

Chased by cops, AL man drowns in Kaptai Lake

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

A member of Prajanma League, a pro-Awami League organisation, drowned after he jumped into Kaptai Lake to escape arrest by Kotwali police in the district town early Wednesday, police say.

The dead, Ziaul Haque Komol, 36, son of late Nazmul Haque of village Shantinagar Asambasti, hailed from Munshiganj district.

He was accused in a case under wildlife preservation act with Gojaria Police Station in Munshiganj, said Md Salamat, assistant sub-inspector of Kotwali Police Station, last night.

Around 11:30pm on Wednesday, a team of police conducted a raid to nab Komol in Tabalchhari Bazar area. With police in hot pursuit, Komol jumped into the lake.

An unnatural death case was filed in this connection.

Protesting the death, the AL and its associated organisations yesterday brought out a procession in the town and held a rally near its district party office.

Holding police responsible for the killing, they issued a 24-hour ultimatum for the transfer of Rangamati superintendent of police and the officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station. Otherwise, they would lay siege to the police station and announce an indefinite strike.



Kids of pre-primary section of Tilakpur Primary School of Ishwardi upazila in Pabna are in class on a corridor due to lack of classrooms. The photo was taken on Wednesday.

PHOTO: STAR

UPAZILA POLLS Third phase on March 15

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday announced that the third phase of elections to 83 upazila parishads would be held on March 15.

The last date for filing the nomination papers is February 15. Those would be scrutinised on February 17. The deadline for withdrawal of the candidacy is February 24, according to the schedule.

Election Commissioner Shah Nawaz announced the schedule at the media centre of the EC Secretariat in the afternoon.

As part of the plan to hold elections to all 487 upazila parishads across the country in six phases, the EC will hold elections to 97 upazila parishads on February 19 and one on February 24 in the first phase.

In the second phase, 117 upazila parishads will go to the polls on February 27.

Besides, the commission mulls over holding elections to the remaining upazila parishads on March 25 in the fourth phase, March 31 in the fifth phase, and on May 3 in the sixth phase, the EC officials said.

PM SUBMITS ELECTION EXPENSES

The Prime Minister and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina spent around Tk 10 lakh for electioneering in two constituencies, Gopalganj-3 and Rangpur-6, in the January 5 polls.

A sum of Tk 4,98,700 was spent in

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Bangla wrapped in Urdu

FROM PAGE 20

Intellectuals went around suggesting that Urdu be the lingua franca of Pakistan, there were on the other side of the fence leading Bangalee scholars who believed that Bangla should be the language of the state.

The Bangalees of eastern Bengal would, after all, constitute the largest component of the overall population of Pakistan. Dr Muhammad Shahidullah argued in an article in the daily Azad, published from Calcutta, that adopting Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan would undermine the Bangalees.

The argument in favour of Bangla really took off when Abdul Haq made it clear in articles in June and July 1947 that Bangla ought to be Pakistan's state language. In June 1947, the Abul Mansur Ahmed-edited weekly Millat in an editorial adopted a similar position. Likewise, quite a few other periodicals and daily newspapers articulated the idea, on the basis of the probable composition of the Pakistani state, that Bangla take pride of place as the language of the state. And that was not all. In the election manifesto of the Muslim League in 1946, Abul Hashim placed the case for Bangla in unequivocal terms. Similar was the position of the Gono Azadi League in July 1947.

The establishment of Pakistan on August 14, 1947 saw the swift rise of arguments in favour of Urdu and Bangla, depending on the ethnicity of those engaged in the debate, as the lingua franca of the state. And what was particularly noticeable was the clear propensity of non-Bangalee scholars as well as politicians to propagate the demand for Urdu as the language of the state. It did not matter that Urdu was not the mother tongue of the peoples comprising the five provinces of Pakistan --- East Bengal, Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier Province. Indeed, it was argued by Urdu enthusiasts that because of the diversity in language and ethnicity in the country, it was essential that Urdu come in as a unifying factor for the country.

It soon became clear, though, that an effort was underway to have the Arabic script find its way into Bangla. The idea was that with Pakistan coming into being as a state for the Muslims of the subcontinent, it was only proper that all cultural and political links with the mother country India be severed and Pakistani's get started on a new footing. The results were as horrendous as they were hilarious. It was soon noticed that Bangla announcements or news items on Radio Pakistan began to come in

mangled form. Words and terms with which Bangalees were not familiar began to creep in. An instance will suffice:

Aaj subh-e sadiq-e Dhaka'r hawai adda-e Pakistan-er ujir-e-khajana tashreef enechhen (this morning Pakistan's finance minister arrived at Dhaka airport). Notice the way it should have been in Bangla proper: aaj shokale Pakistan-er ortho montri Dhaka biman bondor-eeshe pouchehhen.

Many were the ways in which Bangla was beginning to be undermined. But while it is true that a concerted effort was on to get Bangla out of the way in favour of Urdu, there were the brave Bangalee voices who did not flinch from speaking for their people in places where they were certain to be heard. The Pakistan Constituent Assembly met for the first time after partition in Karachi on February 23, 1948. The deliberations of the House were, under the rules, to be conducted in Urdu and English.

On the day, Dhirendranath Dutta rose in the House to demand that Bangla be included as the third language of the House considering the fact that Bangalees constituted 44 million of Pakistan's population of 69 million. The suggestion was swiftly shot down by Pakistan's Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, who defended Urdu as a language

HRW for trade union in RMG

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suppliers respect labour rights, the New York-based rights body said in a report published yesterday.

The rights body interviewed 47 workers of 21 factories in and around Dhaka to make the report.

Some workers told HRW that not only had their managers mistreated those, who formed trade unions, they had also threatened to kill the employees, the report says. Some union organisers said they were beaten up while some others said they had lost their jobs or had been forced to resign.

From the interviews HRW also learnt that factory owners sometimes used local goons to threaten or attack garment employees outside the workplaces and even when they were at home.

Bangladesh amended the labour law in July 2013 amid widespread criticism following the collapse of the Rana Plaza building, which killed more than 1,100 people.

The labour ministry had refused to register all but a handful of unions, but the amendments provided for full freedom of association by workers.

More than 50 factory-level unions have been established, but since the law still requires union organisers to get support from at least 30 percent of a factory's workers before registering a union, employers' threats and intimidation make it a difficult task, especially at the industrial units employing thousands of people.

"The best way to avoid future Rana Plaza-type disasters and end the exploitation of Bangladeshi workers is to encourage the establishment of independent trade unions to monitor and protect workers' rights," said Brad Adams, Asia director of HRW.

The government has belatedly begun to register unions. It now should ensure that factory owners stop persecuting the union leaders and let them function, he added.

There are more than 5,000 garment units in Bangladesh. Both the US and the European Union suggested that Bangladesh's access to trade privileges in their markets was dependent on making urgent improvements in labour rights and workplace safety.

The government and Bangladesh

Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association should enforce the labour law and sanction companies that violate workers' rights, the rights organisation added.

After the Rana Plaza disaster, the US and the EU called on the Bangladesh government and the garment industry to improve labour rights situation.

In June 2013, the US suspended Bangladesh's trade benefits in its market under the Generalised System of Preferences.

The European trade commissioner, Karel De Gucht, next month warned that Bangladesh might lose its duty-free and quota-free access to the EU market if it did not improve its labour rights situation and workplace safety. The EU will conduct a review this summer.

In order to regain the GSP status, the US says, Bangladesh has to enhance its monitoring and inspection of factories and impose increased fines and sanctions, including loss of import and export licences, on the garment units that fail to comply with labour, fire or building standards.

Biman hopes to serve better

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A Biman official told The Daily Star yesterday wishing anonymity, "The wide-body aircraft will bring much relief to us as we have been struggling to maintain schedule after an Airbus had been grounded since January 25 due to a structural crack."

The crack discovered in the now-out-of-production Airbus A310-300 led Biman to cancel some of its scheduled flights and seek help from local airlines to fly in its stranded passengers.

Biman only has seven aircraft, including the grounded Airbus and the lone DC-10-30, the last passenger carrying aircraft of its kind which would retire on February 20.

At Shahjalal International Airport on February 11, Prime Minister Sheikh

Hasina will attend a programme arranged for celebrating the 777 joining the Biman fleet and the last passenger carrying McDonnell Douglas DC-10-30 retiring from commercial service and possibly heading for a museum in the US.

Biman received the 777 hardly two weeks after the government approved \$356 million hard-term loans to help the loss-making airlines buy the two new 777s.

Of the total loan, \$290 million will be guaranteed by US-based Ex-Im Bank while the remaining \$66 million would be from Standard Chartered Bank, officials of the finance ministry and Biman said.

The interest on the Ex-Im Bank's loan would be three months' London

Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR), an average interest rate estimated by leading banks in London, plus 0.35 percent. The loan would have to be repaid in 12 years, officials said.

The loan from Standard Chartered Bank would carry interest at three months' LIBOR plus 5.5 percent and would have to be repaid in five years, officials said, adding that other service charges would have to be paid by Biman.

"Earlier, we had received similar long-term loans to purchase the two Boeing 777s now in service," a Biman director told The Daily Star yesterday.

Biman had sought around Tk 1,600 crore from the government. However, the finance ministry agreed to provide Tk 500 crore initially.

Low awareness limits

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from most government and non-government authorities within a specific period of time without any state interference.

About 78 percent of respondents admit to facing some trouble while collecting information, the study showed.

The biggest difficulty (53 percent) was in locating the designated officers, followed by the need for frequent visits (47 percent) and a lack of cooperation from the officers (35 percent), it showed.

The survey was conducted on stakeholders and was based on the opinions of 25 designated officers, 5 civil society representatives, 8 NGO officials and 7 journalists.

It also interviewed four high placed officials of the Information Commission in July 2013.

This perception study is part of a project on 'Strengthening Information Dissemination Capacities of the Key Oversight Institutions in Bangladesh'

supported by German based Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom.

According to the survey, around 90 percent of information was provided free of cost. In a few cases, the cost was less than Tk 100.

The total number of applications collected from across Bangladesh from January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2012 using the RTI Act prescribed form is 7808, said the study.

Among them, 7671 applications were submitted to the authorities and 137 to NGOs.

Of all applications, 97.54 percent received the information needed, 1.33 percent of applications are pending and 1.12 percent was discarded, it said.

Inadequate training, lack of manpower and no additional incentives were cited as key problems by the officers in providing information.

Most stakeholders also felt that the punishment for not complying with the act was insufficient, showed the survey.

Some suggestions put forward by respondents to ensure implementation

of the act include decentralising Information Commission up to division levels, modifying archaic laws like Official Secrecy Act 1923, and making the parliamentary standing committees truly functional.

At the event, M Bodiuazzaman, chairman of Anti-Corruption Commission, said the country's people are facing a crisis of trust.

He stressed the need for cooperation among each government agency to bring more transparency and accountability.

Masud Ahmed, comptroller and auditor general, Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh, said mental barriers, skills deficiency, and a lack of manpower are key reasons behind the officers not being able to give information.

Mohammed Farooq, chief information commissioner of Information Commission, stressed the need for coordination among the oversight agencies by holding meetings regularly.

"In this a digital age, coordination is a must. Through it, we can identify the gaps

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