



Troops patrol Bakerganj upazila in Barisal yesterday morning. The army has been deployed to help law enforcers maintain law and order before and during the February 19 upazila polls.

Half of aspirants

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Around 62 candidates have taken loans and only 103 pay income taxes, according to the report.

Addressing the function at DRU, Dilip Kumar Sarkar, central coordinator of Shujan, said the returning officers and the Election Commission must take necessary steps to widely

publicise the information of affidavits so that voters could choose their representatives.

He also criticised the political parties for interfering in the upazila parishad elections, though it should be non-partisan.

Shujan executive member Justice Kazi Ebadul Hoque said, "We want the

local government bodies to be run under efficient, skilled and honest leadership. The disclosure of candidates' information will help voters to choose the right person."

Shujan Assistant Secretary Zakir Hossain, among others, was present at the function.

PASSPORTS MISSING

Probe team goes to KL

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The government finally sent a three-member high-powered team to Malaysia to probe the missing of 550 passport booklets from Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur.

Led by Paban Chowdhury, additional secretary at the Prime Minister's Office, the team left Dhaka for Kuala Lumpur last night. The other members of the team are Allama Siddiki, director general (administration) at the foreign ministry, and a joint secretary of the home ministry.

Bangladesh mission in Kuala Lumpur last month discovered that the passport booklets were missing, said foreign ministry officials.

They suspected that a section of high commission officials and a few others might have been involved in the incident. The officials presumed the booklets might already have been sold.

The passport booklets were in the possession of Suchona Rani Halder, second secretary (political) at the high commission. She left Kuala Lumpur for Dhaka on January 5 on a 10-day leave.

Former leader of Eden College unit Chhatra League, Suchona had joined the mission on October 23 last year. She came to Dhaka with her family and is still staying here, citing medical reasons.

According to foreign ministry sources, Suchona was supposed to return to her work by January 15.

Contacted, Suchona told The Daily Star that she got admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday due to her deteriorating health.

Sadr's political exit may be 'gift' to Iraqi rivals

AFP, Baghdad

Powerful Iraqi Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's announced exit from politics two months before elections may be a "gift" to rivals but could also be another temporary withdrawal, experts say.

Sadr's political career began with his fierce opposition to the presence of foreign troops in Iraq after the 2003 US-led invasion, and has spanned more than a decade.

His rise, aided by the reputations of two famed relatives -- including his father, Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr -- who were killed during Saddam Hussein's rule,

eventually translated into political clout.

At the time of his weekend announcement, Sadr's movement held six cabinet posts, the deputy speakership of parliament and 40 seats in the legislature.

"I announce my non-intervention in all political affairs and that there is no bloc that represents us from now on, nor any position inside or outside the government nor parliament," Sadr said in a statement.

His exit so close to parliamentary elections in April may "benefit other (Shiite) parties," said Aziz Jabr, a political science professor at Baghdad's Mustansiriyah University.

AL leaders slam

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national polls, he expressed concern about the election which is an internal affair of Bangladesh.

One of the leaders informed the meeting that the US envoy would leave Bangladesh soon.

The meeting held at the Jatiya Sangsad building with Prime Minister and AL President Sheikh Hasina in the chair, also discussed a plan to make the people aware of "questionable role" of Dr Yunus.

The meeting was convened to finalise the party candidate for Tangail-8 by-polls on March 23.

Awami League leaders Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Kazi Zafarullah, Obaidul Quader, Syed Ashraful Islam, Alauddin Ahmed and Abdul Mannan Khan were present at

the meeting starting, which began around 6:00pm.

Hasina directed top party leaders to take every measure to reorganise the party at the grassroots level. She asked them to strongly monitor the candidate selection and take care of the dissidents.

The meeting decided to distribute party nomination forms among the aspirants from the party president's Dhankondi office today and tomorrow.

The next ALPB meeting would be held tomorrow at the prime minister's official residence Gono Bhaban where the party would interview the nomination seekers.

The Tangail-8 constituency was vacated following the death of Awami League lawmaker Shawkat Momen Shahjahan on January 20. He was elected unopposed in the January 5 polls.

Mominul Haque, but the innings turned into a wreckage when Mushfiqur inexplicably attempted a scoop with the finishing line in sight and deliveries remaining aplenty. The Tigers were at one stage cruising along at 114-2 but lost their last eight wickets for 53 runs on a wicket which was much better than during the first half of the match.

The second ODI will be held at the same venue on Thursday, and the odds of Bangladesh coming back into this series after their show yesterday are very low.

He said that they initially could not recover the looted money, but came to know how the money was spent after interrogating the arrestee, he said.

Meanwhile, Taleb yesterday gave a confessional statement before a Dhaka court, he added.

MIR QUASEM WAR TRIAL

Witness speaks of torture, killings

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Al-Badr men led by Jamaat-e-Islami leader Mir Quasem Ali picked up Tuntu Sen and Ranjit Das and took them to the Dalim Hotel torture camp in Chittagong during the Liberation War, 1971, a prosecution witness told International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday.

"I heard from the detainees at Dalim Hotel that Tuntu and Ranjit along with some others were killed on the directives of Mir Quasem Ali," said fourth prosecution witness Sunil Kanti Bardhan who too was detained at the camp.

Sunil, who was rescued along with others on the December 16 Victory Day in 1971, yesterday gave a vivid description of how the Al-Badr men shot detainees dead and dumped their bodies.

In his hour-long testimony, Sunil told the Tribunal-2, led by Justice Obaidul Hassan, they were on the run to escape the Pakistani army and its auxiliary forces during the war.

But one day, towards the end of November when Sunil was leaving

Chakta village for Perpara of Patia on a boat with his wife, six-month-old daughter and the domestic help, Al-Badr men captured him.

He was taken to an Al-Badr camp at Dost Panjabi's building at Chamrak Gudam area and tortured by Al-Badr men. Sunil's wife was later released and the domestic help took his daughter to Sunil's village home in Perpara.

Sunil's mother with the help of the principal of the Chittagong College had managed to convince Al-Badr commander Shah Alam to free Sunil.

Shah Alam had told Sunil that he was trying to have him freed. However, chances of Sunil getting out diminished when Shah Alam was killed during an operation at the port the following day.

The witness said there was a toilet on the Chakta canal above the water and detainees were shot and killed there and the bodies were dropped in the water.

"I was taken there twice but they [Al-Badr] later decided not to kill me in the hope of getting more information out of me," the witness said.

On December 13, 1971, the witness noticed that the lights of the camp were being removed. He learnt from Kamrul, who worked for Al-Badr camp, that he would be transferred to Dalim Hotel camp where "Mir Quasem Ali will not let him live".

At dawn of December 14, 1971, Sunil along with other detainees was taken on a truck to Dalim Hotel where Mir Quasem asked them to divulge information about freedom fighters.

"As we were not giving anything, Quasem threatened to kill us," Sunil said, adding that they were put inside in a room on ground floor of Dalim Hotel.

After his rescue, Sunil also heard from the wives of Tuntu and Ranjit that their husbands were picked up and blindfolded by Al-Badr men led by Quasem.

Following the deposition, defence counsel Mizanul Islam began cross-examining the witness. The proceeding of the case was adjourned until today.

Quasem is facing 14 charges of crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War.

Kidnappers, reason

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Later, Mridul talked to his wife Shelly Chowdhury and brother Shimul Chowdhury over Harun's cell phone.

Shimul then called the Kotwali police who informed the matter to Burichang Police Station, said the SI, also investigation officer of the case filed after Mridul's abduction.

On information from Burichang police, a team from the Devpur outpost near Kangshanagan Bazar rescued Mridul around 4:00am. He stayed at the outpost till starting for Chittagong around 11:30am with wife and brother and law enforcers.

Mridul was brought to Royal Hospital, a private clinic, in the port city around 5:00pm.

Dr Polash Biswas of the hospital told The Daily Star that Mridul had several marks of assault from knee to foot and on the waist and buttock. He said the victim was out of danger.

During his stay at the police outpost, Mridul said the abductors kept him blindfolded while his mouth and hands were also tied with cloths almost all the time. They tortured him on the day of kidnapping and kept him half-fed, he added.

Mridul also said the kidnappers shifted him to three places, but he could not identify the places as he was blindfolded, he added.

"I thought I wouldn't be kept alive. God saved me," said Mridul, choking back emotion.

The kidnappers changed vehicles three times before releasing him around 1:00am, he said.

Mridul's brother Shimul Chowdhury said he saw marks of injuries due to beating on the victim's legs.

Shelly Chowdhury, the victim's wife, told The Daily Star yesterday that they gave up all hopes about her husband's return.

Talking about the events of February 11, she said, "As soon as he [Mridul] left home for his shop, I heard and saw Jhunu, a friend of my husband, shouting: 'They are taking him away'.

"I thought muggers might have snatched something from Jhunu. But our maid came and told me about the kidnap."

Squadron Leader Nazmul Haque, a deputy director of Rab-7, however, denied their involvement in the incident saying that the elite force had not conducted any raid in the Hazari Lane area on the very day.

Meanwhile, Chittagong Metropolitan Police Commissioner Shafiqul Islam after visiting Royal Hospital told the reporters, "We are not sure who the abductors are."

He added, "We suspect he [Mridul] was taken to Dhaka."

Regarding alleged involvement of law enforcers in the abduction, the commissioner said, "We are not including names of law enforcement agencies in the suspect list as the victim has not claimed so."

Hailing from Hathazari, Mridul lives in Chittagong with his family in a rented house. He has a jewellery shop on the first floor of Chittagong new market and he has a wholesale shop on Hazari Lane.

On October 3 last year, he sent his trusted driver Babul Paul with 80 tolas of liquid gold to Tantibazar area in the capital, SI Qamruzzaman said.

As Babul reached Kamalapur Railway Station, Maj Rokibul, an official of Dhaka Rab-2, and one Fahad forced him into a car. They took away the gold and dropped him after a while.

Mridul said he phoned Rokibul to have the gold returned. But the major told him that it would be returned after some examination.

When he called again, Rokibul asked him not to phone further; otherwise he would be in danger.

The CMM's Court in December ordered Criminal Investigation Department to probe the allegation.

The case was still under investigation, ASP Bijay Krisna Kor of CID said yesterday.

Railway ticket

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Israfil dead on the floor at his office room, with his hands and legs tied up and mouth gagged with tape.

Following the murder, a case was filed with Kamalapur Railway Police Station and later transferred to the CID.

Quoting the arrestee, CID Special Superintendent of Police Abdul Kader Akhund told The Daily Star that Taleb and three other people had entered the room that night saying that they had some work to do inside the room.

The criminals' motive was to loot the cash using Taleb's acquaintance with Israfil, the CID officer added.

He said that they initially could not recover the looted money, but came to know how the money was spent after interrogating the arrestee, he said.

Meanwhile, Taleb yesterday gave a confessional statement before a Dhaka court, he added.

Tk 163cr lost

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"That's why, expenses of the railways are a bit higher than its income."

Replying to another query, Mujibul alleged that with the "direct provocation" of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Jamaat-Shibir men ran amok across the country to destroy rail communications.

The saboteurs resorted to subversion only to save their leaders convicted of committing crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War, he mentioned.

"Khaleda and the anti-liberation forces must be defeated at the hands of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina," the minister reiterated.

About his ministry's plan to prevent

violence in the railways, Mujibul said a proposal to recruit around 1,441 railway police, including two police super, is now under the government's consideration.

About the progress on the construction of 87.18 km Joydevpur-Mymensingh four-lane road, Communications Minister Obaidul Quader told the House that around 20 percent work of its 30.25km Joydevpur intersection to Nayanpur portion has so far been completed.

"Around 35 percent work of another 56.93km of the road, stretching from Nayanpur to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, has also been done."

The minister said hectic efforts are on to complete the project by 2015.

Govt cashing in on it

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well as the US rejected the January 5 election," the BNP leader told a press conference at the party's Nayapaltan office.

Fakhru said, "While the state minister for foreign affairs is unclear about the authenticity of the message, some ministers and ruling party leaders are linking it to BNP. The claim is not only illogical and false but also ridiculous."

If one accuses the BNP of having ties with al-Qaeda just for the similarity between its statement and the al-Qaeda's message, then international community and the country's civil society that spoke against the government's misrule too should face the same accusation, he added.

Jamaat, a key component of the BNP-led alliance, also binned the allegation that the Islamist party has any connections with al-Qaeda.

In a statement on Sunday, acting Jamaat secretary general Shafiqur Rahman said media reports that Jamaat has links with al-Qaeda are absolutely false.

The "so-called" al-Qaeda message could be part of a conspiracy against the Muslims of the country, said the Jamaat leader.

Hefajat also refuted the allegation of having any ties with al-Qaeda.