

Asmani

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suffering from old-age complications since long.
Widowed Asmani died around 3:00am at her Rasulpur village home under Eshan Gopalpur Union of Faridpur Sadar, our Faridpur Correspondent reports, quoting family sources.

Daughter of Arman Mollick of nearby Bhanudangi village, Asmani was married to Hashem Mondol of Rasulpur at the age of nine. Hashem died around 20 years ago.

Asmani has two sons and six daughters -- all busy with their own families now.

Symbolising a typical poverty-stricken little girl with shattered dreams and broken spirits, the poem "Asmani" was published in Jasimuddin's "Ek Poisar Banshi" in 1949.

Local journalists discovered her at Rasulpur village in 2003.

Earlier on June 26, Asmani was admitted to Faridpur General Hospital due to brain haemorrhage and high blood pressure. Later, she was shifted to Faridpur Medical College Hospital as her condition deteriorated.

On June 28, she was transferred to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital in the capital.

UNB adds: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Saturday expressed profound shock at the death of Asmani.

In her condolence message, the prime minister said Asmani was a unique character represented by Palli Kabi Jasimuddin. Sheikh Hasina prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed her sympathy to the members of the bereaved family.

JP to contest

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saying for the last three years. There has been no change in our stand," Ershad told reporters on Saturday at Shahjalal International Airport on his return home after a 5-day visit to India.

Asked about the attitude of the neighbouring country about Bangladesh's present political situation, the former military ruler said India wanted free and fair polls in the country with the participation of all major political parties.

During his tour, Ershad, leader of one of the key allies of the Awami League-led ruling grand alliance, met Indian top leaders including newly-elected President Pranab Mukherjee and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Teesta water sharing treaty and Tipaimukh Dam project were among the issues that came up for discussions during Ershad's meetings with the Indian leaders, according to Indian media.

ACC to probe

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against war crimes trial against him.

The commission had received a document from the law ministry regarding appointment of lobbyists by Mir Quashem and decided to probe the allegation, ACC Chairman Ghulam Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday. The ACC would take necessary steps on the basis of the findings in the inquiry, he added.

Meanwhile, Law Minister Shafigue Ahmed said his office had received the document from Zead Al Malum, a member of prosecution team dealing with crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971.

The commission could file a case against Mir Quashem on charges of money laundering if probe findings substantiated the allegation, he said.

Mir Quashem, detained in connection with crimes against humanity, might have appointed lobbyists so that they could place his profiles before the US government and US senate to stop trial proceedings against him, the law minister said, adding the prosecutors might draw attention of the International Crimes Tribunal to take action against the Jamaat leader.

Jamaat leader Azharul held

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Syed Nurul Islam, deputy commissioner of Ramna Division, told The Daily Star.

Azhar, who hails from Badarganj of Rangpur, was taken to the DB office on Mintoo Road on security grounds, Nurul Islam claimed.

Azhar had been in jail in connection with other cases since September last year but he got out on bail last Thursday, the day before the Eid holidays began.

Mashiur Rahman, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Ramna Police Station, said Azhar would be produced before Tribunal-1 today (Thursday).

Earlier yesterday, Prosecutor Nurjahan Begum Mukta appealed to Tribunal-1 for an arrest warrant against the Jamaat leader for "effective and proper investigation" into his alleged crimes during the war.

The prosecutor said Azhar was the chief of the Al-Badr force in Rangpur and had committed murder, genocide, rape, looting and other crimes against humanity during the war.

The Al-Badr was a force that collaborated with the Pakistani occupation army. It was formed mostly with members of the Islami Chhatra Sangha, the then student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami.

Nurjahan said, "Investigation has properly revealed evidence of his [Azhar's] involvement in crimes against humanity..."

"As the acting secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami, the accused is a very influential person," said the prosecutor, adding, "There is proof that the accused has been trying to destroy evidence at home and abroad to hinder the proper investigation process."

Claiming that the accused might go on the run any time, the prosecutor said he should be arrested for the sake of effective and proper investigation.

In response to the prosecution petition and arguments, the three-member tribunal, headed by Justice Md Nizamul Huq, issued the arrest warrant and directed police to produce the Jamaat leader before the tribunal within 24 hours of his arrest.

It also directed the authorities concerned to look after the health of the accused.

Shishir Manir, a member of the defence team of detained Jamaat leaders accused of war crimes at the tribunals, told The Daily Star that the defence would seek bail for Azhar today.

Abdul Hannan Khan, the coordinator of the investigation agency of the tribunals, told The Daily Star that investigations into the allegations against the Jamaat leader had already been half done.

He said the investigators

hoped to complete the probe within the next three months.

Investigations against Azhar began on April 15 this year.

THE ALLEGATIONS
Prosecutor Nurjahan claimed that Azhar was a student of Rangpur Carmichael College and president of Islami Chhatra Sangha of Rangpur. She said he led the formation of the Al-Badr force in the district during the war.

She claimed that on a single day in mid-April 1971, around 1,200 freedom-loving Bangalees of Jharuar Beel and Padmapukur areas of Badarganj were killed and Azhar was directly involved in the mass killing.

Nurjahan said Azhar was also involved in arson and looting of numerous houses in Badarganj area in cooperation with the Pakistani army.

In April 1971, Azhar along with the Pakistani army, abducted a professor of Rangpur Carmichael College along with his wife and some other professors of the college. They were shot dead near Damdama Bridge in the district, said the prosecutor.

Nurjahan did not mention the names of the victims or witnesses for the sake of their privacy, secrecy and the ongoing investigation. She used alphabets instead of names before the tribunal.

The prosecutor said the Jamaat leader was directly involved in the killing of at least 11 people, including a prominent pro-liberation lawyer of Rangpur.

The lawyer was abducted in late March 1971. He was confined to Rangpur cantonment and tortured inhumanly there, Nurjahan claimed.

In April, he along with 10 others was shot dead at Dakhiganj Mahashwashan, the prosecutor went on to say.

The prosecutor said the accused directly took part in the killing of the 11 people, including a nine-month pregnant woman of Dhappara, in cooperation with the Pakistani army.

The accused used to visit Rangpur cantonment frequently on his motorcycle hoisting the Pakistani national flag, said the prosecutor.

She said in Rangpur cantonment, the accused got involved in hatching conspiracies to kill pro-liberation intellectuals and professionals.

The prosecutor claimed that the Jamaat leader regularly visited Rangpur Town Hall, which was used as a recreation centre for the Pakistani forces during the war.

THE ARREST
Witnesses said a huge contingent of law enforcers from Ramna Police Station, DB and Rab arrested Azhar at 2:00pm at his flat in Moghbazar.

He was brought out of the house at 2:30pm and

taken to the DB office in five minutes.

Before he was put into a prison van, Azhar said, "I have been arrested unjustly. Pray for me."

Members of different law enforcing agencies, including Detective Branch of police and Rab, had cordoned off Azhar's home since noon.

After getting the copy of the arrest warrant, the law enforcers went in, police said.

Azhar was arrested in connection with being involved in a clash between law enforcers and Jamaat and Islami Chhatra Shibir men at Kakrail in the capital on September 19 last year. He was released on bail on Thursday last.

Tasnim Azhar Shumon, son of Azhar, told The Daily Star that at least 11 criminal cases had been filed against his father since September 19, 2011, and he had got bail in all of them.

JAMAAT'S REACTION
Jamaat acting ameer Maqbul Ahmed in a statement said, "The government arrested him [Azhar] by filing cases based on false allegations as part of a conspiracy to destroy the Jamaat-e-Islami by eliminating the party leadership."

Most of the senior party leaders are now in jail over their alleged involvement in crimes against humanity during the war.

Former ameer Ghulam Azam, incumbent Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami and Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, Nayab-e-Ameer Delwar Hossain Sayeede, assistant secretaries general M u h a m m a d Kamaruzzaman, Abdul Quader Mollah and working committee member Mir Quashem Ali are meanwhile facing war crimes charges at the tribunals.

Transfer power

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government in power.

Portraying a gloomy picture of the country, the BNP chief said the people were not safe under this regime as the law and order situation in the country was deteriorating.

Khaleda alleged that the opposition leaders and activists were being killed and disappeared.

She also slammed the government for filing "false" cases against the party leaders and activists. They could be tried under the law of the land if they committed any crime at all. But for that, she said, "The judiciary has to be fair and independent. All we want is justice."

Asked about the much-talked-about "minus-two formula" recently re-floated by HM Ershad, Khaleda said people would decide who would be in politics.

The BNP chief also urged all political parties and the people from all walks of life to wage a vigorous movement to oust the government.

Syria finally ready to talk

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But he added: "Any problems can be discussed during negotiations. We are even ready to discuss this issue."

According to political sources in Damascus, Jamil was sent to Moscow to discuss a possible plan for a presidential election in Syria in which all candidates would be allowed to stand, including Assad.

The exiled opposition umbrella group the Syrian National Council said it was studying the formation of a transitional government, but did not elaborate on whether it could include regime figures.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, speaking after meeting China's top diplomat on Tuesday, said Moscow and Beijing were committed to "the need to strictly adhere to the norms of international law ... and not to allow their violation".

Chinese state media yesterday accused Obama of planning to use Syria's chemical weapons as an excuse for intervening militarily.

West not to meddle in Syria in the wake of US President Barack Obama's warning to Damascus over its chemical weapons arsenal.

Obama had put Assad's regime on notice Monday that although he had not ordered military action "at this point," Washington would regard any recourse by Damascus to its deadly arsenal as crossing a "red line."

"There would be enormous consequences if we start seeing movement on the chemical weapons front or the use of chemical weapons," he told reporters.

Syria admitted in July that it has chemical weapons and could use them in case of any "external aggression" but not against its own people.

In Syria, at least 198 people were killed nationwide on Tuesday, a watchdog said, reporting relentless shelling and fighting across swathes of the main battleground of Aleppo.

"Once again, Western powers are digging deep for excuses to intervene militarily," it said.

Xinhua's commentary is not an official statement but it reflects fears among China's communist leaders that the West wants regime change in Syria under the guise of humanitarian action, the BBC's Damian Grammaticas reports from Beijing.

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Activists say more than 23,000 people have been killed since March 2011, while the UN puts the death toll at 17,000 and says hundreds of thousands more have fled or been made homeless in a major human-

Report blames Sonali Bank's

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prepared by Syful Shamsul Alam and Co, a chartered accountant and consultancy firm.

The Sonali Bank board appointed the chartered accountant firm in June to find out those responsible for the scam.

The consultancy firm submitted its report to the bank and forwarded the central bank a copy of the report last week, said a Sonali Bank official.

In May, a central bank investigation revealed massive irregularities in sanctioning and disbursing of loans, especially to little-known Hallmark Group and others, by the bank and instructed it to take necessary actions.

The functional audit report said the top management of the bank had remained "mysteriously silent for a year", since February 2011, although the signs of irregularities in the branch came to light through various internal inspections.

In 2009 and 2010, an internal inspection team detected gross irregularities in international trade of the branch and submitted a report in February 2011, but the International Foreign

Trade Division of the bank did not take any steps in this regard.

Besides, the foreign trade division also did not monitor the abnormal loan disbursement growth, 1,938 percent in some categories, the report added.

The foreign trade division finally raised an office note to inspect the branch office on January 26, 2012 which the managing director of Sonali Bank approved.

"But without any valid reason the inspection team started the inspection after two months. Had the inspection started immediately after the office note, the bank could have saved around Tk 1,860 crore," the report stated.

Pradip Kumar Dutta, managing director of Sonali Bank, said, "The bank will take proper actions against the people involved in the loan scam on Thursday [today], after discussing the functional audit report in the board meeting."

According to the audit report, as of May 31 this year, the bank had disbursed Tk 3,699 crore as loan, of which Tk 3,606 crore was disbursed without maintaining banking rules.

The report said the branch

manager did not follow the banking rules while sanctioning and disbursing the loans. He had also taken advantage of the loose supervision by the principal and general manager's offices and the head office. He had adopted unauthorised ways to disburse the huge amount of money as his clients wished.

On the other hand, the report said, the branch officials intentionally refrained from maintaining relevant documents properly.

The top management, including the managing director and general manager's office, also did not monitor and evaluate the growth in loan disbursement by the Ruposhi Bangla Hotel branch, the functional audit report said.

Rather than monitoring the branch properly, the top management in different times appraised the branch's activities. The audit report quoted one of the bank's internal reports that read: "AKM Azizur Rahman is managing the branch efficiently with his extraordinary talent, foresight and banking knowledge".

Such remark had encouraged the branch manager to go for unethical banking, the

Rich-poor gap grows in Latin America: UN

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

The gap is widening between the rich and poor in much of Latin America, the world's most economically unequal and its most urbanized region, the UN said Tuesday.

The richest 20 percent of the population now earn on average nearly 20 times more than the 20 percent poorest, a study by the UN Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT) found.

"The main challenge is how to combat such huge disparities in the cities," where eight out of ten of Latin America's 589 million people live, said Erik Vittrup, the UN-Habitat expert who presented the report.

Inequality has grown in Colombia, Paraguay, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Argentina and Guatemala, according to the study, with Guatemala claiming the title as the country with the greatest disparity between the rich and poor.

The countries with the most equitable spread of riches are Venezuela, Uruguay, Peru and El Salvador.

"Income inequality is extremely high. There is a considerable job deficit and a large labor informality affecting mainly the young and women," the UN said.

Despite some progress recorded over the past decade, 124 million people live in poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean cities.

More than half of them live in either in Brazil or Mexico.

Urban areas are projected to keep growing, with nearly nine of ten people expected to live in cities by 2050, the study said, though the pace of the rural exodus has been slowing.

"Migrations are now more complex and occur mainly between cities, at times across international borders," the UN said.

However, the agency warned that cities are becoming increasingly less compact, expanding physically in an "unsustainable" pattern.

The study, titled "State of the Cities of Latin America," found the urbanization rate is the highest in the farthest south, followed by Andean countries and Mexico, then the Caribbean and Central America.

5 bullet-hit

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refund, which led to the clash between them and the launch staff.

At one point, Ansar members onboard the launch opened fire.

Some panicked passengers jumped into the river. Julfikar Md Gazzali, officer-in-charge (OC) of Baufal Police Station, said they had seized the launch and brought the staff to the police station for interrogation.

The launch was released the next day considering suffering of the Eid holidaymakers.

The OC said the Ansar members admitted to firing only one bullet.

Police filed a general diary in this connection.

New gas layer

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and Production Company Ltd (Bapex), told The Daily Star.

"We have confirmed today [Sunday] that there is a new gas layer in the well," he said.

The new zone of the well would add about 20 million cubic feet of gas per day (20 mcmfd), he said adding that it would take 10 to 12 days to go for commercial production, and thus inclusion to the national grid.

Gas production at the well was suspended for several months and the new zone has been detected following a 3D-seismic survey and work-over, the Bapex MD said.

About 90 mcmfd gas is being produced at the six wells in Kailashtila at present.

Fresh attack condemned

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the college student by a judicial inquiry committee.

TIB also demanded that the prime minister herself take initiatives to ensure security to Limon and his family and exemplary punishment to the perpetrators and compensation to Limon and his family.

Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of TIB, said in the statement that resentment had been created among the people against a section of the members of Rab and the police who carried out heinous attacks on innocent citizens like Limon.

"Besides, the way the security of Limon and his family and their right to justice is being denied to defend the crime and the perpetrators is a matter of grave concern and a threat to the democratic values, especially to the rule of law."

"People expect the government, particularly the prime minister, will rise above any fear of or sympathy to anyone and ensure justice to Limon and set an example of showing respect to democracy, rule of law and human rights," said the statement yesterday.

In the other statement, 42 eminent citizens, including teachers, lawyers, activists, artists, writers and columnists, denounced the attack

on Limon and his mother and brother on the Eid day, saying it was designed to further harass the family.

"We think the final police report on August 14, 2012, showing Rab as innocent, instigated the Ibrahim-led group in the attack," said the statement on Tuesday.

"We are observing with grave concern and despise that inhuman and unjust activities have continued to conceal the elite force's [Rab] misdeed. Instead of ensuring justice, Limon and his family are forced into danger and instability."

Condemning the attack, the eminent citizens demanded immediate arrest and punishment of the attackers. "The highest authority of the government must ensure security to Limon and his family instead of harassing them."

The statement also called for withdrawal of all the "false cases" against Limon, stopping indiscriminate killings and forced disappearances by members of the law enforcement agencies and bringing the wrongdoers to book.

"The government is responsible for the wrongs unleashed on Limon one after another," the statement said.

The signatories include Hamida Hossain of rights body Ain O Salish Kendra,

42 killed in 5 days

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run by a vehicle near Bangla Motor intersection on Sunday morning.

MUNSHIGANJ
At least five people were killed and 38 others injured in three separate accidents in the district.

Four were killed and 30 others injured when a bus heading for Kalibari of Tongibari from Dhaka plunged into a water-filled roadside ditch at Sirajdikhan upazila.

Earlier on Saturday, a woman was killed and five of her family members were injured as their microbus fell into a roadside ditch at Nimtoli on the Dhaka-Mawa Highway.

NATORE
A holiday trip of five school students turned into a death-tour in Baraigram upazila on Tuesday when a rashly driven bus hit two human haulers carrying them to a tourist spot -- Natore Maharaja's Palace -- in the district.

At least 13 other students also sustained injuries in the accident that occurred around 12:30pm on the Natore-Pabna Highway in Garmati of the upazila.

All the victims are the students of Kamalpur High School of Daulatpur upazila of Kushtia, police said.

COMILLA
At least six people died and 82 others suffered injuries in

separate road crashes at different places in the district on Dhaka-Chittagong Highway from Sunday to Wednesday, reports a correspondent.

KERANIGANJ
Three children of a family were killed and five others injured when a bus rammied a CNG-run auto rickshaw at South Keraniganj on the Dhaka-Mawa Highway Tuesday morning at around 11:30am.

GAZIPUR
At least six were killed and 20 others injured in separate road accidents in the district on Saturday and yesterday.

Among the deceased, three were killed at Kaliakoir on Dhaka-Tangail Highway and at Tongi, while three others were killed and others injured in a head-on collision between two buses at Rajendrapur yesterday afternoon.

PABNA
At least three people including a kid died, while 30 others were injured in Joynagar Boardghar in Ishwardi upazila on Dhaka-Kushtia highway when a Dhaka-bound speeding coach of Hanif Paribahan hit a motorcycle around 5:30pm on Tuesday.

RANGPUR
Two bicyclists were killed in a road accident at Bayanbari on Rangpur-Dinajpur Highway under Taraganj upazila on Saturday after-

noon. **NOAKHALI**
At least two were killed and ten injured in a road accident at Banglabazar under Begumganj upazila in Noakhali early Monday morning (Eid day).

CHITTAGONG
A woman was killed in a road accident at Hathazari upazila in Chittagong on Tuesday morning.

BAGERHAT
A pedestrian was crushed under the wheels of a goods-laden truck at Khan Jahan Ali shrine intersection on Tuesday afternoon.

NILPHAMARI
One was killed in a road crash at Darwani on Nilphamari-Saidpur road at around 11:00am yesterday.

BRAHMANBARIA
A bus helper was killed in a head-on collision between a truck and a bus on Comilla-Sylhet highway at Ponoiut turning point under sadar upazila on Sunday.

GAIBANDHA
A motorcyclist was killed and six others sustained injuries as the motorcycle collided head-on with an auto-bike at Falier Pather on Gaibandha-Balashi road yesterday.

Police said motor cyclist Rubel Mia, 23, was returning home from Gaibandha town.

The injured were sent to Gaibandha Sadar Hospital.