

Hannan's residence raided

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police conducted a search at the residence of BNP standing committee member Brig Gen (retd) Hannan Shah at Mohakhali DOHS in the capital yesterday morning, after cordoning it off for five hours.

"We went to conduct a raid at 1:00am following an intelligence report regarding an ongoing secret meeting with ill intentions", said Imtiaz Ahmed, deputy police commissioner (DC) of Mirpur division.

"However, Hannan Shah did not let us in saying he would not allow the police to enter without a search warrant and definitely not before sunrise, which was why we cordoned off the house", he added.

The police finally entered the house at 6:00am and combed through it for 30 minutes.

None were arrested and no evidence related to anything illegal was found during the raid, the DC said.

"We did not let them in as they could not produce a search warrant," Hannan Shah told media, after the raid.

"They haven't even found anything suspicious," he said, adding, "This is nothing but harassment."

Sacked Yemen general finally quits post

AFP, Sanaa

Yemen's sacked air force commander, who has refused to quit for weeks, yesterday left the post he has held for nearly three decades, the United Nations envoy to Yemen said.

"General Mohammed Saleh al-Ahmar has handed his duties over to his successor," Jamal Benomar told AFP. "I personally attended the handover ceremony."

On April 6, President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi issued a decree in which he sacked Ahmar, a half-brother of deposed president Ali Abdullah Saleh, as well as the ex-leader's nephew General Tariq Mohammed Abdullah Saleh, who heads the presidential guard.

Both generals had refused to quit, and Ahmar's loyalists even surrounded Sanaa's airport and threatened to shoot down planes, forcing its closure for one day.

The airport was reopened after international and regional powers voiced support for Hadi, who must restructure the army based on a Gulf-brokered deal that Yemen's political parties have agreed upon.

When asked if General Tariq Mohammed Abdullah Saleh had also agreed to quit, Benomar only responded by saying that "all of Hadi's decisions are being implemented."

Chelsea

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advance 3-2 on aggregate. The first leg had finished 1-0 to Chelsea last week.

It all looked to be smooth sailing from Barcelona when they went 2-0 up thanks to goals from Sergio Busquets and Andres Iniesta. The Spaniards were further buoyed by a red card to Chelsea captain John Terry who was sent off for an off-the-ball foul on Alexis Sanchez.

But Brazilian midfielder Ramires bought them back into the game with a lovely goal just before half-time.

With Barcelona going for the jugular, the English side launched a magnificent rear-guard action that got some adequate help from the woodwork which twice denied Messi; first from his penalty which was smacked against the bar and then a long-range effort that struck the post.

But with Barcelona pouring forward, substitute Fernando Torres took advantage to streak through round Victor Valdes and roll into an empty net.

Chelsea will face either Bayern Munich or Real Madrid in the final in Munich next month.

Quit hartal, please

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political leaders should find an alternative to hartal to protest against government activities since hartal was not a solution.

Further hartals would only bring woes for the economy and the people, the leaders said at a hurriedly-called-for media briefing at the FBCCI office in Dhaka.

The chamber called for the briefing while businesses were being hurt by hartals of the opposition on three consecutive days.

The BNP called the hartal after former lawmaker and party leader Ilias Ali went missing.

"We do not want anymore hartals. We should come out from the hartal culture. More than 95 percent of the people do not like hartals," said FBCCI President AK Azad at the briefing.

Mentioning deterioration of law and order over the last few months, Azad said protecting the lives and properties of the citizens was the duty of the state.

"We are also sorry for Ilias Ali going missing. He is not only a political leader, he is a father, he is a husband, he is a brother and he has a family. But, hartal is not the way to find him," Azad said.

Asked about the losses caused by hartals, the FBCCI president said they do not have the exact figures but it hampers the overall economic activity particularly the export-import operations.

He said the business community would respond positively, if political leaders wanted them as a medium or platform for resolving contentious political problems.

The business community was not under security threats but in a state of discomfort with the political situation, he

mentioned.

Shafiqul Islam Mohiuddin, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said anymore hartals would only damage the economy as the export of ready-made garment products, the country's main foreign currency earner, was being hurt.

The garment exporters would have to face order cancellations, demands for discounts, expensive air transports, delayed payments from buyers due to hartals, he said.

Garment manufacturers are facing a challenge in the EU and the US, two main destinations of the country's apparels, due to the economic crises over there "and hartal is hampering the production at the factories seriously at this critical moment," he said.

Echoing the same, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) President AKM Salim Osman said workers employed in factories on piece-rate basis were the worst sufferers of hartals.

They do not receive any pay if the production stopped, he said, adding, "We should assist the law enforcers so that they can find Ilias Ali."

Syed Tarique Mohammad Ali, a director of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said, "I decry hartals."

Sheikh Kabir Hossain, president of Bangladesh Insurance Association, said insurance companies were directly affected by hartals as these financial institutions have to pay policy holders for any damage in untoward incidents.

Kazi Akramuddin

Ahamed, a representative of Bangladesh Association of Banks (BAB), said many loans would default as some borrowers would not be able to pay the instalments due to halt in production at their factories.

Amir Hossain Khan, president of Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity, a platform for the retail shop owners across the country, said the shop owners were the worst sufferers of hartal as they cannot open their outlets.

Baby-lifter

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Selina Begum, the grandmother, told The Daily Star yesterday that she had identified the woman from the video.

She said that around 6:20pm on Monday, about 20 minutes after the boy was born, she was walking on the corridor of ward 212 with the baby in her arms.

All of a sudden, a woman approached her, saying the baby's mother was in a critical condition.

On hearing this, Selina hurried to enter the ward but the woman stopped her and asked to leave the baby with her.

As Selina went inside leaving her grandson with the woman, she found her daughter doing just fine.

Alarmed, Selina rushed out of the ward only to find the woman disappeared with the baby.

The distressed mother of the baby has stopped eating and demanded that her son be returned to her.

Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Shabbagh Police Station, said they were yet to trace the infant or the woman.



PHOTO: QUAMRUL ISAM RUBAYAT

Liberation War widows gather at Jagannathpur Government Primary School in Thakurgaon Monday afternoon, ending a silent procession that marks the Jhathibhanga Mass Killing Day. Their husbands were among the 3,000 people killed by Pakistan occupation forces on April 23, 1971. Several thousand people of Jagannathpur, Gorea, Shukanpokhori and Balia unions on this day planned to flee to India to save themselves from atrocities by the Pakistan army and collaborators. As they gathered at Jhathibhanga village in sadar upazila, Pakistani soldiers, tipped off by razakars and al-badres, rushed there and killed them. The martyrs were buried at Jhathibhanga mass grave.

Charges read out to Alim

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Alim along with the Pakistani army and other auxiliary forces also looted the house of a local Awami League leader in Joypurhat and then torched it. He also forced his family to leave the country, Prosecutor Rana Dasgupta told the tribunal.

The tribunal, the second of two set up to deal with war crimes committed during the 1971 Liberation War, adjourned the hearing until today.

The three-member tribunal headed by Chairman Justice ATM Fazle Kabir extended Alim's bail, which expired yesterday, until April 29. The former minister was facing 74 counts of crimes against humanity.

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 had taken the charges brought against Alim into cognisance on March 27 after the prosecution submitted formal charges against him on March 15.

On April 16, Tribunal-1 transferred three cases including Alim's to Tribunal-2 for quick disposal and the second tribunal started Alim's case proceeding yesterday.

Rana Dasgupta told the tribunal that Alim, an influential leader of East Pakistan Conventional Muslim League and vice-chairman of Bogra district council, formed Peace Committee and Razakar Bahini (two collaborator forces) in Joypurhat in 1971 and committed crimes like killing, genocide, rape, looting, arson and other crimes against humanity in association with the auxiliary forces and the Pakistan army.

Among 28 incidents of atrocities committed by Alim, the prosecutor read out two of those before the tribunal.

Rana said Alim along with his cohorts and the Pakistani army attacked the house of Meher Uddin Chowdhury, a local Awami League leader of Panchbibi upazila in Joypurhat, on April 20, 1971, and looted the houses before setting it alight.

Meher Uddin was forced to leave the country with his family following threats from the attackers, said the prosecutor.

Shawn Lal Bazla, a Marwari businessman of Sadar Road of Joypurhat, and his family were compelled to leave the country following threats from Alim and his associates before the Pakistan army reached the district headquarters on April 21, 1971.

The accused and other collaborators occupied the home and business establishment of the businessman on April 21. "He [Alim] established the office of the Peace Committee and camp of Razakar there, accommodated the Pakistan army and used the place for imparting training to the auxiliary forces," said the prosecutor.

The atrocities committed by the Pakistan army and the auxiliary forces in Joypurhat and surrounding areas were planned and controlled from the camp under the leadership of the Alim, who was also the chairman of Joypurhat Peace Committee, said Rana Dasgupta. **BAIL AND ADJOURNMENT PETITIONS**

When the tribunal started yesterday's proceeding at 11:15am amid a countrywide hartal, defence counsel Muhammad Tarikul Islam appealed for a six-week adjournment as they could not prepare their defence due to the illness of their client.

Opposing the petition, Rana Dasgupta said the defence got over three weeks to prepare for the case. As per the tribunal act, the defence would get at least three weeks after the tribunal takes the charges into cognisance.

Defence sought adjournment to create unreasonable delays to the trial and as per the tribunal act, the tribunal has the power to prevent such delays, said Rana, adding that the prosecution was ready to start charge framing hearing.

The tribunal fixed April 29 for placing defence deposition in this regard and ordered the prosecution to start their deposition.

In another petition, the defence counsel sought extension of the bail for the accused as he did not violate any conditions of the bail granted by Tribunal-1.

Rana once again opposed the petition claiming that the case has progressed a lot and appealed to the Tribunal-2 to not extend the bail.

Justice ATM Fazle Kabir said Alim was given bail by Tribunal-1 and the Tribunal-2 has to receive fresh bail petition. Extending the bail until next Sunday, Tribunal-2 asked the defence to submit fresh bail petition.

The tribunal would hold hearings on the bail petition that day.

Time 4 days

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Sunday," Khaleda warned. The BNP will announce its next course of action on Saturday.

Asked about the possibility of getting back Ilias alive, Khaleda said she was hopeful and the government must return the leader immediately.

It was her first formal appearance before the media after Ilias Ali, one of the organising secretaries of the party and former lawmaker, along with his driver went missing in the early hours of April 18.

Ilias' wife Tahsina Rushtir Luna and three children were also present.

The statement Khaleda read out at the press meet touched on railwaygate scandal and resignation of ruling party lawmaker Tanjim Ahmed Sohel Taj.

The BNP chief said it was unconstitutional that the prime minister kept Sohel Taj on salary even after his

resignation as state minister. "Finally, Sohel has stepped down as a lawmaker to retain his dignity. And I thank him for that."

Khaleda alleged that the administration and law enforcement agencies had been making up stories since Sheikh Hasina said "Ilias went into hiding at Khaleda Zia's suggestion".

Asking the government to stop "killings and forced disappearances", the former premier said, "The country has become a Moger Mulluk [a land of anarchy]. It is now under a dictatorship. People are in a state of panic over disappearances. They are filled with apprehensions. Things must change."

Hasina alone was to blame for this situation, as it was the result of her whims and autocratic attitude, Khaleda alleged.

Expressing sympathy for the families of the two drivers killed in last three shutdowns, she said the govern-

ment had created chaos by deploying ruling party cadres to repress the opposition activists.

The BNP chief demanded release of all leaders and workers arrested during the last three days.

She said the prime minister had rewarded corruption by reinstating Suranjit Sengupta as minister without having him take the oath. Suranjit had resigned amid widespread criticism after his APS was caught with bribe money.

Khaleda claimed the foreign media published a list of 100 BNP leaders who were targets of abduction or murder; even a secret killing squad was formed for this purpose. She, however, did not go into details.

BNP standing committee members and senior leaders, including acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, were present at the conference.



The three home-made time bombs at Shyampur Police Station after their recovery from Zurain and Postagola in the capital.

PHOTO: STAR

Three 'time bombs'

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assistant commissioner of detective police.

He added the controlling system of the bombs were analog like those exploded on August 17, 2005.

Of the three, one was recovered from Postagola intersection around 6:45am and the two others were found near Jurain rail crossing an hour later, said Abul Kalam Azad, officer-in-

charge of Shyampur Police Station.

A battery and a clock were attached to each of the three bombs, he said. The clocks were ticking at the time of the recovery.

"According to the times set, the one recovered from Postagola was to explode at 10:00am and the two recovered from Jurain at 11:00am," he added.

On recovery, the clocks were switched off and the bombs were taken to Shyampur Police Station and kept in a bucket full of water.

Experts of the bomb disposal unit of the detective police defused those around 1:00pm on the premises of the station.

Police were investing the matter.

Sagar-Runi

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Maasranga, and Meherun Runi, a senior reporter at another TV channel ATN Bangla, were killed in the early hours of February 11 at their rented apartment in the capital's West Rajabazar.

The High Court on April 18 vented frustration over the Detective Branch's failure in identifying the killer(s) of the journalist couple and ordered to transfer the case to Rab.

It also ordered the home secretary to form two committees to monitor the progress of the Rab investigation and probe whether there had been any negligence by Sher-e-Bangla Nagar police in preserving evidence of the crime.

The committees have been asked to submit their reports within 30 days. Meanwhile, the Rab has taken the investigation as a great challenge after the HC showed confidence in it.

"As the HC has expressed its confidence in our capacity, we will try our best to honour it by unfolding the mystery behind the murder. We will engage our highest efforts, technologies and intelligence to become successful," Rab Director General (DG) Mokhesur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Rab had been following the case informally and now it is formally assigned to probe the crime, added the DG.

The elite force has collected the evidences and documents obtained earlier by police and the DB, he maintained.

People left to suffer

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auto-rickshaw for Tk 600 to go to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

By the time he reached the DMCH, the hospital's outdoor section had already been closed.

Mamun went to the emergency section after 2:00pm. The doctors there said they were unable to help him as he was a patient of the outdoor section.

Failing to get treatment, he left for home after three hours.

Like Mamun, many had to endure pain and sufferings because of the dawn-to-dusk shutdowns enforced by the main opposition BNP to protest the disappearance of party leader Ilias Ali.

Several hundred airline passengers hurried to Shahjalal International Airport early in the morning, hours before their scheduled flights, to avoid street violence during hartal hours.

"My flight to Malaysia is at 4:00pm today [Tuesday]. But I came to the airport at 5:30am. I have to wait here for more than 10 hours," said Jahangir Alam from Kishoreganj.

The passengers who returned from abroad also struggled to find transport to reach their destinations.

Khorshed Alam, who returned from South Korea after eight years, said he failed to find any transport to go to Rajshahi. "I along with my relatives will stay in a hotel in Dhaka until hartal ends."

Ilias Hossain, a college student, frantically searched for a transport to take his

father Abbas Hossain to the DMCH from Mazar Road in Mirpur after he complained of severe chest pain.

But Ilias failed to find any transport for half-an-hour. Finally, he and his father boarded a public bus to go to the hospital. When the vehicle was crossing Agargaon, it came under attack from pickets. They got panicked and stepped out of the vehicle.

He then took his father to the hospital by an auto-rickshaw.

Hundreds of commuters were seen waiting for hours at bus stops in the capital yesterday.

State-run BRTC and some private companies operated buses but most of their counters remained closed.

"I have been waiting here for two hours. The transport operators are saying no bus will run from here," said Rajib Ahmed, a university student, one of the passengers who waited for buses for hours to travel out of the capital.

Abul Kalam, a transport leader, said they stopped operating buses since Sunday. He said they tried to run buses at night, but pickets set fire to two buses forcing them to suspend operation.

Failing to get any bus, many passengers flocked to Kamalapur railway station. But reaching there was not easy.

Abul Hasnat, who was to leave Dhaka for Rajshahi, said pickets chased his auto-rickshaw on the way to the railway station.

One crushed under train in Ctg

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A man was killed when a Dhaka bound train ran him over in Sitakunda upazila in Chittagong early yesterday.

Identity of the deceased could not be known immediately as his face was completely mangled.

Sukhlal, assistant sub-inspector (ASI) at Government Railway Police (GRP) station in Chittagong, said Dhaka bound Mohanagar Probbhati from Chittagong ran over the man when he was walking on the railway track around 8:00am at International Islamic University gate area of Bhatari in the upazila.

The body was sent to Chittagong Medical College Hospital morgue.

A case was filed with the GRP station, the ASI said.

Probe deaths

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countrywide hartal.

"The Bangladesh authorities must establish an independent investigation to determine how these men died and who fired the bullets, and bring to justice those responsible for these deaths," said Abbas Faiz, Amnesty International's Bangladesh researcher, in a statement.

The main opposition BNP enforced its second consecutive daylong shutdown on Tuesday in protest over the disappearance of party leader Ilias Ali, who along with his driver went missing in early hours of April 18 from the capital's Banania area.

Two people were killed and at least 50 others, including 10 policemen, injured in fierce clashes between pro-hartal pickets and law enforcers at Bishwanath.

Police opened fire on demonstrators after being attacked with stones, said the statement.

About the disappearances, it said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called on the police to investigate the disappearance of Ilias Ali and his driver. Paradoxically, she also stated the two men chose to go into hiding to "create an issue".

"Why did the prime minister order an inquiry, but then claim she knows what has happened? Any inquiry will be credible only if it is independent and free from police and political involvement -- otherwise it risks simply towing the police line," said Faiz.

This is the latest in a spate of disappearances in which security forces, including Rab, have been implicated, though they deny detaining those missing, said the statement.

"There appears to be a pattern of enforced disappearances -- a concerted effort to eliminate people deemed undesirable."

One trade unionist was killed and more than 20 people have "disappeared" this year, it said.

US worried

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at his Gulshan residence in the afternoon.

"This is a frightening experience not only for the person but also for his family. My worry is not for the person only but also for the family," he said without mentioning the name of Ilias who has been missing since around midnight of April 17.

The envoy had invited the journalists for briefing them on the outcome of the US-Bangladesh Security Dialogue held here on April 19.

On mechanisms for holding the next parliamentary elections, Mozena reiterated his call to major political parties to hold dialogues and find out ground rules shared by all before the polls.

He asked the political parties to follow the democratic path and reach a consensus on how to proceed.

Asked if he was afraid that democracy in Bangladesh would be threatened as happened in the recent past, Mozena said, "I believe in democracy... Bangladesh is meant to be a democracy. People here are very sophisticated and politically aware. Democracy is rooted here and the future is a democratic one."

US Embassy Political Officer Enrique Rodrigo Gallego, and Press and Information Officer Patricia A Hill were present there.