

Sarak Bhaban shooting probe starts

15 RHD staff, guards quizzed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The communications ministry probe body on Tuesday's shooting at Sarak Bhaban, headquarters of Roads and Highways Department (RHD), yesterday interrogated 15 staff and security guards of the RHD who witnessed the incident.

The committee will interrogate 10 other staff on June 17 and eight contractors of the RHD the next day.

"We took the case seriously and will interrogate all the people concerned to prepare a complete investigation report," said Mohammad Ali, additional chief engineer of the RHD, who leads the three-member committee.

He said they would also interrogate those who were injured during the incident.

At least five people were bullet-hit in the 10-minute-long firefight between two groups over supremacy in tender manipulation on the Sarak Bhaban premises in broad-day light on Tuesday.

Sources said the groups are led by Shamim Shahriar, a contractor and publication secretary of Swachhasebak League central committee, and Kamal Uddin Khandaker, an office assistant of RHD and general secretary of pro-AL Sramik Karmachari Union.

Communications ministry formed the probe committee that day and directed it to submit report within three days.

"We will appeal to extend the deadline for report submission by a week since it is not possible to submit a complete report within three days," Ali said.

He, however, did not elaborate on the statements of the witnesses.

Another investigation committee led by Chowdhury Ruhul Amin, deputy director (security) of the RHD, submitted its report yesterday. The committee interrogated 10 security guards in this connection.

"The guards told us that they could not identify anybody who fired that day," he added.

He said the committee was formed to investigate the role of on-duty security guards.

Meanwhile, Golam Azam Mamun, a contractor of the RHD, yesterday urged the RHD chief engineer to take departmental action against three of its employees -- Kamal, Md Fazlur Rahman, chairman, and Abdul Kalam Azad, assistant storekeeper.

In the application, he claimed that the three fired on the contractors of the RHD on Tuesday.

Mamun on Wednesday filed a case with Shahbagh Police Station accusing 18-20 people including Kamal, Fazlur, Azad and one Md Rafique.

Police arrested Azad early Wednesday while Kamal and Fazlur went into hiding since the incident.

Banks asked

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"We have requested the central bank to seize all the accounts of the scammers and their spouses," Shafiqul Alam, additional managing director of UCB, told The Daily Star, adding that the directives were issued on Wednesday.

He said two arrestees -- Maruf Haider and Md Shahidullah, both senior officers in the bank's credit card division -- gave confessional statements in the court.

Assistant Vice-President Nahidul Haque and Executive Officer Zahid Hossain were arrested along with Haider and Shahidullah on June 3. Shahadat Hossain Sohag, head of the bank's card division, was arrested on June 5.

Earlier this month, UCB identified five of its top and mid-ranking officials who had withdrawn over Tk 10 crore by using 21 credit cards between 2007 and May 2012.

Dhaka sticks to its 'no'

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"Bangladesh is not bound by any international law to open its border for the Rohingyas, as there is no war-like situation in that country and that its government is not forcing its citizens out," Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said in parliament yesterday.

She added the international organisations and other non-governmental entities had better go to Myanmar and extend their support to the Rohingyas instead of pressing Bangladesh to take them in.

Dhaka has conveyed its message to the international community that it does not want any more Rohingyas to enter the country, officials said.

They added that Bangladesh was not deporting any Rohingyas who are living in the country for years; the country rather prefers their voluntary return.

Bangladesh allowed several lakh Rohingyas in 1991 when they crossed the border in the face of persecutions in Myanmar, officials said.

Meanwhile, Charge de Affairs of US Embassy in Dhaka Nicholas Dean, Canadian High Commissioner Heather Cruden and UNHCR Country Representative Craig Sanders yesterday met Foreign Secretary Mijarul Quayes separately and conveyed their governments' stance not to push back Rohingyas and allow them in Bangladesh.

However, the foreign secretary told the diplomats that it would not be possible for Bangladesh to accept more refugees as there were already over five lakh registered and illegal Rohingyas in the country, said officials. They said the Bangladesh government was highly annoyed with the UNHCR representative as he was making public statements before discussing anything with it.

Foreign ministry sources said the UNHCR representative had sent a three-page letter to the ministry in which he narrated the refugee situation since June 8 and requested the government to let Rohingyas cross

the border.

They said the letter was dated June 12, but was handed over to the foreign ministry yesterday. Meanwhile, the UNHCR official had been making public statements for the last few days, which was a gross violation of diplomatic rules.

"The foreign ministry will soon issue him [UNHCR representative] a warning for the violation of diplomatic norms," said a high official, adding that the government would also issue a warning to another top ranking UN official who had recently held meetings with the locals of Chittagong Hill Tracts and made various allegations against the government.

"None of the countries or agencies that are requesting us to allow refugees are saying anything to Myanmar, but asking Bangladesh to open its border. Are we responsible for the violence in Myanmar?" said a high official of the foreign ministry.

The ministry officials said they had received information that the situation in Rakhine state was becoming stable due to the steps taken by the central government.

They said the Rohingya issue would be given top priority during the Myanmar president's official visit to Bangladesh on July 15-17.

OICURGE MYANMAR The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in a press statement on Wednesday expressed grave concern over the reports of violence against Rohingya Muslim minorities in Arakan province and other parts of Myanmar.

It had been reported in the last few days that repeated attacks on Muslim Rohingyas and on their places of worship, property and residences had taken place in the western province of Rakhine. Also disturbing are the reports of armed mobs surrounding the Central Mosque and the Auk Ywa mosque intimidating worshippers, the note said.

The OIC has condemned such systematic acts of

violence and intimidation against the Rohingyas for decades and urged the OIC member states and the international community to urgently request Myanmar to contain such brutality and bring the culprits to justice.

As the country moves toward democratisation, the OIC expects the Myanmar government to live up to their democratic responsibilities, take all necessary measures to stop violence in the Arakan region, maintain international standards and fully accord the rights of citizenship to Rohingya Muslims, said the press note.

10 killed in Yemen army, Qaeda clashes

AFP, Aden

Ten people were killed in fighting between al-Qaeda militants and the army for control of the jihadists' stronghold town of Shuqra in southern Yemen's Abyan province, a local official said yesterday.

Clashes using machineguns between al-Qaeda militants and the army, backed by local militiamen, left two soldiers dead and 11 wounded," the official in Shuqra told AFP.

He said eight jihadists were also killed in the fighting late on Wednesday.

Fierce clashes between the militants and troops trying to retake Shuqra -- the only Abyan town besides Mahfad which extremists still hold -- broke out earlier the same day.

On Tuesday, the military drove the jihadists out of the provincial capital Zinjibar and Jaar, another town. Al-Qaeda gunmen are believed to have fled east to Shuqra.

On May 12, the Yemeni army launched an all-out offensive to recapture territory lost to the jihadists.

A total of 525 people have died in the campaign -- 402 Al-Qaeda militants, 78 soldiers, 26 militiamen and 19 civilians -- according to an AFP tally compiled from various sources.

Garment exporters

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power wants to destroy the industry and the government and exporters know who instigated the general workers to do vandalism," Mohiuddin told the briefing at the BGMEA office in the capital.

He said most government agencies knew how the demonstration took place and that they had footage of the vandalism.

It all began on Monday when about 4,500 workers of Artistic Design Ltd, a packaging factory of Ha-Meem Group owned by FBCCI President AK Azad, took to the streets demanding a raise in their wages.

Yesterday, they staged violent protests in the presence of State Minister for Home Shamsul Haque Tuku, local lawmaker Talukder Md Towhid Jung (Murad) and some top police officials, who went to Ashulia on the outskirts of the capital to convince the workers to return to work.

Their efforts went in vain as the workers ransacked more than 150 vehicles and vandalised 30 factories and put barricades suspending traffic on Dhaka-Tangail highway for eight hours and on Nabinagar-Kalaikoil road for about four hours since 8:00am.

The agitating workers clashed sporadically with law enforcers, leaving more than 100 people, including 12 policemen, injured, said Abdus Salam, director general of Industrial Police.

They set several vehicles on fire, including a microbus of Maasranga Television, a motorbike of a policeman, and also furniture of a factory.

Police fired several hundred rubber bullets and teargas canisters in addition to baton-charging to disperse the clashing workers, who retaliated with brickbats and also beat up policemen with bamboo sticks, witnesses said.

Owners of around 300 factories closed their units although a few factories reopened for a while in the morning.

The industrial police chief told The Daily Star around 4,000 forces from Industrial Police, Savar District Police, Armed Police Battalion and Rapid Action Battalion were deployed to calm the situation.

According to him, police

fired around 200 rubber bullets and teargas.

During the clashes from Monday to Wednesday, around 300 people were injured, some 200 vehicles ransacked and about 100 factories vandalised, police and witnesses said.

Yesterday's demonstration began around 8:00am.

As the day wore on, thousands of workers joined the agitating groups, said Fayezul Kabir, deputy director of Industrial Police.

The demonstrators set fire to tyres and furniture on the road and chanted slogans, demanding a payhike.

At present, a garment worker gets between Tk 3,000 and 5,500 a month. The agitating workers demand a raise between Tk 1,500 and 2,000.

"My salary is Tk 4,400 and I got Tk 6,200 last month, including my overtime pay," said Rashidul Islam, a sewing operator of Sharmin Group.

"My minimum monthly expenditure is Tk 10,000," he said, adding: "I am facing severe difficulties to run my family with the income."

Like Rashidul, a number of other workers spoke of their hardship in maintaining their families at a time when house rent and prices of essentials are skyrocketing.

Tuku along with lawmaker Murad Jung went to Ha-Meem Group premises around 7:30am yesterday, where he held a meeting with the authorities and labour leaders.

After the meeting, the minister asked the agitating workers to return to work. He also requested the workers to calm down, assuring them that the prime minister herself was looking into the matter.

Several resolutions were agreed on in the meeting mediated by Tuku.

Contacted, Brig Gen (ret'd) Mohammad Ali Mondal, director of the project at Ashulia of Ha-Meem Group, told The Daily Star that the workers would get an increment from next month.

The owners will also pay for the treatment of the injured workers and that the workers will get the full month's salary although production remained suspended for four days, he added.

Also, the workers were promised that the government would see to it that their house rents at Ashulia do not go up further.

Lawmaker Towhid Jung of Dhaka-19 (Savar) will oversee the matter, Mohammad Ali added.

Tiger cubs

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Abdul Kader's Shyamoli residence in the capital. He and his elder son Masud Hossain have been on the run since then.

The tigers, over two months old, would be confined to a certain area inside the botanical garden, Yunus Ali, chief conservator of forest, told The Daily Star last evening.

Meanwhile, the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh suggested looking for the mother of the tiger cubs to reunite the family or sending them to a rehabilitation centre.

If it takes a long time to find the mother, the cubs should not be left with her as the mother tiger would then kill the cubs or refuse to accept them, the WTB said in a statement issued yesterday.

In that case, it proposed sending the cubs to a specialised tiger rehabilitation centre where they would grow up more naturally and then return to the wild.

Rab had to hand the cubs over to Abdul Wadud, an exotic birds breeder and owner of the mini zoo, when Dhaka Zoo and other government wildlife organisations showed reluctance to take responsibility for them.

The Dhaka Zoo authorities had said they would not take the cubs as they could be carrying diseases, while the forest department lacked facilities for such young tiger cubs.

Visiting the mini zoo, wildlife experts had described its environment as hostile for the cubs and suggested that the forest department should immediately relocate them to any government facility.

At present there is no facility in Bangladesh capable of raising cubs naturally, the WTB said in the statement signed by its Chief Executive Prof Anwarul Islam.

Gaza water too contaminated to drink, say charities

BBC ONLINE

Gaza's only fresh source of water is too dangerous to drink because of contamination by fertiliser and human waste, a new report yesterday said.

The charities Save the Children and Medical Aid for Palestinians has said the number of children being treated for diarrhoea has doubled in five years.

They said Israel's five-year blockade of the territory is preventing crucial sanitation equipment from getting in.

The blockade must be lifted "in its entirety", they said.

The report, Gaza's Children: Falling Behind, said that high levels of nitrates and other contaminants have been found in the main water supply.

Nitrates, found in faeces and fertiliser, are linked to the doubling of the incidence of watery diarrhoea in children since the blockade began, it says.

British soldier killed in Afghanistan grenade blast

AFP, London

A British soldier has been killed in a grenade attack in southern Afghanistan, the Ministry of Defence in London yesterday said.

The soldier's death brought to 418 the number of British troops killed since operations in Afghanistan began in October 2001. Of these, at least 378 were killed as a result of hostile action.

The soldier, from 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, was on a patrol aimed at disrupting insurgent activity in the Nahr-e Saraj district in Helmand Province when he was caught in the blast from an enemy grenade.

The soldier's next of kin have been informed. He is the 24th British soldier to die this year in the Afghanistan campaign.

Fakhrul

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secretariat.

The other freed leaders are Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, ASM Hannan Shah, Ruhul Kuddus Talukder Dulu, Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Amanullah Aman, Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, Shawkat Hossain Nilu, Kamruzzaman Ratan, Habib Un Nabi Khan Sohel, Saiful Alam Nirob, Sharafat Hossain Sofu and Sultan Salahuddin Tuku.

Police, however, said they again arrested Ratan, Sohel, Nirob, Sofu and Tuku at the gate of High Security Jail in Gazipur.

Fakhrul and Dulu walked out of Kashimpur Central Jail-2 at 9:35pm, superintendent of the jail, Forman Ali, told The Daily Star.

Mosharraf and Hannan Shah were released from Kashimpur Central Jail-1 at 10:10pm.

Leaders and workers of the main opposition BNP received the freed leaders at jail gates and greeted them with garlands.

Earlier, the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court granted bail to Mirza Fakhrul and 14 others in the case after the defence lawyers submitted fresh bail petitions.

Prior to granting the bail, the court accepted their appeal for withdrawal of warrants issued against them on June 7.

Seven other accused in the case were freed earlier on a High Court bail.

Two hand-made bombs went off on the secretariat premises during the hartal hours on April 29. Shahbagh police filed the case accusing 28 leaders of the BNP-led 18-party alliance for the blasts.

The leaders on May 14 secured anticipatory bails from the High Court until it accepted the charge sheet in the case. On May 31, detectives pressed charges against the accused.

The opposition leaders were also sued in another case in connection with torching of a vehicle in front of the Prime Minister's Office on April 29.

The High Court on June 7 granted them bail in that case.

Myanmar claims

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protocol are we obliged to shelter the Rohingyas.

"Although we are not bound by any international laws, considering our experience of the 1971 [Liberation War], we have been sheltering the Rohingyas on humanitarian grounds," she told the House.

Remembering Bangladesh refugees taking shelter in India during the Liberation War, she said, "We have never forgotten it and that's why Bangladesh

always extends its helping hands when such incidents take place."

"In 1971, there was a war going on in Bangladesh. There was mass killing, looting and rape taking place.... We are grateful that the Indira Gandhi government and the people of India stood beside the Bangladesh refugees."

But Myanmar's situation is not similar to that of Bangladesh in 1971, she added.

"The situation is not as if the Rohingya people have

no place to go. We ourselves face many problems. We have allowed many Rohingyas to live in our country and we do not want to add to our problems by allowing more of them in.

"The country [Myanmar] is not forcing its citizens to leave the country. This is a sectarian clash in which the state is not involved. The Myanmar government is rather working to resolve the problem," she added.

BSF claims 'restraint'

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Indian daily newspaper, quoted Bansal in an interview published yesterday.

He was reacting to allegations by Human Rights Watch, an international NGO, that the BSF personnel were indulging in extra-judicial killing, torture and human rights violation and killed over 1,000 people over the years.

Because of BSF's careful decision to avoid violent confrontation with "criminals" [cattle smugglers] the death toll had come down, he said, adding otherwise there would have been at least 200 killings this year alone.

The BSF, he said, was exercising restraint in the face of smugglers coming in hundreds and resorting to attacks on them, clearly outnumbering the BSF members in the border areas. In the last one year, two BSF jawans were killed and 225 others injured, he said.

Asked why BSF men do not arrest the smugglers

and hand them over to police, instead of firing at them, Bansal said it was easy to comment on the situation without knowing the reality. Nearly 1 lakh cattle are being smuggled every year to Bangladesh and the amount involved in this is roughly around Rs100 crore. "The force's personnel are working under the challenging circumstances," the BSF DG said.

Curfew from sunrise to sunset is imposed in the areas, a 4100-km border with Bangladesh. "Why should anybody go near the fence during those hours? What work they will have at odd hours except to indulge in smuggling or other criminal activities?" said Bansal.

Bansal, however, pointed out that BSF had commonality of interest with all right-minded and honest organisations working for protecting human rights.

Any BSF jawan found guilty of human rights violations was duly punished under BSF rules, he

said. Bansal, however, refused to give details of the BSF personnel booked or punished for violations of human rights, stating it was an internal matter.

Indian guru in custody over sex abuse charges

AFP, Bangalore

A popular Indian guru facing a series of assault and sexual abuse charges was in police custody yesterday after he turned himself in to court authorities.

Police ordered Swami Nithyananda, 35, to be detained for questioning after five women accused him of abusing them at his Hindu religious retreat in the southern state of Karnataka.

Nithyananda, wearing flowing saffron robes, surrendered on Wednesday to a court in Ramanagar, 35 kilometres from the state capital Bangalore, before he was taken into custody.

It's no refugee influx

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The members of BGB and coast guard in the 24 hours till 8:30pm yesterday detained 48 Rohingyas, who entered Bangladesh at different points like Shah Porir Dweep and St Martin Island.

Of the intruders, 25 were pushed back and no other boat arrived during the rest of the day.

It is also hard to get the specific statistics of boats as some of those being turned away by the BGB or coast guard go off to a different point of the coast.

"On June 11, three boats carrying around 120 Rohingyas first came near Shah Porir Dweep and a BGB team sent them back. But they went to Saint Martin's Island, from where they were pushed back by the coast guard," said an official involved in the action.

"The three boats went to two different points and were noticed by two different teams. At each point, the force concerned assumed the boats as new ones. So, it would be wrong to say six boats arrived that day."

The same boat also can come another day, said the official, trying to explain the difficulties of getting the actual figure of Rohingyas attempting to intrude.

About the latest crisis, ANM Nazim Uddin, upazila nirbahi officer of Teknaf, told The Daily Star, "I don't think there is any scope of terminating an influx."

"It was influx when they [Rohingyas] were forcibly sent [to Bangladesh] in 1991."

The recent violence in

Maungdaw and Sittwe has led to the increase in Rohingyas heading for Teknaf. Locals and officials expect such attempts to be stopped soon.

Because of trade and social relations between the two neighbouring countries, the Teknaf people try to know the situation in Maungdaw and Sittwe (formerly Akyab).

Some of them told this correspondent that they had come to know from some people in Myanmar that now the situation was calm in the Burmese towns.

They said the clashes between Rakhines and Rohingyas in Myanmar over the past several weeks originated from some small unwanted incidents.

But police and Luntin Armed Police Battalion helped Rakhines and took part in looting and attacking Rohingyas, worsening the situation.

Locals in Teknaf also said Luntin and police even fired at Myanmar's border force Nasaka and the army, which were deployed to control the situation.

The Myanmar government had positioned its army on June 11 in its turmoil-hit neighbourhoods and had withdrawn Luntin and police from those areas over their controversial roles.

Bangladeshi locals and authorities in Teknaf say they believed the present crisis was not comparable with that of 1978 and 1991.

Amir Ahmed, 55, president of the association of imams in Teknaf, said, in 1991 the Naf River was heavily congested with hundreds of boats of

Rohingyas approaching Teknaf.

He said 50,000 to 1 lakh Rohingyas came to Teknaf in 1978; it was 2.5 to 3 lakh in 1991.

Locals believe the Myanmar government in 1991 wanted Rohingyas to leave the country, but this time it was just the opposite.

A local official said, "After the recent violence... their government sealed their border. That means the Myanmar government wants their citizens to stay on their soil."

"We expect the situation will be normal soon as the Myanmar government takes steps to resolve the recent problems." He called for quick steps to protect the Bangladesh border with Myanmar.

A top government official in Teknaf said Myanmar did not face any threat from Bangladeshis.

"Our people don't try to trespass into Myanmar; Burmese come to our land illegally. But Myanmar protected its border through fencing but we have no protection except for inadequate vigilance by the forces."

The local administration in Teknaf and Cox's Bazar has proposed to the top of the government to fence the Bangladesh border with pocket gates at different points, construct circular road near the border for proper vigilance and set up closed-circuit cameras at strategic points of the border. But no progress on the proposals has been made yet, they said.

[Dwaipayan Barua also contributed to the report]