

Let him decide

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Talking to The Daily Star, a number of policymakers in Hasina administration reiterated that the incident has embarrassed not just Suranjit but also the government and the party.

Some of them note if the government goes for action against Suranjit, known as a reformist and an outspoken leader, different quarters may interpret that he has been punished for his roles during the tenure of military-backed caretaker regime.

Suranjit had placed some reform proposals saying none should be at the helm of the party for more than two consecutive terms, apparently pointing to Sheikh Hasina. The result was his removal from the AL central committee in 2009 and a long wait to become a minister.

Risk is also there in not taking any action. The policymakers say if the government tries to save him, there will be sharp reactions from the public, critics and the opposition. It will be best to leave it to Suranjit, a seven-time lawmaker.

"If he comes clean, he will stay. If not, he must quit, but this is up to him," a senior minister told The Daily Star, referring to Suranjit's Thursday statement that he would resign if his involvement in the incident is proved.

The Daily Star talked to some other ministers and party leaders in the last two days. But none preferred to say anything on record about the scandal because of its sensitivity.

"The government won't take such a huge risk to save him ahead of the Dhaka city corporations elections," a senior minister said.

Meanwhile, the railway minister did not talk to any of the senior ministers about the issue. Rather, some of his cabinet colleagues phoned him to know firsthand information about the incident. He did not receive the calls, according to the sources.

Party insiders said upon arrival from Turkey today, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would talk about the matter with her close aides in the party and government.

Ministers and party leaders think a veteran leader like Suranjit must come clean otherwise it would be a huge blow to the government, the party and careers of other senior leaders.

It all began on Monday around 11:30pm when the driver of Suranjit's Assistant Personal Secretary Omar Faruq Talukder pulled over to the Border Guard Bangladesh headquarters in the capital and shouted out that there was bribe money stashed in the microbus.

Faruq, Railway General Manager (East) Yusuf Ali Mridha and Dhaka Divisional Commandant Enamul Huq were in the vehicle. According to Enamul, they were heading to the Jigatola residence of Suranjit Sengupta.

Rab 'shootout'

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The Daily Star that a patrol team signalled a speeding microbus to stop at the check post near Bashundhara City at around 4:20am.

The driver of the microbus slowed down but as Rab neared the vehicle, he sped up, said Rab officials.

The criminals on board opened fire on the Rab patrol team, prompting them to fire back and at one stage the microbus stopped and around four criminals fled, they added.

The elite force then discovered the body of Tusher lying inside the abandoned vehicle.

They seized the microbus and recovered one pistol and four bullets from the scene.

However, family members of the deceased gave a different account of the incident.

They said that Rab claimed Tusher and his gang were involved in carjacking in the capital but they failed to mention any case against him in this connection.

Ibrahim Hossain Titu, Tusher's younger brother, said his brother was a fruit vendor in Chittagong Road area.

He said someone called Tusher on his mobile at 10:30pm and after that Tusher left his residence. He could not be reached over his mobiles since then.

Titu said when they rang up Tusher again early morning a person at the other end said that Tusher was injured in a road accident and was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Principal assaulted

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complaints with the district and police administrations and also with the office of the Director General of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE).

Saifullah told The Daily Star yesterday that local ruling party cadres loyal to the UP chairman assaulted him at his ATI residence on Tuesday.

The attack came on the pretext that he did not provide the chairman with "proper protocol", when he visited the campus to request him to accept the joining of an instructor--Mondol Istiak Hasan--who was transferred from Boalmari agriculture office to Faridpur ATI.

"In my 30 years' career I have never heard of such a thing that a government institute principal gives protocol to a Union Parishad chairman," said the ATI principal showing the marks of wounds on his face and head.

He alleged Mondol Istiak Hasan, transferred to his institute without his prior knowledge on April 8, was withdrawn from the same institute around eight months ago on charges of professional misconduct and malpractices in student admission.

"As I initially refused to accept his joining letter and tried to consult with the high-ups, his elder brother Barkat Mondol, Iku Mia, was withdrawn from the same institute around eight months ago on charges of professional misconduct and malpractices in student admission."

"As I refused, Barkat Mondol and a gang of seven to eight youngsters entered my house and assaulted me. They asked me why I didn't provide the chairman with proper protocol and threatened me so that I call him. I

obeyed and the chairman from other side just thanked me and hung up," described Saifullah.

Iku Mia yesterday denied assaulting the ATI principal. Asked why he thought it was his domain to intervene in the affairs of a government educational institute, he said, "The instructor [Istia] is a local and Mosharraf [minister] bhai recommended his transfer here. So I just requested the principal to accept his joining."

Contacted over phone, Labour Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain told The Daily Star last night that if someone in his own Union Parishad was insulted, "Do you think people should spare the offender?"

Being a government employee, one should not misbehave with the people, he commented.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury told The Daily Star last night that a cabinet colleague has brought the issue to her notice on Thursday. She said she has already instructed to receive a written complaint from the principal and probe the matter.

She added that there was no question of an ATI principal giving protocol to a UP chairman.

As our Faridpur correspondent Rezaul Karim contacted Istia's brother Borkot Mondol, he denied the assault, while Istia's mobile phone was found switched off.

Acting Superintendent of Police of Faridpur Bijoy Bashak said he has instructed the officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station to give a report after investigation.

Helaluddin Ahmed, deputy commissioner of Faridpur, said he has requested the AIT principal to file a case.

Principal Saifullah yesterday showed a draft and said he would file a case through someone by tomorrow as he does not feel it safe to do it himself.

Khagrachharari Jana Sanghati leader killed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

A leader of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS MN Larma group) was shot dead by assailants in Dighinala upazila on Thursday.

The deceased Supranu Chakma, 45, was the general secretary of the upazila PCJSS.

A group of 10 to 12 armed men entered Supranu's Badadam residence around 8:00 pm on Thursday and shot him as he was watching television and left him dead, said Officer-in-Charge of Dighinala police station Shahadat Hossain quoting the victim's family members.

A case was lodged in this regard and police are trying to arrest the criminals, said the OC.

Dighinala upazila president of the group Pritimoy Chakma blamed the armed cadres of Santu Larma led PCJSS for the incident and demanded immediate arrest of the offenders.

Press and information secretary of PCJSS (Santu Larma group) Sajib Chakma denied the allegation and said the killing happened due to the internal feud of the group.

Suu Kyi

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The British premier announced a dramatic shift in stance on sanctions following Suu Kyi's recent election to parliament, calling for all measures except the arms embargo to be suspended, if not lifted.

"I think there are prospects for change in Burma and I think it is right for the rest of the world to respond to those changes," Cameron said.

"Of course we must respond with caution, with care. We must always be sceptical and questioning because we want to know those changes are irreversible. But as we discussed I think it is right to suspend the sanctions that there are against Burma."

Britain -- Myanmar's former colonial ruler -- has traditionally taken a hard-line stance on sanctions because of human rights concerns.

The 27-nation European Union already lifted some restrictions against the regime this year and foreign ministers will decide the next steps when they meet on April 23.

Suu Kyi, who spent much of the past 22 years locked up at the hands of the former junta, for the first time also called for the suspension of sanctions against her country.

"We still have a long way to go but we believe that we can get there. I believe that Their Sein is genuine about democratic reforms," she said.

A steady stream of foreign dignitaries, including US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and British Foreign Secretary William Hague, have visited Myanmar since a new quasi-civilian government took power last year.

But Cameron is the first Western head of government to go there since the military seized power in 1962, ushering in almost half a century of repressive junta rule and isolation from the West.

He is believed to be the first serving British prime minister to visit Myanmar, which won independence in 1948.

Foreign ministers from the Group of Eight world powers -- Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States -- on Thursday welcomed "significant steps" by Myanmar toward democratic reform.

"The ministers will consider the easing of sanctions to help this country embed reform and fully integrate into international and regional political and economic processes," they said in a final statement after talks in Washington.

Cameron was accompanied by a group of British corporate executives, but because of the sanctions they were expected to refrain from any business-related activities.



Owned by Railway Minister Suranjit Sengupta, this shopping arcade named Sen Market was inaugurated at Dirai upazila of Sunamganj yesterday. The minister was supposed to open the market but he pulled out. The four-storey market was built after the Awami League assumed power in 2009.

PHOTO: STAR

'Sen Market' opens

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Station at the upazila headquarters, said locals.

Witnesses said Mohammad Altab Uddin, the upazila unit president, inaugurated the market around 11:30am in presence of a number of political leaders, assistant police commissioner of Sunamganj (Dirai Circle) and Dirai Police Station officer-in-charge.

Altav Uddin, a former teacher of Dirai High School, told The Daily Star, "Upon request from Suranjit Sengupta on Thursday, I

inaugurated the market when local leaders and police were present."

The minister's assistant personal secretary (APS), his driver, railway's general manager (east zone) and Dhaka Division security commandant were detained on Monday night with Tk 70 lakh.

Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB) men held them after the driver drove the microbus into BGB Headquarters and told the BGB personnel that there was illegal money in the microbus, owned by the

minister's APS.

Aminul Islam, Dirai upazila unit general secretary of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, said the building is being constructed on a 52-katha land. "The construction started few years ago. But it has been launched after the completion of its four floors," he said.

Dirai OC Nurul Absar Khan said police remained present there on a security ground since there was a mass gathering apart from the presence of several political leaders.

Dhaka, Ankara

FROM PAGE 1
meeting with TUSKON, a leading business group in Turkey, at Hotel Sheraton here.

On Thursday's official talks, Hasina and Erdogan discussed the entire range of bilateral relations, and agreed to support each other in the UN, and in regional and international forums.

Erdogan praised the achievements of the Bangladesh government in promoting education, rule of law, and democracy under the dynamic leadership of Hasina.

He hoped that Bangladesh would be a middle income country by 2015.

"We have attached special importance to our bilateral relations. We have agreed to give support to each other's candidates in multilateral institutions, including in the UN Security Council," Hasina said at a joint press conference after the official talks.

She said that agreements signed between the two countries would further bolster bilateral relations in economic, commercial, cultural, agricultural, and other fields.

Turkey would soon join the International Jute Study Group (IJSJG), the only UN organisation headquartered in Bangladesh.

It would also finance Bangladesh in the construction of several hundred community healthcare clinics, she added.

"The two countries have been working hard to explore the full potentials of our bilateral relations in different fields," she said.

Hasina mentioned that the Bangladesh Consulate General office has been established in Istanbul this month to cater to the needs of businesspersons and investors from both countries.

During the official talks, Turkey has agreed to increase the number of government scholarships for Bangladeshi students and assist in restoring the historical Shahi Jame Masjid at Anderkilla in Chittagong.

Hasina expressed her happiness over the signing of a Sister-City twinning agreement linking the spiritual capitals of Konya in Turkey and Sylhet in Bangladesh.

Erdogan expressed his satisfaction saying that the defence cooperation between the two countries is growing.

After the official talks, Bangladesh and Turkey signed seven instruments to further bolster cooperation in economic, cultural, agricultural, and other fields.

An agreement has been

signed for reciprocal promotion and protection of investment while the other has been inked for mutual abolition of visas for the diplomatic, service/official, and special passport holders.

The third agreement is on customs cooperation between the two countries.

Of the two MoUs, one is on scientific and technical cooperation in the field of agriculture, and the other is for cultural, scientific and educational exchange programme.

A letter of intent has also been signed between the two countries under which Turkey will join IJSJG.

During the one-to-one meeting with Erdogan, Hasina hailed the Turkish government's efforts for strengthening democracy and discouraging unconstitutional takeover.

She also admired Turkey's political, legislative, judicial and administrative steps for institutionalising democracy, human rights, and rule of law that have set up an example in the region.

She hoped that none of the countries would experience military rule in the future.

Later, Hasina attended a state banquet hosted in her honour by the Turkish premier at his official residence.

Earlier, on her arrival at the office of Erdogan, Hasina was given a guard of honour by a smartly turned out contingent of the Turkish armed forces.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Industries Minister Dilip Barua, Ambassador at-Large M Ziauddin, Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad, among others, accompanied Hasina during the official talks.

FTA BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES SOON

During the meeting with TUSKON yesterday, Hasina said her government has initiated plans to make Bangladesh the hub of all economic activities in South Asia and South East Asian regions, encompassing China and India.

Mentioning that Bangladesh and Turkey will sign FTA soon, she said her country's export to Turkey has so far been limited to a few products like readymade garments and jute yarn.

"We can offer many more. You can import ceramic products, leather and leather products, frozen shrimp, jute goods, handicrafts, bicycle, and many other products from Bangladesh at competitive prices," she said.

In the last few years, she said the Bangladesh government has been developing road, rail, sea, and air connectivity in the region that

would connect Bangladesh to a market of over two billion people.

She urged the TUSKON to take advantage of the phenomenal growth of pharmaceutical industry in Bangladesh to provide quality medicines at better prices to the Turkish people.

The premier said at present, trade between Bangladesh and Turkey is far below the potential which stands only around \$1 billion.

"During the visit of your prime minister to Bangladesh in November 2010, we decided to achieve a target of at least \$3 billion bilateral trade volume by 2015," Hasina said, adding that TUSKON can play a significant role in achieving this target.

TUSKON President Rezanur Meral and AK Azad, president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), spoke on the occasion.

BNP yet

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the journalists at the Bangladesh Photo Journalists Association office in the capital.

At another meeting at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday, BNP leader Moudud Ahmed said they fear that the government might foil the upcoming DCC polls, even after the announcement of the election commission.

He, however, did not give any reasons why.

The party has already stated that it will not take part in any election without deployment of the army, and if electronic voting machines are used in the polls, Fakhru said.

Earlier on Monday, he, however, said "We have a positive attitude towards the polls. A lot of surprises are waiting for you."

On Suranjit Sengupta's involvement in the recent money scam, the BNP leader yesterday said "He [Suranjit] should resign as per democratic principles."

"His [Suranjit] massive corruption has been proved already, and it was a fraction of the present government's huge corruption," Fakhru added.

He also ruled out Suranjit's 'conspiracy theory' behind the scam.

On BNP's participation in the DCC polls, Fakhru said his party would take decision after the party Chairperson Khaleda Zia returns from Singapore.

The leader of the opposition went to Singapore a few days back for medical check-up.

In reply to a query, he said the BNP chief would announce the details of the expansion of BNP-led four-party alliance on April 18.

In Baishakh

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a spell of grandeur on the lives of our ancestors across the generations.

Moving, spreading out in waves of passionate excitement through the hamlets and towns of this land, Baishakh is that melody of colours, in the literal as also figurative sense of the meaning, which draws life to it, the better to inject it with a new life force. In the rural market, under the banyan tree, in the town square, in the familiarity of hearths and homes, the good cheer which breaks forth on the first dawn of Baishakh speaks of the sparkle of the stream of thought in the mind. It speaks of dreams, of the lyrics forging the songs which sustain us on the banks of the primeval river --- and beyond.

There is that certain music, that soft murmur of song flowing out of the night and into the brilliance of dawn cascading down and into the Bengali soul. The sheer energy of living, that beautifully inexplicable desire to explore the heart, to plumb the depths of sensibilities, is the engine which drives the river in us into the wider sea of self-discovery in Baishakh. The river flows, the sea dances. And poetry gives meaning, that sure rhythm, to life.

At dawn today, it is the old song we sing in a new melody coursing through the crevices of the soul. It is that hallowed moment when we in this country look back at time, at heritage --- to remember the roots we have sprung from.

India gives

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The next priority would be given to cotton that had been handed over to customs, it said. These cases were revaluated on March 23 and again on March 28.

On March 5, the government banned export of raw cotton. It was revoked a week later but no fresh registration of contract for exports was allowed.

However, all Registration Certificates (RCs), which were obtained before the ban imposition, were to be examined before revalidation so that they could go ahead with their exports.

Meanwhile, the restrictions on export of cotton caused strain in relations between India's Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar and the commerce and industry ministry. While Pawar heads Nationalist Congress Party, India's Commerce Minister Anand Sharma belongs to Congress party, which leads India's ruling UPA coalition.

Pawar wrote a letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh protesting the continuation of the ban on fresh registration for exports. The continuation of the ban was decided at a meeting of committee of ministers headed by Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee on April 9.

While Pawar has been pushing for cotton exports, the Indian textile ministry has been against fresh export permission in order to increase cheap supply of cotton in the domestic textile industry.

"Comprising the interests of small cotton farmers to benefit the textile magnates is indeed a travesty of justice. Moreover, it defies logic to permit the consumer of cotton (textile industry) to dictate terms to cotton producer," Pawar said in his letter to the prime minister.

Pawar is a member of parliament from western state of Maharashtra, which is a major producer of cotton.

Moderate

5.7 quake

rattles

Mexico

AFP, Washington

A moderate 5.7-magnitude earthquake rattled Mexico yesterday, the latest in a series of temblors to hit the country in recent weeks, according to the US Geological Survey.

There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage in the wake of the quake which struck Mexico's southern state of Oaxaca, on the Pacific coast, some 200 kilometers southeast of the beach resort of Acapulco.