

Narayanganj restive

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sharply divided there due to the politics of domination by Shamim Osman on one side and his opponent Ivy on the other.

The split has become so manifest that yesterday's hartal in the town protesting pro-AL lawyer Chandan Sarker's abduction and killing, called by the town's lawyers, was not practically observed by the pro-ruling party lawyers.

"None of the past murder cases has been resolved," said Ivy, sharing her views with The Daily Star on why suddenly there is a surge of abductions and murders in the town.

"There has been no investigation; no arrest of the real culprits," she said, referring to the sensational 2012 killing of Toki and many others in recent years.

"We have been talking for long about who are sheltering the criminals in the town, but without any effect."

Like many others in Narayanganj, Ivy came down hard on the police administration, some of whose top officials have been replaced recently.

"The administration does not cooperate with me. For instance, all the footpaths of the town have been occupied by hawkers in the last six months and they cannot be evicted because the MP [Shamim Osman] has asked the police not to. The DC office also does not cooperate with me," she said.

"Criminal activities have spread in Narayanganj gradually over the last 25 years -- first by criminals like Zakir Khan under the protection of Nasim Osman and then by criminals like David. Both Zakir and David later joined the BNP. The

patrons of these criminals belonged to the same family. But later, these crooks changed parties. Criminals like 'Tower' Selim, Sweet or David were later killed in crossfire."

Ivy, who won the 2011 mayoral election by defeating Shamim Osman who was blessed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, observed that the town was reasonably peaceful in 2009 and till the murder of Toki in 2012. Since then many murders and abductions have taken place, but the police did not do their job professionally.

In many cases, the force was busy framing innocent people, including relatives of Ivy.

The city mayor also noted that over the years, Shamim Osman has tried to push out other strong AL leaders like Nazma Rahman and SMAkram.

Ivy herself is one of those popular leaders facing strong pressure from Shamim.

On the abduction and killing of Nazrul Islam, she said both Nazrul and his accused killer Nur Hossain were backed by Shamim Osman. Unlike Nur, Nazrul came from the AL grassroots.

"Those involved in criminal activities actually do not belong to any political party. They use the political parties for criminal purpose," she said.

"To change things in Narayanganj, the government must decide to punish the criminals, no matter which party they belong to. And this has to be done lawfully, not through any crossfire or not out of political vengeance. The drug and crime rings must be busted."



Police seize a car that belongs to the family of Nur Hossain, the prime suspect in the murder of Narayanganj city panel mayor Nazrul Islam and six others, from the compound of a glass factory in Shimrail of Narayanganj. The factory belongs to the in-laws of Awami League lawmaker Shamim Osman. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

No headway in probe

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involvement of activists of Hefajat, Jamaat, BNP and its front organisations in the anarchy.

Asked about the reason behind the poor progress of investigation, Tofayel Ahamed, inspector (Investigation) of Paltan police, said "A large number of unknown persons were made accused in the cases."

"It is very difficult to trace them all. Recording the statements of witnesses is also a lengthy process."

Although no headway was made in the cases, nine police officers were rewarded for handling the situation on May 5.

Some BNP leaders, including Moudud Ahmed and Sadeque Hossain Khoka, were also shown arrested in the cases. But most of them got bail.

Harun bin Izhar Chowdhury, son of Hefajat's nayebe-ameer Mufti Izharul Islam, was also arrested. But he was later released on bail.

Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), said they were still watching video footages to detect persons involved in the vandalism on that day.

"At the same time, we are looking for persons accused in the cases," he told The Daily Star.

He added, different types of cases were filed in connection with the incident and investigation into all these cases would be time-consuming.

The administration, however, has taken a divide-and-rule policy to tackle the Islamist party's future movement.

A minister, who maintains communication between the ruling alliance and Hefajat, said the Islamist party would not try to orchestrate any May 5 like violence in the future.

"The party, however, will occasionally arrange rallies and processions apparently to show off its strength," he told The Daily Star, preferring not to be named.

Khelafat Andolan, a component of Hefajat, has planned to bring out a protest procession in the capital today to observe the day.

Maulana Abul Kasem Kasemi, international affairs secretary of Khelafat Andolan, told The Daily Star that they had sought permission from DMP to hold the procession.

Finger pointed at Rab men

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same time after they came out of the court area in two cars. Six bodies were found floating in the Shitalakkhya river three days later and another the next day.

Police suspect a single group was behind the crime, while Nazrul's wife Selina Islam said ward-4 Councillor Nur Hossain was responsible for the kidnap and the killing.

"A vehicle marked with Rab-11 was there at the time," Shahidul told journalists at Narayanganj Rifles Club.

Also known as Shahid Chairman, he said after the abduction he went to the Fatullah Police Station to file a case against Rab men, including its commanding officer (CO), but the police refused to take the case.

He added that he also went to the Rab-11 headquarters in Adamji to report the abduction, but the CO kept him confined for six hours there and quizzed him.

Lt Col Tareque Sayeed Mohammad was the CO of Rab-11 then. He was withdrawn following the incident.

He, however, could not be contacted for his comment.

HARTAL FOR JUSTICE
Narayanganj people yesterday observed a daylong hartal, protesting

the abduction and the killing of the seven people.

Most shops and businesses were closed and there was almost no public transport on the streets, in signs of spontaneous public support for the strike.

City people and different socio-political organisations held protest rallies and gatherings at different points, demanding the immediate arrests of the culprits and demanding their punishment.

Angry locals also vandalised the office of Nur Hossain, the prime accused in Nazrul's abduction and killing case, around 11:00am at Badruddin Super Market at Shimrail.

"I support this hartal as I want all kinds of abduction and killing to stop. I also want that the perpetrators are arrested immediately," said Abdur Rahim, an official of a garment factory.

The hartal was called by Narayanganj district lawyers association, but the BNP, Communist Party of Bangladesh and Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal extended their support to it.

Police have yet to arrest Nur, also vice-president of Siddhirganj Awami League, and Haji Mohammad Yasin, general secretary of the same unit, another main accused in the case filed

by Nazrul's wife against six people.

COPS SEIZE ANOTHER CAR

In another development, law enforcers yesterday seized a car of Nur Hossain's brother Nuruzzaman, suspecting it was used in the abduction and the killing.

It was seized around 11:30am from a glass factory, JMS Glass Industries Ltd, owned by a relative of ruling AL lawmaker Shamim Osman at Siddhirganj in Narayanganj.

Talking about the raid, Narayanganj SP Khandaker Mahid Uddin said they seized the car on suspicion and they were trying to establish if the car was used in any criminal activity.

Abdul Awal, general manager of the factory, said Nuruzzaman often used the space for parking his vehicle for a short while.

"But this time, he left the car on Friday afternoon here but did not come back to take it," he said.

Shamim Osman's uncle-in-law Shamsuddin Ahmed is the managing director of the factory.

NO TRACE OF NUR

Earlier on Saturday, police raided Nur Hossain's house at Shimrail and seized a microbus and detained 11 people from there.

Police, however, did not disclose the

identities of the detainees.

Asked to explain the raid six days after the abduction, police said they did not have necessary information to carry out the drive.

State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan, however, said Nur and his relatives and followers were under the watch of law enforcers.

"That is why we conducted the drive in his house," he told reporters at the secretariat yesterday.

Asked if Nur was under the police surveillance where he might be now, the state minister said, "It is true that he went into hiding after a case was filed against him. We are trying to catch him."

Meanwhile, the abduction and murder case of Nazrul was handed over to the Detective Branch (DB) yesterday.

Mahbubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Narayanganj DB, said they started investigating the case.

Also yesterday, detectives produced 15 detainees, including the 11 detained from Nur Hossain's house, before a Narayanganj court, seeking remand.

The court granted seven days' remand for six of them and two days' each for the nine others.

Mir Quasem's trial ends

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Quasem, the alleged chief of Chittagong Al-Badr, an auxiliary force of Pakistani army, faces 14 charges, including murders, committed in the port city between November and December 16, 1971.

According to the prosecution, Quasem, president of Jamaat's then student wing Islami Chhatra Sangha's Chittagong city unit, colluded with the Pakistani army, Jamaat, and other anti-liberation forces and formed Al-Badr force there in 1971.

As the Al-Badr commander, Quasem had led the setting up of several Al-Badr camps in Chittagong for torturing and killing pro-liberation people, the prosecution said.

Quasem also had links with the Pakistani army and had direct involvement in crimes like abductions, torture, and murder in 1971, the prosecution claimed.

They produced 24 witnesses, mostly victims, and documents to prove the charges. They, however, could not

produce any witness in support of two charges.

Quasem's defence said their client was indeed involved in Islami Chhatra Sangha in 1971 but he had nothing to do with Al-Badr or any torture camp.

They claimed that Quasem was not in Chittagong during November and December 16, 1971, and that he had been in Dhaka after becoming the general secretary of Islami Chhatra Sangha of East Pakistan on November 6.

"So, no question arises about his [Quasem's] involvement in the said crimes," they claimed.

The defence produced three defence witnesses including one of Quasem's sisters and some documents in support of their claims.

Quasem's lawyer Tanvir Ahmed Al Amin, wrapping up his brief legal arguments yesterday, said the prosecution "miserably failed to prove the charges and we are humbly praying for his [Quasem's] acquittal."

Responding to the defence argu-

ments, Prosecutor Tureen Afroz said the prosecution witnesses have narrated the brutal torture they or their relatives endured in the Al-Badr torture centres "controlled" by Quasem.

"We want capital punishment," she said.

Quasem was in the dock yesterday. Tribunal-1 and Tribunal-2 have so far delivered judgments in nine war crimes cases.

The Tribunal-1 is expected to deliver the verdict in the case against Jamaat chief Motiur Rahman Nizami and Faridpur BNP leader Zahid Hossain Khokon, as the proceedings of these cases have already been completed.

Quasem, son of Mir Tayeb Ali and Rabeya Begum, was born in Munsidangi Satalori of Manikganj on December 31, 1952. He got involved in Islami Chhatra Sangha in 1967 when he studied in Chittagong Collegiate School.

Later, he became president of Chhatra Sangha of Chittagong College and Chittagong town units and on

November 6, 1971, he became the general secretary of East Pakistani Islami Chhatra Sangha, according to prosecution documents.

He became the first president of Islami Chhatra Shibir, formerly Islami Chhatra Sangha, in 1977 and joined Jamaat as an activist in 1980. He is now a member of Jamaat's central executive council, the highest policy-making body of the Islamist party.

According to a defence petition filed on July 19, 2013, Quasem is the chairman of Keari Ltd, a real estate and tourism company, chairman and director of the Diganta Media Corporation Ltd, which owns Bangla daily Naya Diganta and now off-the-air Diganta TV.

He is the director (marketing) of Ibn Sina Pharmaceutical Industries, chairman of Agro Industrial Trust, member secretary of Fouad Al-Khateeb Charity Foundation, chairman of Association of Multipurpose Welfare Agencies of Bangladesh, an association of Bangladeshi NGOs, the petition said.

Lack of security shakes investor confidence

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The observations were made on the basis of an analysis of the economic indicators that had been found to be on a declining trend after the January 5 election.

"Concerns over the economy will not go unless the country sees return of participatory political and electoral process," Debapriya Bhattacharya, distinguished fellow of CPD, told reporters.

These concerns will have a negative impact on domestic savings and encourage capital flight out of the country, thus creating fund shortage for the upcoming budget.

The economy did not turn around after the national election, Debapriya said. The growth in revenue income, exports, private credit, remittances and foreign aid are all on a declining trend. Import of capital machinery, which increased for some time, has now gone into negative territory, he added.

third consecutive year. Surprisingly, private investment, which is the engine of Bangladesh's consistent growth, declined by 1 percentage point this year, Debapriya said.

Only some productions that were disrupted by last year's political turmoil have resumed after the election, he added.

Fahmida Khatun, research director of CPD, presented a paper on the overall economy at the programme addressed by Prof Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of CPD.

"Investors are yet to regain their confidence and so the country has been facing some sort of stagnation of investments," Prof Mustafiz said.

Against the backdrop of the present economic and political condition, CPD placed its budget proposals for fiscal 2014-15, focusing on five key issues -- assessment of macroeconomic developments in the outgoing year and recommendations for the upcoming

year, reviewing the investment situation and proposals, fiscal budgetary recommendations relating to rural economy, social protection and non-economic issues.

On the macroeconomic trends, the think-tank said the looming uncertainties afflicting business and investment outlook had continued to persist with adverse implications for major indicators.

During the third quarter of the present fiscal year, export grew by only 3.9 percent, while the three quarters' average growth rate is 12 percent.

Similarly, revenue and remittance have also witnessed a slowdown in growth in recent months. Private sector credit growth went down to just 10.7 percent in February and capital machinery import was negative by 1.4 percent between January and February.

Implementation rate of the annual development programme during the third quarter was lower than that of the

same period in the previous year.

On the financing of the budget, CPD observed that the government had continued to rely on domestic sources. National savings instruments have helped a lot in this regard, it said, adding the stagnant investment situation forced people to invest in savings certificates.

It is anticipated that the national budget for FY 15 will face a daunting task of adding momentum to the country's economy, CPD said. Fiscal management will also be a very difficult task for the government, it said.

The think-tank, however, said inflation remained close to the target and balance of payments was in a comfort zone. The fiscal deficit will also remain within the target.

Responding to a query, Debapriya said CPD always opposed amnesty on black money.

"Allowing black money hurts the honest taxpayers."

Tablets, phones

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Doctors found that toddlers in a clinic were often given smart phones to keep them occupied and investigated links to development and speech.

A survey of 65 families suggested most parents believed the games were educational and helping the child's development but this was not found to be the case.

The average age children starting using touchscreens was just 11 months and most used them for around half an hour per day.

The team from the Cohen Children's Medical Centre of New York found there was no difference in scores on general developmental tests in children aged up to three between those who played educational or non-educational games on touchscreen devices.

However those who played non-educational games such as Angry

Birds or Fruit Ninja had lower scores in speech tests for both understanding of language and speaking.

Ruth Milanaik, chief investigator of the study, said: "We have observed in our neonatal clinic that the number one 'toy' parents are giving their toddlers are smart phones.

"It was striking to see that parents were substituting books and general baby toys for smart phones.

"Technology can never replace a parent's interaction with his or her child. Just talking to your child is the best way to encourage learning."

The researchers said they could not establish if the games caused poor speech or if children who were already struggling were drawn to playing those games.