

The load shedding causes immense sufferings to people in Rajshahi, Natore, Naogaon, Chapainawabganj, Pabna, Sirajganj, Bogra, and Joypurhat districts.

"I was forced to buy an IPS for Tk 20,000 for my daughter who is taking the HSC examinations this year," said Hafizul Islam, a businessman of Miapara in Rajshahi city.

He said sometimes he cannot charge the IPS properly due to frequent power cuts.

Frequent load shedding caused water crisis in many areas while healthcare including surgical operations at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital are being greatly hampered.

Rajkhowa

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Chairman Pradip Gogoi and six other former leaders of the banned outfit were acquitted Saturday by the court set up under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act of India in the case relating to the murder of a businessman and political leader Bijoy M Baruah and his two bodyguards.

Judge H Sharma of the Special Judge Designated Court Assam said the evidence placed by the prosecution before the court did not warrant conviction of the accused.

Baruah and the two others were gunned down by suspected Ulfa militants in Sibsagar district of Assam in January 1990.

Police had submitted charge sheets against the eight accused after carrying out investigations.

The other six were former Ulfa cadre Jugal Kishore Mahanta, Kushal Deuri, Saurav Gogoi, Binod Phukan, Chitra Didingia and Moni Gohain.

Rajkhowa and Gogoi head the pro-talk faction of the Ulfa and have entered into peace negotiations with the Indian government after they were handed over to India by authorities in Bangladesh.

In February 2011, an Ulfa team led by Rajkhowa had met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram to kick off the peace talks.

The next round of talks is likely to be held later this month.

However, Paresh Baruah, the chief of Ulfa's military wing, has been opposing the talks.

Destiny magic

FROM PAGE 1

from Tk 5.53 crore a year ago. The figure jumped to nearly Tk 1,200 crore in 2010-11.

Loans and investments grew to Tk 569 crore in 2010-11 from less than Tk 23 crore in 2008-09; they rose over 213 percent between 2009-10 and 2010-11.

Destiny posted a staggering 354 percent increase in its net profit in 2010-11 from that of a year ago. These figures, however, are not certified by any chartered accountant and can easily misguide people, says the Bangladesh Bank report.

As of June 30, 2011, the firm showed Tk 656 crore in assets whereas it actually spent the amount for research and development. Had it shown the amount as expenses for research and development, the balance sheet would have been negative, said the central bank.

The Bangladesh Bank probed the activities of Destiny Multipurpose Cooperative Society on instructions from the finance ministry.

Though Destiny Multipurpose Cooperative Society is registered with the Department of Cooperatives, it has been running on MLM concept that goes against cooperative laws, said Bangladesh Bank.

MLM is a marketing strategy in which members benefit not only from the sales they generate, but also from the sales of others they recruit. It creates a pyramid structure of distributors. MLM is also known as network marketing and referral marketing.

Since there are no laws or policies for MLM in Bangladesh, a vested group has been swindling people out of crores of taka by offering them huge returns on their investments. Earlier, ITCL, Jubok and Unipay2 pocketed several thousand crores through MLM programmes.

The latest name is Destiny 2000, which is known to many for sponsoring such high-profile

programmes as Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) and the World Marketing Summit.

The BB probe found that Destiny has been illegally running banking activities and has nearly 70 lakh members. It has set a target of registering 1 crore members by this year.

As of December 31, 2011, the organisation collected nearly Tk 2,000 crore as deposits and share capital from people. Of the deposits, over 94 percent are long-term, says the BB report.

Destiny purchases land and gives loans to its associate organisations as well as members from the deposits. It did not try to borrow from banks or capital markets to meet its demand for money, the report says.

The central bank also hinted at a link between the current liquidity crisis in the banking sector and the booming MLM business. High interest rates and commissions offered by MLM companies and cooperative firms may have encouraged people to deposit money with them instead of banks.

Though Destiny makes an annual profit of Tk 200 crore, the money is tax free because the firm is registered under cooperative laws. On the other hand, banks have to pay a 42.5 percent tax on its income, said Bangladesh Bank.

Destiny collects members through employees of government, semi-government and autonomous organisations, the report says.

The central bank said the Microcredit Regulatory Authority is not playing its due role, and if Destiny continues its operation, it could lead to indiscipline in the financial sector.

The bank suggested conducting a probe to find out whether officials from the finance and home ministries, Bangladesh Bank and the Department of Cooperatives are involved in Destiny's activities.

Finance passes

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ministry. Now the government has to take a stand," he told The Daily Star.

Over the last few days, various newspapers have published reports on various irregularities of Destiny revealed by the central bank.

The BB investigation found proof of illegal banking by Destiny Multipurpose Co-operative Society Ltd, one of Destiny-2000's dozens of concerns. Such illegal banking is creating chaos in the country's financial sector, said the probe report, which was sent to the finance ministry recently.

Explaining why the central bank cannot act on its own against the company, the BB official said a co-operative is not a banking company; it is registered with the Department of Cooperatives.

"The law has to be changed if Bangladesh Bank is to intervene. We can freeze Destiny's bank accounts only when the government directs us to do so," he said.

Asked whether the government was reluctant to take action against the firm due to the involvement of some "influential persons" with the company, the finance minister said, "I know a general is there."

It may be mentioned that former army chief Harun-Ar-Rashid is a director of Destiny-2000. Rashid is also a member of the Sector Commanders Forum, which champions the demand for the war crimes trial.

The central bank is also shocked by the delay in making a law to regulate multi level marketing (MLM) companies such as Destiny.

Destiny-2000 Ltd was registered under the Department of Co-operatives in 2000 and began operations the same year.

As its website shows, it has 42 sister concerns, including Air Destiny Ltd, Destiny Tree Plantation Ltd, Boishakhi Media Ltd and Dainik Destiny.

A year ago, another MLM company unipay2u came into the limelight by cheating people. At the time, the government moved to formulate laws or policies to police these companies, but the initiative has yet to see any result.

In October last year, the commerce ministry drafted a law on direct sales. But it is yet to be placed in the cabinet for approval.

Meanwhile, the parliamentary standing committee on the commerce ministry has asked the ministry to expedite the task of making a law to oversee the activities of MLM businesses and prevent fraudulence by such companies.

"The committee will write to the top government authorities, including the finance minister, to take immediate measures to stop the illegal activities of different MLM companies, including Destiny-2000 Ltd," ABM Abul Qasem, chief of the parliamentary watchdog, told reporters at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday.

Commerce Minister GM Quader could not be reached over the phone for comments despite repeated attempts.

Contacted by The Daily Star, Destiny group's Public Relations Director Mahmud Al Faisal said, "Destiny Multipurpose Co-operative Society Ltd operates under co-operatives acts. It does not do banking and its clients withdraw money through slips, not through checks."

On the financial transparency of the company, he said the co-operative company operated with the approval of the company's board of directors and the Department of Cooperatives.

Suu Kyi wins election

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The United States and European Union have hinted that some sanctions - imposed over the past two decades in response to human rights abuses - may be lifted if the election is free and fair, unleashing a wave of investment in the impoverished but resource-rich country bordering rising powers India and China.

The charismatic and wildly popular Suu Kyi had complained last week of "irregularities", though none significant enough to derail her party's bid for 44 of the seats. Suu Kyi made no immediate comment on her victory.

From dawn, voters quietly filed into makeshift polling stations at schools, religious centres and community buildings, some gushing with excitement after casting ballots for the frail Suu Kyi, or "Auntie Suu" as she is affectionately known.

To be regarded as credible, the vote needs the blessing of Suu Kyi, who was freed from house arrest in November 2010, six days after a widely criticized general election that paved the way for the end of 49 years of direct army rule and the opening of a parliament stacked with retired and serving military.

President Thein Sein, a general in the former military junta, has surprised the world with the most dramatic political reforms since the military took power in a 1962 coup in the former British colony then known as Burma.

In the span of a year, the government has freed hundreds of political prisoners, held peace talks with ethnic rebels, relaxed strict media censorship, allowed trade unions, and showed signs of pulling back from the powerful economic and political orbit of its giant neighbour China.

It was rewarded last November when Hillary

Clinton made the first visit to the country by a US secretary of state since 1955. Business executives, mostly from Asia but many from Europe, have swarmed to Yangon in recent weeks to hunt for investment opportunities in the country of 60 million people, one of the last frontier markets in Asia.

The 2010 election was condemned as rigged to favour the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the biggest in parliament.

The NLD boycotted that vote. But as Myanmar is changing, so too, is Suu Kyi. At 66, many see her now as more politically astute, more realistic and compromising. She has described President Thein Sein as "honest" and "sincere" and accepted his appeal for the NLD to take part.

Her top priorities, she says, are introducing the rule of law, ending long-simmering ethnic insurgencies and amending the 2008 constitution ensuring the military retains a political stake and its strong influence over the country.

While her party might end up with only a small number of seats, many expect her to exert outsized influence.

Some Burmese wonder if conservatives would dare oppose her ideas in parliament given her popularity, especially ahead of a general election in 2015. Many MPs want to be seen aligned with her, basking in her popular support.

But the election has not gone smoothly. Suu Kyi has suffered from ill health and accused rivals of vandalizing NLD posters, padding electoral registers and "many, many cases of intimidation."

Some of these infractions, however, are quite minor compared to elections elsewhere in Southeast Asia, where vote-buying and even assassinations are common-

place.

The NLD on Friday said a betel nut had been catapulted at one of its candidates and a haystack had been set on fire close to where another was due to give a speech.

It made fresh claims of irregularities yesterday and said some ballots papers had been covered in wax to make it tricky to write on. It accused the USDP of waiting outside some polling stations and telling voters to back their party.

Sceptics in the democracy movement say Suu Kyi is working too closely with a government stacked with the same former generals who persecuted dissidents, fearing she is being exploited to convince the West to end sanctions and make the legislature appear effective. Others have almost impossibly high hopes for her to accelerate reforms once she enters parliament.

"Too many expectations are dangerous," says Ko Ko Gyi, a former political prisoner and Suu Kyi loyalist. "She is not a magician."

It was not clear when the election results would be announced. The full result has been promised within one week.

Some US restrictions such as visa bans and asset freezes could be lifted quickly if the election goes smoothly, diplomats say, while the EU might end its ban on investment in timber and the mining of gemstones and metals.

But holding a credible and transparent election would not mean an automatic lifting of sanctions, stresses a visiting EU delegate. "We still note that there are several hundred political prisoners," says Robert Cooper, who counsels the EU's foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton. "There is still some unfinished business here."

'I can see the sunshine now'

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restful one for Thauang Nyant.

"I was so excited about voting I didn't sleep at all," the betel nut and bamboo farmer said proudly.

Then as dawn broke in the town of Kawhmu he could wait no longer. Thauang rode his bike to the polling station and became one of the first Burmese ever to cast a vote for Aung San Suu Kyi.

Fifteen months ago, when an election was held held, the 52 year-old didn't even bother to take part.

"There was no candidate I liked," he said with a smile. "Now we have Daw (Madame) Suu and we all love and yearn for her."

In the 2010 vote, Aung San Suu Kyi was still under house arrest in Rangoon. That vote was widely derided as a sham with no international observers or foreign journalists allowed in. Ms Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), declined to take part.

This time, after a year of dramatic reforms, she agreed to compete in one of 45 by-elections being held across Burma. She chose as her constituency a rural district located to the south west of Rangoon in the Irrawaddy Delta.

And it was there that Burma's Nobel laureate spent the morning of polling day.

Ignoring concerns about her fragile health she'd travelled from Rangoon on Saturday to spend the eve of the poll among her electorate.

Then at first light, accompanied by hundreds of supporters and journalists, she toured Kawhmu's polling stations. With the roads dusty and in bad shape this was probably the first and only time the area will experience traffic gridlock.

One of those excitedly lining the streets to see their candidate was a shaven-headed nun, Thadimonhtar Htay Yi.

"We are here to support Auntie Suu" she said, "and to thank her for her sacrifice for us".

Alongside her and unable to suppress a wide grin that

showed off his teeth stained red from chewing betel nut was Htwe Thein Naing.

"I can see the sunshine now," he said. "There will be more change in the future."

Whoever wins Kawhmu and the other 44 seats, it won't have any bearing on who governs Burma. These are just by-elections that make up a small fraction of the 664 parliamentary seats.

But what has become more important is the question of the fairness and whether enough is being done to make this a credible democratic process. A cautious thumbs up from observers could mean the further loosening of international sanctions on Burma.

On the ground this extra scrutiny has brought new pressure.

"I've worked harder than in 2010," said Win Oo as he manned a table outside a polling booth in Kawhmu. "If there are any mistakes it's the reputation of both the government and the country that suffers."

Turnout at his polling station in Kawhmu had been brisk, he said, with half of all the registered voters visiting before 09:30.

It had also been a busy day for Myo Win, the village chairman for the NLD. He'd twice served time in prison for his political activities but exuded the confidence of a man who had a much-loved global icon as his candidate.

"She's definitely going to win here," he said, "probably with over 90 percent".

"FAR FROM PERFECT" It was hard to argue. Finding anyone who'd admit that they voted for Ms Suu Kyi's military doctor opponent in Kawhmu was difficult. But echoing similar complaints from counts across Burma, Mr Win said the election been far from perfect.

"We're not happy with the voting lists, there have been discrepancies there and those who've turned 18 since the last election haven't been included either," he said.

With the Kawhmu result close to a foregone conclusion, thoughts are already turning to what sort of a local

parliamentarian Ms Suu Kyi will be.

"We need better transportation and opportunity for young people here," said U Myo Khine, a father of two, as he watched her convoy pass by.

Others have their eyes on the much greater prize, the general election of 2015. "The army has changed and are now more lenient," said NLD official Myo Win. "So there is more of a possibility that Aung San Suu Kyi can become president in 2015."

Those like Win who are optimistic about the future remain cautious too. One year of fast moving reforms does not necessarily mean Burma has changed for ever.

Heated debate

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While presenting a keynote paper at a seminar at the Anti-Corruption Commission Auditorium yesterday, Farashuddin said, "Even though the Berlin-based Transparency International's financing is questionable and its evaluation process faulty, its perception index putting Bangladesh in the list of most corrupt countries of the world has tarnished the country's image overseas."

When Transparency International Bangladesh official Iftekharuzzaman got the floor during the discussion, he said he had not expected something like that from a highly educated person like Farashuddin.

"I will resign if one can prove financial irregularities in Transparency International. One should not make any statement without knowing details about the very subject," he said.

Farashuddin, while responding to the comments made by the discussants at the end of the seminar, said he stood by his statement.

Theatre festival

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focusing on Chittagong's rich heritage, culture, history and future prospects.

On the second day of the other theatre festival that began on Saturday, theatre loving people thronged Theatre Institute, Chittagong (TIC) in the evening to enjoy Puppunya, a play by Tolstoy.

Nandikar, a leading theatre troupe of the port city, staged the play.

Theatre personality and director of Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts Shishir Dutta inaugurated the four-day long theatre festival at Zila Shilpakala Academy.

In the inaugural ceremony, he said the theatre of Chittagong has a glorious history, and the port city played a major role in the independence movement through theatre.

So, Chittagong is a pioneer in theatre movement, he said adding that at present, the theatre of Chittagong has a significant position besides Dhaka.

The Daily Star Chittagong Bureau Chief Raisul Huq Bahar in his welcome speech said theatre played a vital role in the country's independence movement.

He elaborated on different events of the Odommo Chattagram Festival before the audience and urged them to attend the events in different venues in the port city.

In the ceremony, Shankar Dey presented three songs -- 'Dui diner ek visa diya, ei duniai pathaiya', 'Assalamu alaikum' and 'Bakum ta batashjemon'.

Priyanka Das presented two songs -- 'Khachhar vitor ochin pakhi' and 'Keno piriti baraila re bondhu' while Kushal Deysang -- 'Ontorjole rejole' and 'Ekdin matir vitor hobe ghor' on the stage.

Artists of Arindom Natya Samproday performed 'Jalkanya'. Mannan Heera is the playwright of the play.

Director of the play Akber Reza said "Jalkanya is the 28th production of Arindom Natya Samproday."

Cops sued

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from his residence and took him to a place in the city's Mirpur Zoo area, according to the case statement. Police shot Masud dead there and told the media that he had been killed in an exchange of bullets between police and a group of extortionists.

The accused in the case are officer-in-charge of Shah Ali Police Station Anisur Rahman, Sub-inspector Mohammad Zahid, assistant sub-inspectors Moshir Rahman and Moazzem Hossain, and jhut (garment by-products) traders Nantu, Ayub Ali, Kuddus, Sentu, Bulu alias Ripon, Shamim and Sakir.

In his complaint, Mohammad Dadon Miah said jhut traders Nantu and the six others had had a feud with his two sons Masud and Asad over jhut business.

He added that Masud had been a helper of ETC Paribahan Ltd and Asad, elder brother of Masud, had been involved in jhut business. The seven businessmen had paid the OCTK 5 lakh to kill Masud.

Asad has been in jail for the last three years in an arms case, his family members said.

After the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Moniruzzaman recorded the statements of the complainant, took into cognisance the charges against the 11 accused and ordered a judicial inquiry into the matter.

Locals earlier said a police team in plainclothes took a youth to an under-construction building, Setu Bhaban, on Zoo Road on that day. The team halted the traffic movement there around 7:45pm for a few minutes. Locals then heard the sound of firing. Around 9:15pm, a police van was seen leaving the spot with a dead body.

The police had, however, claimed that on information they went to the place to arrest extortionists. A gunfight took place, in which one of the criminals was killed and two policemen Mashiur and Moazzem of the police station were injured.

Moreover, two pistols, three magazines and four bullets were recovered from the scene, according to police.

The play is based on the sorrows of fishermen in coastal areas, he said.

Proma Abonti was the choreographer of the play.

From the School of Oriental Dance, Shubhra Sen Gupta and her troupes presented group and solo dance performances on stage.

Artists of Uttaradhiker theatre group performed "Mrittu Pakhi". Tanbi Ahmed Sydney is the play wright of the play while Moslem Uddin Sikder is its director.

2 principals

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exams that began yesterday as the education board did not issue their admit cards.

The board officials said most of those students were not allowed in the test examination and got admitted to the two colleges with fake transfer certificates.

Prof Wahiduzzaman, examination controller of Dhaka board, told The Daily Star that there was no scope of issuing admit cards to them.

He said students with fake transfer certificate numbered 119 and of them, 66 students were from Dhaka Model College and 14 from City Royal College.

The college authorities themselves made the fake transfer certificates, he said. The principals even did not submit to the board the registration fees they took from these students.

Contacted, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said all the eligible candidates had been provided with admit cards.

A few college principals took money from the students, who did not qualify in the test exams, promising them registration for the HSC exams.

The minister added they will investigate the matter and ensure stringent punishment to the people involved in the irregularities.

Arsenic

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recent survey jointly conducted by the Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (Cuet), and the Institute of Engineers of Bangladesh, Chittagong.

The seven affected wards are East Sholoshahar, South Kattali, West Bakalia, East Bakalia, South Bakalia, North Agrabad, and North Halishahar.

According to World Health Organisation (WHO), 0.05 ppm (part per million) arsenic in water is safe for human body.

But tubewells in North Halishahar and East Sholoshahar are pumping water that contains 0.5 ppm arsenic, 10 times higher than the safe level.

Dr Swapan Kumar Palit of the civil engineering department at Cuet said the seven wards have been identified as more risky. His department has done a detailed survey in East Sholoshahar recently.

Of the 233 tubewells in ward 6 of East Sholoshahar, 99 pump water with high levels of arsenic, said Dr Swapan, who is the key researcher in the survey.

Areas affected by the highest level of arsenic in the ward are Baraypara, Ghasia Para, Chairman Ghata, and Omar Ali Matabar Road, Swapan said adding that generally low-income group people and slum dwellers live in these areas with no water supply from the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA).

Dr Swapan said the survey was launched in 2008.

He said CCC and PHED should seal the contaminated tubewells, so no one could be affected.

Both the authorities, however, are trying to shift the responsibility on the other.