

Elias Mollah's ex-APS killed in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League lawmaker Elias Mollah's former assistant personal secretary died last night, hours after he was thrown from a speedy microbus at the capital's Dainik Bangla intersection.

Amir Hossain Kanchan, 42, died around 11:15pm at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. He was a member of Pallabi thana unit AL and also a furniture trader. He lived at Mirpur-6 with his family.

DMCH sources said Kanchan suffered several stab wounds in his legs.

"A pedestrian took him to the hospital," a police source said.

Kanchan's wife Nasrin Begum told reporters that she called her husband in the evening. "He said he will return home late as he was coming from Motijheel."

Abdul Hannan, brother of the deceased, said they suspect a land dispute might have something to do with the murder.

US considering speeding up Afghan pullout: Report

AFP, Washington

The United States is seriously considering speeding up the withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan because of frustration with President Hamid Karzai, the New York Times reported.

And a so called "zero option" -- having no US troops in Afghanistan after 2014 -- is also on the cards, the daily said late Monday, quoting US and European officials.

US President Barack Obama is committed to ending the US military involvement in Afghanistan by the end of 2014, and his administration has been negotiating with Kabul about leaving behind a "residual force."

But Obama's relationship with Karzai has been deteriorating and suffered a big and new blow last month with an effort by the United States to open peace talks with the Taliban in Qatar.

Karzai opposed the talks, and halted negotiations with the Americans on a long-term security deal needed to keep US forces in Afghanistan after 2014, the Times said.

To defuse tensions, the two presidents spoke by videoconference June 27 but it went badly, the paper said, quoting American and Afghan officials familiar with the exchange.

They said Karzai accused the United States of trying to negotiate a separate peace with both the Taliban and their backers in Pakistan. Karzai felt this would leave his country exposed to its enemies.

Car blast wounds 53 in Lebanon

AFP, Beirut

A car bomb yesterday rocked Beirut's southern suburbs, a stronghold of Lebanon's Shia Hezbollah movement, injuring at least 53 people, government and military sources said.

The blast comes amid spiralling tension in Lebanon over the civil war raging in neighbouring Syria, where Hezbollah fighters have joined President Bashar al-Assad's forces in facing down a revolt by mainly Sunni rebels.

The attack took place in a zone monitored closely by Hezbollah.

It is the most serious incident in the movement's Beirut stronghold since the start of the Syria war more than two years ago.

"A car bomb exploded near a commercial cooperative called the Islamic Cooperation Centre in Bir al-Abed," which lies in the heart of Hezbollah's Beirut stronghold, the military source said.

Asiana chief defends 'very experienced' crash pilots

AFP, Seoul

South Korea's Asiana Airlines on Tuesday defended the pilots of the San Francisco crash jet as "very competent" as attention focussed on whether human error caused the Boeing 777 to slam into the runway.

The pilot at the controls was a novice at flying the 777, and his supervising colleague had only just qualified as a trainer, according to Asiana. US investigators say the plane was flying far too slowly when it clipped a seawall short of the runway on Saturday.

Asiana chief executive Yoon Young-Doo said he would travel to California to

meet transport safety officials and victims, after US investigators said they had begun questioning the cockpit crew.

Two teenage Chinese girls were killed and more than 180 people injured when the flight from Shanghai via Seoul went skidding out of control on its belly, shredding the tail end of the plane and starting a fire.

Yoon said the trainer who was acting as co-pilot at the time of the crash, Lee Jung-Min, had led 33 flights on 777s to San Francisco and had more than 3,000 flight hours under his belt -- far more than the 500 required to become a trainer.

The pilot who was at the

controls, Lee Kang-Kuk, who was still undergoing training on the 777, had also led 29 flights to San Francisco on 747s in the past, he said.

"They are very experienced and competent when the flight from Seoul, while adding that South Korea's number two airline would improve its landing simulation training.

"I feel tremendous responsibility for those affected by the crash," Yoon added.

Family and friends in eastern China's Zhejiang province are mourning the two dead passengers -- identified by state media as high-school classmates Ye Mengyuan, 16, and Wang Linjia, 17.

Mahmudur acquitted

FROM PAGE 16

defamation case filed by Prime Minister's Energy Adviser Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Alamgir Hossain Raj passed the acquittal order as Tawfiq did not appear before the court for the seventh consecutive date of proceedings.

The adviser had filed the case against Mahmudur, publisher of the Bangla daily Mohammad Hasmat Ali and its reporter M Abdullah on January 19, 2010 for tarnishing his image as well as that of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's son Sajeeb Wazed Joy by running a "false" report.

The three accused were present in court yesterday.

In his complaint, the adviser said the accused had run a "false" report involving him and Joy in the

December 17, 2009 issue of the newspaper.

According to the report, Tawfiq and Joy took a bribe of \$5 million from the American energy giant Chevron, promising to award it a gas compressor station project.

The news tarnished his reputation in and outside the country, claimed Tawfiq.

Earlier, the three accused had secured bail in the case. But Mahmudur Rahman is now in jail custody in a sedition case filed for running an online conversation with Justice Md Nizamul Huq, former chairman of International Crimes Tribunal-1, and expatriate Bangladeshi legal expert Ahmed Ziauddin.

So far, over 45 cases have been filed against Mahmudur on different charges during the tenure of the incumbent government,

Mahmudur's counsel Masud Ahmed Talukder told The Daily Star.

Contacted, Tawfiq said he had attended two or three hearings in the case. "But due to my preoccupation, I couldn't attend the other hearings," he noted.

Regarding the acquittal of the three accused, he said, "It doesn't mean that the report was based on truth. It was written on the basis of an anonymous letter which was absolutely false," claimed the adviser.

After months of negotiations from late 2008, Petrobangla had awarded Chevron a \$52 million deal to install the compressor station in Muchai under its Production Sharing Contract (PSC) for Block 12. Since the commissioning of the station recently, Chevron is being paid for its investment from sales of gas from the block.

Egypt election in six months

FROM PAGE 16

Egypt more divided than ever in its modern history, and added to pressure on the military-led authorities to explain how they will restore democracy after the army toppled Morsi last week.

Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood rejected the proposed plan for constitutional changes and elections to be held in about six months, holding fast to its demand for the reinstatement of Egypt's first freely elected leader.

Senior Brotherhood figure Essam El-Erian condemned "a constitutional decree issued after midnight by a person appointed by the putschists, usurping the legislative power from a council elected by the people, and bringing the country back to stage zero".

In an important signal for the transitional authorities, the ultra-orthodox Islamist Nour Party said it would accept ex-finance minister Samir Radwan as prime minister, potentially paving

the way for an interim cabinet.

The Brotherhood says Monday's violence was an unprovoked attack on worshippers holding peaceful prayers. But in a sign of the country's deep divisions, most Cairo residents seemed to accept the official account and blamed the Brotherhood for its members' deaths. That has left the deposed president's followers isolated and angrier than ever.

The bloodshed in the Arab world's most populous nation has raised alarm among key donors such as the United States and the European Union, as well as in Israel, with which Egypt has had a US-backed peace treaty since 1979.

Millions of people took to the streets on June 30 to demand Morsi's resignation, fearing he was orchestrating a creeping Islamist takeover of the state.

To the Brotherhood, his removal amounted to the reversal of democracy a year after he became Egypt's first

freely elected leader. Islamists fear a return to the suppression they endured for decades under autocratic rulers.

The streets of Cairo were quiet on Tuesday but the Brotherhood called for more protests later in the day, raising the risk of further violence.

Medical sources confirmed at least 55 people had been killed, raising the death toll in the incident, the deadliest in the two-and-a-half years of Egypt's political turmoil apart from a riot at a soccer stadium in 2012.

Thousands of pro-Morsi protesters are now camped out at a mosque in northeast Cairo, while elsewhere in the city residents are flying banners from their balconies with portraits of the military commander who toppled him.

Egyptian media, mainly controlled by the state and Morsi's opponents, praised the army and denounced Monday's violence as the provocation of terrorists.

Chinese firm proposes

FROM PAGE 16

yesterday disclosed the matter after a meeting with a Chinese delegation. He, however, did not say anything about the interest rate of the investment.

The delegation was comprised of officials of Exim Bank, China and Poly Technologies, a state-owned construction company in China.

The proposal came as a big surprise, as the government in January decided to build the 6.12-kilometre bridge with its own fund and on June 26 floated an international tender involving \$1.18 billion to build the main structure (road and rail line) of the bridge.

The very day, the government floated another tender involving around \$70 million inviting fresh bids for appointment of the construction supervision consultant for the main bridge.

The tender for river training is also underway.

reporters that the government would open a separate foreign currency account of \$1.2 billion to \$1.4 billion with the central bank for bearing the foreign exchange liability of the project.

However, briefing journalists on the latest funding proposal yesterday, the communications minister said the construction of the Padma bridge would require a huge amount of foreign exchange. The Chinese proposal, if accepted, could help meet that requirement.

He said the proposal had been sent to the Economic Relations Division for evaluation.

"The proposal was made earlier but this time it has been placed officially," said the minister.

At the meeting, the Chinese delegation showed interest in signing a memorandum of understanding under Government-to-Government (G2G) formation and in funding and building the bridge

based on Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) system, said officials of the communications ministry.

Padma bridge, the country's biggest infrastructure project, had remained stalled until recently since the World Bank raised allegation of corruption conspiracy in the project in September 2011 and cancelled its \$1.2 billion financing in June last year.

Following a request from the government, the global lender again got involved in the project. But the two sides failed to reach an agreement on the process of investigating the allegation. On January 31 this year, the government withdrew its loan request.

Ramadan begins

FROM PAGE 1

Chairman of the committee and State Minister for Religious Affairs M Shahjahan Mia chaired the meeting held at the Islamic Foundation

RANGAMATI

Kidnappers free one of five victims

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Kidnappers freed one of the five staff of a contractor of Teletalk Monday night, hours after they had abducted the five from Baribindughat in Baghaichhari upazila here.

The freed person is Monthu Chakma, aged about 24. The whereabouts of the rest of the abductees and the reason behind the abduction of the staff of Bi Technology still remained unknown, Abdur Razzaq, sub-inspector of Baghaichhari Police Station, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The four others -- assistant engineer Akhter Hossain, technicians Hemayet Uddin and Imrul, and worker Suja Miah -- had come here from Dhaka on Monday to inspect construction of a Teletalk tower. Five unidentified criminals abducted them from Baribindughat around 6:30pm when they were returning after inspecting the telecom tower there, added the SI.

Police and Border Guard Bangladesh members were conducting operations to rescue the four.

AL, BNP refuse

FROM PAGE 16

government system had been scrapped from the constitution.

Mosharraf said the BNP would not go to the polls without a non-partisan interim government because it was not possible to create a level playing field under a partisan government.

Former chief election commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda said it was not possible for the Election Commission to check all the 300 MPs if the next general election was held with the incumbent lawmakers in office.

"The political parties will have to negotiate a poll-time government," he added.

Dr Akbar Ali Khan, former adviser to a caretaker government, said political will was the key to overcoming the crisis.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, another former adviser to a caretaker government, stressed that political parties work out a long-term pact to flourish democracy.

Jatiya Party presidium member Anisul Islam Mahmud spoke of forming a poll-time interim government comprising some MPs through negotiations.

Ain O Salish Kendra Chairperson Hameeda Hossain criticised lawmakers for not discussing issues of public interest in parliament.

Women leader Shirin Akhter urged opposition leader Khaleda Zia to give up "militancy and communalism" and work for women's progress.

Former president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry Asif Ibrahim suggested forming a cabinet for an interim government with representatives of both the ruling and opposition parties.

Prothom Alo Associate Editor Abdur Quayum moderated the roundtable, while Prothom Alo Editor Matuor Rahman, among others, spoke on the occasion.

Latvia set to join EU

AFP, Brussels

Economy and finance ministers from the 28 European Union countries gave the final green light to Latvia to join the eurozone on January 1, 2014.

"ECOFIN has taken final decision approving Latvia's euro membership from 2014," the EU's current Lithuanian presidency announced via its Twitter account.

"Yes we are joining the euro as of January 1 next year," said Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis, adding that it was "good news not only for Latvia but also for Europe and the eurozone."

Heading into the ECOFIN council's meeting earlier, Latvian Finance Minister Andris Vilks had described it as a "symbolic day".

9 killed in road crash

4 others killed as train hits 3-wheeler

STAR REPORT

At least nine people were yesterday killed and 40 others injured when two buses collided on the Dhaka-Khulna highway at Mukusdpur upazila, Gopalganj.

On the same day in Tangail, four people were killed and six others injured when a train hit a CNG-run three-wheeler at an unmanned level crossing in Mirzapur upazila.

In the Gopalganj incident, four of the dead are Smrity Begum, 35, and her daughter Joya, 7, of Narail; and Setara Begum, 65, and Laizu Akhter, 25, of Jessore.

The other deceased could not be identified immediately. All the injured, except three, were taken to Mukusdpur upazila health complex. Of them, 27 with critical injuries were referred to the Faridpur Medical College Hospital, said sources in the health complex.

The three received first aid from other clinics.

The sources said the death toll could rise.

The accident happened when a Gopalganj-bound bus of Tungipara Express and a Dhaka-bound bus of Falguni Paribahan collided and swerved off the highway near Salinabox bridge around 10:45am, locals

said. The buses had started from Dhaka and Gopalganj respectively.

Eight passengers died on the spot and a ninth died at Faridpur Medical College Hospital.

Officer-in-Charge Md Ferdous Hossain of Mukusdpur Police Station confirmed the incident, saying police were preparing to file a case in this connection.

Two more people were killed in another road accident that took place on Gopalganj-Takerhut road in Satpar, Gopalganj, around midday.

A local bus crushed school student Shoan Biswas, 12, and his father Bablu Biswas, 40, under the wheels when they were crossing the road.

In the Tangail incident, the Dhaka-bound train from Sirajganj hit the vehicle when it was crossing the point in Dokolhati area around 1:30pm.

The impact killed two passengers and the driver of the three-wheeler there and then and injured seven others, witnesses said.

Locals rushed the injured to Mirzapur Kumudini Hospital. The fourth person succumbed to his injuries on the way.

One of the deceased, identified as the driver, is Mohammad Tarif, 24, of

Baniara village in the upazila. The other dead could not be identified.

Relatives have taken the bodies from the spot. One of the three bodies had already been taken when police visited the site, said Golam Mostofa, officer-in-charge of Mirzapur Police Station.

RMG exports

FROM PAGE 1

by 11.18 percent to \$27.02 billion backed by a strong demand for Bangladesh garment products.

Despite various adversities, the garment sector demonstrated a strong growth due to price competitiveness, BGMEA President Atiqul Islam said.

Ramadan

FROM PAGE 16

occasions of Juma'tul Wida, Shab-e-Qadr and Eid-ul-Fitr.

Ministry sources said the step was taken mainly to make up for time lost during hartals. The frequent shutdowns seriously disrupted the academic activities, forced reduction of the number of classes in schools, and even forced the SSC and HSC examinations to be postponed.

The country witnessed 31 hartal days in total from January to July this year.

Govt not on right track

FROM PAGE 16

In November 2012, at least 47 percent people felt the country was heading in the wrong direction while in 2009 at least 71 percent people thought the country was actually going in the right direction, the survey by the party read.

According to the survey, more than half the people of the country would feel insecure casting their votes if the next general elections are held under the present government.

The results of this year's survey, conducted in April, were revealed yesterday at a programme at a hotel in the capital with party chief HM Ershad as the chief guest.

The survey was carried out through a survey of 2,200 people selected at random from 46 districts.

The research wing also conducted a survey among 400 random people under 10 police stations in the capital about the chiefs of the three major political parties.

According to the study, 90 percent of the surveyed people consider Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina as well educated and 56 percent think her to be an opportunist.

Only 22 percent people thought Khaleda was well educated and 48 percent thought she was an opportunist.

For Ershad, 64 percent people thought him to be

well educated while 46 percent believed he was an opportunist.

It also said Sheikh Hasina was far ahead, compared to Khaleda and Ershad, in terms of getting youth support as she had taken up many programmes for them.

About keeping promises, 45 percent people consider that Hasina does not keep her promises while the figure is 36 percent for Khaleda Zia. At least 25 percent people believe Ershad does not keep his promises, the study claims.

On casting votes for Hasina, Khaleda and Ershad, the survey finds 26 percent people vote for Hasina considering that she is educated while almost the same number of people vote for her considering her to be honest. Only 17 percent voters vote for Hasina considering that she is religious.

The survey claims that 42 percent people vote for Khaleda considering her to be religious while only 16 percent people vote for her thinking her to be honest. It also said voters did not consider her "courageous" anymore.

On Ershad, the survey says that 28 percent people vote for him considering him to be well educated. At least 21 percent of the surveyed people vote for him thinking him to be religious and almost the same number of people vote for him

believing him to be an honest man.

The Jatiya Party's research wing is the first such wing of a political party but yesterday it became rather controversial.

The wing published a magazine on the occasion in which it showed that "The New York Times" published a news item on April 11, 2008, titled "People of Bangladesh want HM Ershad".

Some Jatiya Party leaders were angered by this and they at the programme said the US based daily had not published any such news on Ershad.

"This was nothing but fraudulence of the research wing," a Jatiya Party presidium member told The Daily Star over the telephone.

Asked, Bobby Hajjaj, special adviser to Ershad and chief of the research wing, said the wing had not done this intentionally. "The whole thing was basically a design done by the 'designer'."

Speaking at the programme yesterday, Ershad said his last moment decision to back mayor aspirant Ajmat Ullah Khan in the July 6 Gazipur City Corporation polls would help the party assume power someday. "And I will prove that my decision was not wrong although many leaders in my party were very annoyed by this," he said.

New robots act on Bangla

FROM PAGE 16

capable of understanding gestures of an instructor, claimed Sadli Salauddin and Soumin Islam, who made the robot.

Sadli and Soumin, of department of electrical & electronic engineering, claimed that the robot was the first device capable of understanding the Bangla language.

Soumin told The Daily Star that even speech impaired people could instruct the robot with signs and gestures. He said with an internet connection the robot could be controlled remotely.

Sadli told The Daily Star that the robot was also capable of sending live streams of video it captures with its camera via the internet and

it could be positioned precisely using GPS (Global Positioning System).

The robot was exhibited on Ruet campus yesterday.

Addressing a programme on the occasion, Vice-Chancellor Prof Mortuza Ali said it was a matter of great pride that students of the university were the first to make a Bangla recognising robot.



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