



A military police officer looks at a mortar at the Ghatail Cantonment firing range in Tangail. The explosion of a shell inside a similar mortar killed six men of the army and the BGB yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

6 killed, 10 hurt

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The bodies of the deceased were at the morgue of Salimullah Medical College and would be handed over to the families sometime today, sources at the BGB said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed her grief at the deaths of five members of the armed forces. Wishing eternal peace for the departed souls, she conveyed her condolences to the bereaved families and asked authorities concerned to make sure the injured get the best treatment.



Mohammad Ali



Abu Sufian



Ekramul Haque

Yusuf's war trial closed

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order does not amount to posthumous acquittal of AKM Yusuf for crimes against humanity and genocide for which he was indicted."

The three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Shahinur Islam also regretted the "sudden death" of Yusuf as it "deprived" him as well as the victims of justice.

The 88-year-old Jamaat nayeb-e-ameer died at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University on Sunday.

Yusuf, who was buried at his village home at Rajoir in Sharankhola of Bagerhat on Tuesday, had been facing 13 war crimes charges. The closing argument of his case was scheduled to start yesterday.

When the court sat at 11:15am yesterday, the prosecution prayed to the tribunal to proceed with Yusuf's case, despite his death.

"The matter cannot be ended with his death," Prosecutor Syed Haider Ali said.

He appealed to the court to deliver a judgement or at least dispose of the case with some observations, terming it "a demand of the nation".

As the tribunal asked Haider to give instances of the continuation of trial from home and abroad even after the death of a lone accused, he cited the case of Slobodan Milosevic, former president of Yugoslavia, who died during

his ongoing trial at ICTY.

Although ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia) put an end to Milosevic's trial after his death in 2006, International Court of Justice (ICJ) announced the order [formal end to his trial] "ineffective", Haider said.

Besides, this case is not a usual one as the gravity of his [Yusuf] offences is very strong, he added.

Haider, however, said as per the domestic law, an accused gets discharged after his or her death.

Saifur Rahman, who was a counsel of Yusuf, said there was no way to proceed with the case after Yusuf's death. "He [Yusuf] will be considered innocent after death."

The tribunal, in its order, said ICTY and ICJ are two different judicial forums and only the appeal chamber of ICTY can intervene over the order of ICTY trial chamber.

"In the absence of instances either domestic or international, we are not convinced with what has been submitted by the learned prosecutor," said Justice Hassan.

After a long delay, he said, the trial against Yusuf "significantly offered" the victims of 1971 a "fundamental occasion" to see and participate in "valid justice".

"We regret that the accused's sudden death has surely deprived not only him

but the victims and sufferers, who with the aspiration of getting justice narrated the enormous pains and horror they sustained resulting from serious systematic crimes, in the dock," said Justice Hassan.

"But with the death of the accused, the rest of the proceedings have become redundant," he said.

"However, the testimony of victims and sufferers, who came before the tribunal, shall ever be considered as a response to the legitimate needs of justice," Justice Hassan said.

The court asked the authorities concerned to preserve the case documents according to the procedure. It also asked the jail authority to submit Yusuf's post mortem report immediately.

According to prosecution documents, Yusuf established the Razakar force, an auxiliary force of the Pakistani army, on May 5, 1971, at an Ansar camp on Khan Jahan Ali Road in Khulna with 96 Jamaat activists. He also named the force.

Yusuf landed in jail on May 12 last year, hours after Tribunal-1 took the charges against him into cognisance. Later, his case was transferred to Tribunal-2.

A total of 27 prosecution witnesses including the investigation officer testified against Yusuf while his son Mahbubur Rahman testified as the lone defence witness.

2 more killed in 'gunfights'

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against the death sentence to Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee in February last year.

When the police reached 2 no bridge on Keranihat-Bandarban road around 11:00am, some 20 Jamaat-Shibir activists opened fire on the law enforcers, Najmul Haque said, adding that police had fired gunshots in response.

All but bullet-hit Jasim and Rafique fled the scene around 20 minutes after the gunfight, he said.

Police said they had recovered two firearms, eight bullets and sharp weapons from the spot.

The injured duo was taken to Satkania Upazila Health Complex around 12:00 noon. But Medical Officer of the hospital Rakib Hasan referred them to Chittagong Medical College Hospital where they reached

around 3:30pm.

The duty doctors in the CMCH declared Jasim dead, while Rafique was undergoing treatment there.

Karim Uddin, Rafique's younger brother, said some plainclothes policemen had picked up Jasim and Rafique, and shot them afterwards.

He admitted that the duo had taken part in demonstrations after Sayedee's conviction last year.

Meanwhile, on information that some carjackers were passing through Satkhira district after hijacking a car of Sanjana Zerin, wife of an army officer stationed at Dhaka Cantonment, police signalled the car to stop at Chaltetola in the town around 12:30am yesterday.

Sensing danger, the carjackers fired five to six shots and hurled three crude bombs at the law enforcers, Inamul

Haque, officer-in-charge of Satkhira Sadar Police Station, said, adding that police had fired in retaliation.

After 15 minutes of the gunfight, police arrested bullet-hit Ekramullah Babu, 40, a resident of Sultanpur in the town and Shahidul Islam of Modhumollardangi area.

Babu died at Satkhira Sadar Hospital around 4:30am, hospital sources said.

Shahidul, now undergoing treatment at the hospital, claimed that Mahbubur Rahman, an acquaintance of Babu, was driving the car, which he claimed to be belonging to one of his relatives now visiting India, to Satkhira town when police asked them to stop.

A police constable also received minor injuries, police claimed.

The car was hijacked at Rajanigandha Shopping Tower in the capital around 3:30pm Tuesday, police said.

Come to me

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leader of the opposition in parliament. The couple began going their separate ways ahead of the election, with Ershad suddenly quitting while a section of JP leaders joining the race under Raushan's leadership.

At yesterday's meeting, only four out of the 34 JP lawmakers were present. Ershad claimed he had invited all the leaders.

Raushan, a senior presidium member of the party, herself was not present, but Secretary General Ruhul Amin Hawlader was.

"A conspiracy is being hatched to split the party. We have to resist it. It is not a party of 30 lawmakers; it is a party of millions of people. Despite

being invited, they [central leaders] did not participate in the programme. It cannot be accepted that you stand in the polls with plough symbol, but don't attend the party programme now. I'm warning you for the last time to come back immediately," said Ershad.

Party insiders told The Daily Star that Ershad called the meeting without inviting Raushan "properly" to re-establish his command over the party that slipped to Raushan after the January 5 polls. This is why most MPs avoided the programme.

While Ershad was allegedly kept confined to the Combined Military Hospital following his decision to quit the polls race, the Raushan-led JP won 34 seats, including that of Ershad. After

a month-long drama, Ershad took oath as MP. Subsequently, he was made special envoy to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

"I am taking responsibility for the 200 candidates who withdrew their nominations after my announcement," Ershad said.

He asked his party activists to campaign for the JP men who are taking part in the upazila election. He added that he would start a country-wide tour on February 20 "to unite" the party.

On changing the judge dealing with the Manzoor murder case against him a day before the verdict was to be delivered, Ershad said, "I have a lot to say, but can't say it now. I can't even explain why we didn't go to the polls.

Protect Hindus from violence

EC asks district admin, cops to beef up security during upazila polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday gave DCs and SPs of all districts a special direction to beef up security measures for minority communities during upazila parishad polls.

The EC came up with the directive during a meeting with the deputy commissioners (DCs) and superintendents of police (SPs) at the National Economic Council auditorium in the capital.

"We have directed them to ensure security to all during the elections. We have also specially directed them to strengthen security for minority communities," Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad told reporters after the meeting.

Asked whether the field level officials fear election violence, he said, "They [DCs and SPs] are not apprehending any violence during the polls. We will monitor the situation closely."

Expressing satisfaction on the overall election atmosphere, he said the polls will be held in a festive mood and it will be well-contested.

Besides, the EC has directed the DCs and SPs to maintain close links with the intelligence agencies to get advance information about the law and order situation and take necessary

measures accordingly.

Police will launch special drives to arrest the wanted criminals, said the meetings sources.

Necessary measures will be taken so that no one or nothing can enter the country through illegal border crossing, and election material will be transported under police escort.

The armed forces personnel will remain deployed for election duties for five days from two days before the voting date. Besides, the Coast Guard, BGB and Armed Police Battalion will act as strike forces, the sources added.

BOUNDARY DEMARCATION

The EC has recently sent a letter to the Local Government Division and requested it to immediately complete the boundary demarcations of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) areas and some upazilas adjacent to Rangpur, Comilla, Narayanganj and Gazipur city corporations, said EC sources.

The elections to DCC have remained pending for the last few years due to the complexity over boundary demarcation.

Although the EC did not officially say anything about the letter, some EC officials, preferring anonymity, said the commission was probably thinking about holding the DCC elections.

The last election to undivided DCC

was held in 2002 and its tenure ended in 2007. Later, the EC moved to hold the election for several times, but could not due to different kinds of complexities, including the boundary demarcation.

Besides, the upazila parishad elections to some upazilas adjacent to Rangpur, Comilla, Narayanganj and Gazipur city corporations could not be held due to the complexity over boundary demarcation.

FOURTH PHASE

The EC is likely to announce today the schedule for elections to around 90 upazila parishads in the fourth phase.

Although the EC earlier planned to hold the fourth phase of the polling on March 25, the date of voting might be fixed one to two days ahead of the planned date, said EC sources.

Out of 487 upazila parishads, elections to 98 upazilas will be held on February 19 in the first phase, 117 on February 27 in the second phase and 83 on March 15 in the third phase.

The EC plans to complete elections to all the upazila parishads by March 31, said EC sources.

Besides, the EC may announce the schedule for by-election to the Tangail-8 parliamentary constituency as the seat fell vacant after the death of lawmaker Shawkat Momen Shajahan last month.

Potato woes

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11:00am yesterday and marched towards Bottoli area of Joypurhat-Bogra highway.

They blocked the highway and urged the government to ensure fair price of their produce.

They said that if the cold storage authority had stored the potatoes, the losses would have been avoided.

A large number of vehicles, including bus and truck, got stranded on the both sides of the highway till 1:00pm when the farmer withdrew the blockade.

Shah Zaman Talukdar, a potato grower from Halotri village of the district, claimed that he had spent Tk 14,000 to grow potatoes in one-bigha land.

"If I could sell per kilogram potato for Tk 6, then it would have been marginal. But I had to sell it for Tk 1 a kg," he added.

At least 39,500 hectares of land had been brought under potato farming in Joypurhat this year, said Azahar Ali Mondal, deputy director of Joypurhat Department of Agriculture Extension.

HC order defied

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Sehangel Biplob, a devotee and khedm [attendant] of the Pir, said they had to occupy the park 10 days prior to the Urs to complete the preparatory work like erecting temporary structure, decoration and electric wiring.

On the opulent illumination and decoration, Biplob said, "This is aimed at expressing joy and merriment of the devotees, as you find it in any celebration like wedding and archways are an integral part of any celebration."

The devotees bore the expenses, he said, adding that many high-profile people, like former military dictator HM Ershad were devotees of the Pir. Local lawmaker and State Minister for Home Affairs Asduzaman Kamal Khan, among other big shots, are expected to attend the Urs.

Thousands of devotees would stay overnight in the marquees and the Pir, styled as Khaza Baba Kutub Bagi, is scheduled to address the congregation in the early hours today.

ACC summons

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against some ministers, including the duo, and lawmakers of the ninth parliament.

According to Mahbubur's wealth statement submitted to the Election Commission in 2008, he had only 20 acres of agricultural land.

In the run-up to the 10th parliamentary election, Mahbubur, who got elected unopposed from Patuakhali-4, stated that he had 2,865 acres of arable land, an astounding increase of 143 times in only five years.

On the other hand, Ruhul Haque in his wealth statement in 2008 mentioned that he had properties worth Tk 4.99 crore. But his latest wealth report showed that he had properties worth around Tk 9 crore.

Interestingly, his wife in 2008 had around Tk 97 lakh which increased to around Tk 7.50 crore in the last five years.

ACC sources said they already collected income tax documents of the persons summoned and issued notices to the authorities concerned for documents of land of Ruhul and Mahbubur.

Interactive books

FROM PAGE 16

aimed at helping children between the age of two and seven to learn the three languages without the help of parents and teachers and even listen to songs.

The device has a switch and two outlets -- one for headphone and another for charger.

Iqbal Hossain Sujon, publisher of the book, said one of his friends imported electronic gadgets from China and that he had suggested the idea after coming across some interactive books.

Passing from the statistic department of Dhaka University, Sujon used to work for a share market investing company. But when his friend came up with the business idea, Sujon began to think how he could apply this innovative technology.

Himself the father of a four-year-old child, he thought of bringing out books that would assist children in learning at the primary stage.

Sujon borrowed money from his family members and friends to start the business. Then he developed the content and the software and then imported the devices from China in May last year.

He published 5,000 sets of books in the first lot. Every set that has four books and a device with a charger costs Tk 4,000 but at the book fair it is available for Tk 3,500.

"I wish I could produce more to make the books more affordable."

Sujon continued that the books could be used as education material by the Department of Mass Education.

"Our teachers have problems with pronunciation. This book can help them teach the right pronunciation. Besides, if the government provides me with the learning materials, I can produce more books of this kind."

The idea can also be applied to the literacy programmes for adults and for the people with disability, Sujon added.

As many as 3,000 sets of books have been sold out.

"The books are not selling much in the fair as people do not come here with so much money," Sujon said.

However, visitors showed interest in the books and described them as a new addition to the entry-level education system. Some of them praised the technology as a step forward towards the digitisation of the education system taken up by the government.

"It is simply excellent. I want to have a set for my baby," said Sabuj, an engineer, while visiting the stall yesterday.

He, however, expressed his reservations about the price. "It could be affordable for more people if the price was kept within Tk 2,000."

Jahangir Selim, a school teacher from Mohammadpur in the capital, highly appreciated the initiative saying, "It is a unique opportunity for the children particularly those who live in remote areas of the country to learn the accurate pronunciation."

Besides the fair, the book sets are available at Holy Print shop in Purana Paltan's Gloria Centre in Dhaka.

Concern mounts as govt

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launch probe into the extrajudicial killings, the government criticised those who brought such allegations and asked them to file cases.

On Tuesday, at an interview with BBC Bangla Service in London, Law Minister Anisul Haque said the government would launch probes if only specific allegations of extrajudicial killings were made.

"If there are incidents of extrajudicial killings and we get complaints and then if we find evidence, we will identify those involved in the extrajudicial killings and bring them to book," he said.

Asked why the government is not filing cases and launching probes on its own in connection with extrajudicial killings, the law minister said that was possible if a victim's family or anyone filed a case.

Interestingly, the government had previously filed suo moto cases in connection with incidents of street violence and vandalism. Police even arrested scores of people on suspicion.

Contradicting the law minister, criminal law expert Khurshid Alam Khan said the government has more responsibilities in cases of extrajudicial killing.

"The government must file a case as soon as possible so that the trial of an extrajudicial killing can be held," he said, adding that it would help the government ensure transparency and remain vigilant.

Kazi Rezaul Hoque, full-time member of National Human Rights Commission, also said the government could launch investigations

into such killings on its own since allegations had been brought.

Meanwhile, the home ministry claimed that it did not launch any probe into the incidents, as none of the victim's family or anyone had filed any formal allegation.

Senior Home Secretary CQK Mustaq Ahmed told The Daily Star that they had not found any allegation of extrajudicial killing or forced disappearance.

"We will consider such allegations," he said.

Additional Home Secretary Kamal Uddin Ahmed also said they had received no reports of extrajudicial killing.

"The government has adopted zero tolerance for extrajudicial killing. Tough action will be taken if any lawman is found involved in such act," he added.

Before the 2008 parliamentary elections, the Awami League in its manifesto had pledged to bring an end to extrajudicial killing if voted to power. But in the 2014 election manifesto it dropped the point.

According to ASK statistics, extrajudicial killings had declined since 2009, but those shot up sharply last year.

In 2009, the number of extrajudicial killings stood at 229 while in 2010 at 133, in 2011 at 100, in 2012 at 91 and in 2013 it was 208, say the ASK report.

Since extrajudicial killings began in 2001, the country witnessed the highest number of such incidents in 2005 and 2006 when the numbers of such killings were 377 and 362 respectively.