

Gen Harun's resignation accepted
Haroon Habib made SCF acting secretary general
STAR REPORT

The Sector Commander's Forum (SCF) yesterday accepted the letter of Lt Gen (retd) Harun-ar-Rashid (Bir Protik) requesting to relieve him of the responsibility as the secretary general of the Forum.

A decision to this effect was taken unanimously at a meeting of the SCF's executive council held on Friday and yesterday.

SCF's Joint Secretary General Haroon Habib has been entrusted with responsibilities to discharge duties as its acting secretary general, reports BSS.

Valiant freedom fighter, writer and journalist Haroon Habib was former managing director and chief editor of the national news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS).

Lt Gen (retd) Harun, also president of Destiny-2000 Ltd, a multi-level marketing (MLM) company, resigned on May 2.

His resignation came following a number of reports published in different newspapers recently, bringing allegation against him that he has been using the forum in his personal interests, particularly to serve the business of Destiny-2000 Ltd, which is accused of illegal banking and other irregularities.

He sent his resignation letter through a messenger to the forum's Chief Air Vice-Marshal (retd) AK Khandker, who is also the planning minister of the present government.

According to a press release issued by Keya Chowdhury, information and publicity secretary of the SCF, the executive council of the Forum accepted the letter of relinquishment of Lt Gen (retd) Harun from the post of secretary general. The executive council meeting of SCF has accepted his letter honouring his stand for keeping the Forum above all controversies so that the Forum is not affected at the least, BSS reports.

The SCF expressed sincere gratitude to Lt Gen (retd) Harun for his unparalleled role in consolidating the Forum since its inception and creating public opinion in favour of the trial of the war criminals.

Air Vice-Marshal (retd) AK Khandker (Bir Uttam) chaired the meeting that was attended by all the members of the executive council of SCF, including Sector Commander and former Army chief Maj Gen (retd) KM Shafiullah (Bir Uttam), Maj Gen (retd) CR Dutta (Bir Uttam) and Lt Col (retd) Abu Osman Chowdhury.

Two killed in road crashes
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two persons were killed and one was injured in two road crashes in and outside of the capital yesterday.

The dead are Abdul Jalil, 45, an NGO official, and Hazi Keramat Ali, 60.

Shyampur police said a speeding truck hit a pedestrian and a CNG-run auto-rickshaw in the capital's Jurain around 6:00am, leaving pedestrian Jalil dead and auto-rickshaw driver Rafiqul Islam, 35, injured.

Diabetic Jalil, like the other days, went out for a walk when the truck hit him on Jurain Notun Rasta. The truck also hit the auto-rickshaw parked aside.

Police rescued the two and whisked them to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where the doctors declared Jalil dead. Rafiqul has been undergoing treatment in the hospital.

Law enforcers seized the truck and arrested its driver Mahbub, 38.

Meanwhile, another truck hit a motorcycle at Hemayetpur in Savar near the capital around 10:00am, killing its rider Keramat on the spot.

Savar police said Keramat was from Singair upazila of Manikganj.



(Left) Foreign Minister Dipu Moni greets US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as she alights from the airplane at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday while Hillary calls on Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at the latter's Gulshan residence in the capital last night. (Story on page 1)

PHOTO: COURTESY, BNP

Declaration signed for regular talks on strategic cooperation

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and the United States yesterday signed a joint declaration on "Bangladesh-US Partnership Dialogue", aiming to establish regular dialogues on strategic cooperation.

The agreement also aims to deepen the partnership in addressing bilateral, regional and global issues to the mutual benefit of both countries.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dipu Moni and US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton signed the umbrella agreement. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina witnessed the signing at her office in the capital after the official talks.

Following is the full text of the joint declaration:

"We, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Member of Parliament Dr Dipu Moni of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton of

the United States of America, affirm the strong bonds of friendship and shared values that exist between our two countries and reaffirm our desire to deepen our partnership in addressing bilateral, regional and global issues to the mutual benefit of both Bangladesh and the United States.

"We believe that a strong partnership between Bangladesh and the United States, working together to further mutual peace, security and development, is in the interests of the people of Bangladesh, the United States and the world. As we look to the challenges of the 21st century, our shared interests and values, including respect for human rights and the rule of law, should guide our collective engagement on addressing the challenges of our time.

"Leveraging the values of tolerance, respect for human rights, inclusion and resilience of Bangladesh society, including a robust civil society, we intend our broader

collaboration to be anchored in a strong bilateral development partnership focused on joint development priorities, including food security, maternal and child health, family planning, climate change, strengthening democracy, youth and women's empowerment, among others.

"We reiterate our support for the United Nations system, underscore the value of UN-led peacekeeping and peacebuilding initiatives, and note Bangladesh's singular contribution to such activities.

"We affirm our dedication to deepening dialogue in security cooperation, including in combating terrorism, violent extremism, and transnational crime, such as narcotics trafficking, piracy, and trafficking in persons and arms.

"We also intend to develop deeper and broader people-to-people ties between the United States and Bangladesh, including through educational and cultural

exchanges, encouraging innovation and expanding our commercial and trade relations by building on the creativity and rich diversity of our societies. We further support the exchange of information, skills and technology bilaterally, regionally and globally to promote new economic opportunities for our citizens.

"To advance these and other shared objectives, and to review and give strategic direction to the bilateral relationship and its wide array of ongoing and future cooperative activities, we intend to hold regular, annual consultations under a Partnership Dialogue. The Dialogue will be led at the level of Foreign Secretary/Under Secretary of State and held at times mutually convenient to both parties, alternating between our respective capitals. We also intend to hold periodic consultations at the Foreign Minister-Secretary level."

Budgetary funds for Dalits demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday demanded budgetary allocation for the development of the Dalit community members.

The allocation should not come out of pity or sympathy but to ensure the rights of the discriminated community of 5.5 million people, they said.

Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) and Nagorik Uddyog jointly organised the seminar, "Regarding the Development of Dalit and Excluded Communities - What needs to be done in the upcoming budget", at Dhaka Reporters Unity.

Presenting a keynote, Nagorik Uddyog Project Convenor Abul Bashar painted a grave picture of the discrimination and exclusion faced by the Dalit community.

Literacy rate among them is only five percent and enrolment in primary schools is 10 percent, 95 percent of whom drop out before reaching secondary school, said Bashar.

They are excluded from nearly all facilities available to citizens and there are no anti-discrimination laws to help them fight for their rights in court, he added.

Some Dalits cited the hardships they face everyday, ranging from men and women forced to take baths in the same bathroom to unliveable infrastructure which causes excreta from the upper floors to drop inside living quarters downstairs.

"What they want is so little...they only want some respect from society," said Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal central committee member Rajekuzzaman Ratan.

There are no beggars in the Dalit community. They have the respect and self-dignity to earn their living, he added.

"They are a big part of the wheel that drives the economy forward. And yet they do not have any mention in the national budget," said Ratan.

Workers' Party of Bangladesh President Rashed Khan Menon suggested Dalits to specifically provide the finance minister or the finance secretary with ways to incorporate the community in the next budget.

Addressing as the chief guest, he also reminded the Dalits that they need to raise a movement to build unity and leadership among themselves.

Communist Party of Bangladesh central leader Ruhin Hossain Prince and Nagorik Uddyog Chief Executive Jakir Hossain spoke at the programme with BDERM President Mukul Sikder in the chair.



Foreign Minister Dipu Moni and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton exchange documents at an agreement signing ceremony in presence of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

PHOTO: PMO

Buet strike called off after 27 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The deadlock at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), which was created over alleged anomalies in the administration, apparently came to an end, as agitating teachers called off their 27-day strike on assurance from the prime minister yesterday.

Teachers' Association of Buet had been on strike since April 7, demanding resignation of the Vice Chancellor, Prof SM Nazrul Islam, over allegations of irregularities at the reputed institution, which involve "partisan appointment and administrative reshuffle", among others.

The teachers have a 16-point demand, which also includes resignation of the pro-VC.

"We have withdrawn the strike following the PM's assurance of resolving the existing crisis and meeting our demands", said Prof Mujibur Rahman, president of the teachers' association.

He, however, stressed that the teachers' association would not back down from the demand of VC's removal, even if the teachers would join the academic activities soon.

Contacted, Buet VC Prof SM Nazrul

Islam told The Daily Star that he was hopeful of resuming the academic activities from today (Sunday).

On Friday, a 12-member delegation of Buet Teachers' Association called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her official residence of Gono Bhaban.

A worried PM assured them of looking into the anomalies and urged the teachers to return to classes for the sake of their students.

Following the assurance, the teachers' association took the decision of withdrawing the strike at an emergency general meeting yesterday.

Save Ramna Kali Mandir from grabbers
Governing body urges govt
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The governing body of Ramna Kali Mandir in the capital yesterday urged the government to demarcate the temple's land immediately to protect it from illegal grabbers.

According to the legal documents, Suhrawardy Udyan was endowed (debottor) land, of which over two acres were allocated for the temple later on. During the 1971 Liberation War, the temple was damaged.

In 1999, the Hindu community set up a temple temporarily at one part of the Suhrawardy Udyan.

Addressing a press conference at the temple premises, the governing body demanded the temple's land to be returned so that a permanent temple could be built on it.

They also sought the administration's cooperation to evict illegal settlers from the temple premises.

The governing body President Jitendra Lal Bhowmik and General Secretary Doyamoy Biswas Dipu spoke on the occasion, says a press release.

Skeleton, decomposed body recovered
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered a skeleton from a char in the Padma River in Dohar and a highly decomposed body from the Buriganga River on Friday night.

The two recoveries have stirred rumor involving missing BNP leader M Ilias Ali and his driver, who disappeared from the capital on April 18 night.

Police sent the skeleton and the body to Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue for autopsy.

The hospital authorities will form a board of doctors for the forensic department on Monday (tomorrow) and conduct a DNA test to ascertain the victims' identity, said morgue sources.

Shakhawat Hossain, officer-in-charge, South Keraniganj Police Station, said on information from locals, police recovered the decomposed body which was floating in the Buriganga at Pangao.

The body is of a man, aged above 40. It was found beheaded with the right hand missing.

Officer-in-Charge of Dohar Police Station, Alamgir Hossain, said the skeleton was found in the Padma char at Bahughat around 7:30pm. The skeleton came there floating, he said, adding that the sex of the victim was not identifiable.