

## 2 cousins drown in Bogra river

3 more are in hospitals

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

A dip in the Bangalee river at Velabari of Shariakandi in Bogra turned into a nightmare for five cousins and siblings yesterday afternoon. Two of them died and the rest are in hospitals.

Mostakim Taj, 20, first year student of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) and Rifat Ahmed, 21, a second year student of Green University College of Dhaka, died when they went to the river to bathe.

They fell into an underwater trench dredged by sand lifters.

Rifat's sister Nadira Binte Rija, 18, student of Eden University College, Dhaka, Shama Akhtar, 18, a medical representative, and Babu, 24, a student of Government Azizul Haque College of Bogra, got injured when they tried to save the two from drowning.

Family sources said the five had gone to bathe in the river during their visit to their village home to see their grandmother.

They said Taj and Rifat fell into the underwater trench and started to drown and the others went in to rescue them but began to drown themselves. Locals later pulled them all out but Taj and Rifat died on their way to a clinic in Bogra.

Rija and Babu were moved to Dhaka in the evening from a private clinic in Bogra town, family sources said.

Officer-in-Charge Fayjul Islam of Shariakandi Police Station said the bodies were handed over to the guardians.



A market has been built on the Sandhya river in Banaripara Bazar area of Barisal and the shops, left, have been sold off to local traders. The "land" enclosed by a bamboo fence and filled with dirt near the ferry pontoon has been earmarked for the local Awami League office. Last year then lawmaker Manirul Islam laid the foundation stone for the office.

PHOTO: ARIFUR RAHMAN

## River up for grabbing?

FROM PAGE 1

Sandhya on a ferry. The UNO had talked about his plans too.

"It is necessary to register it as government khas land in khas khatian. Only then can we mobilise funds for the project," the lawmaker said.

Deputy Commissioner Md Shahidul Alam of Barisal did not know that his subordinate was actually grabbing the river by building the enclosure.

"The UNO of Banaripara did not inform me at all about such a project and any land in the Sandhya."

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority, responsible for

managing and protecting the river routes and ports, was clueless as well.

"The UNO has no right to take the 'land' if the DC does not permit or if the 'land' is under BIWTA's jurisdiction. No one has the right to use it for any purpose," said Md Shahidullah, joint director of BIWTA (Port).

"If the river is used for vessels, nobody can take the land without our permission and we did not give permission to anyone," he said, adding that they would visit the area as soon as possible.

However, Golam Saleh Monju Molla, the mayor of Banaripara municipality and local Awami League

leader, said he knew about the project.

He said they needed some land for a crematory, graveyard, and Eidgah Maidan and had asked for land. "But we don't want the land where the UNO placed a signboard in the Sandhya river."

However, UNO Syeed is not the first one to grab a portion of the river. Last year, local AL leaders and other influential people filled up portions of the river in two places near Banaripara Bazar to build a market and the local office of the ruling party.

On August 3, then local lawmaker Manirul Islam Mani laid the founda-

tion stone for the upazila Awami League office.

The mayor of Banaripara had welcomed the lawmaker amid festivity and was present on the occasion, locals said.

Locals said before filling up the river for the office, some local political leaders fenced off around 5,000 square feet more of the river. Later, they filled up the land and sold it to local traders at the rate of Tk 50,000 a decimal, traders said requesting anonymity.

That filled up land has now turned into a buzzing market.

The UNO did not take any action even after being told what was going

on. His office is just 500 metres from the spot.

The Sandhya connects the Kacha river in Kaokhali to the Kirtankhola in Barisal. It is important to the lives and livelihoods of the locals and filling it up at Banaripara is causing erosion in the villages on the other side, locals said.

Filling up a river is also illegal under the Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act 1996 (amendment 2010).

The mobile phone of former AL MP Manirul Islam Mani had apparently been turned off. The Daily Star failed to reach him even after trying for over several days.

## Witness testifies against Azhar

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They had heavily knocked on the door and ordered the family to open it, the witness said, adding, his father opened the door in good faith.

"Colonel Sab salam diya hai [Mr colonel has summoned you]. Come with us now," said the witness, quoting the Pakistani army.

The army forced his father and maternal uncle into a jeep and confined them in a cell at Rangpur Cantonment.

There were nine other detainees in that cell, including eminent persons of Rangpur like Durgadas Adhikary, his son Uttam Adhikary and income tax lawyer ABY Mahfuz Ali.

"The detainees were tortured every night until April 13, 1971," he said.

Rathish added the Pakistani army and their local collaborators, including Azharul, had taken all the detainees with their hands and legs tied to Dakshinganj Cemetery around 2:30am on April 14.

"They opened fire on them. As my father was beside a pillar and fell on the ground as soon as the shooting began, no bullet hit him," the witness said.

But the occupation force was not satisfied and opened fire again to ensure the detainees' death. This time eight bullets pierced through Mahfuz

Ali's body and hit Dinesh's left leg and right thumb.

"Everyone thought my father had been killed," he said, adding, the Pakistani army left the spot assuming everybody dead.

Dinesh managed to crawl to a neighbour's house and with their help crossed the border to India after receiving primary treatment.

Rathish and his other family members had also left to India, met their father, and heard about the incident.

Following the deposition, the defence began cross-examining the witness until the three-member tribunal adjourned the proceeding until today.

Azharul faces six charges of murder, genocide and crimes against humanity committed during the war. He was present at the dock yesterday.

### MOBARAK'S CASE

Earlier, prosecutor Sahidul Rahman yesterday began placing arguments in the war crimes case against Mobarak Hossain, former Jamaat-e-Islami member who later got affiliated with the Awami League.

The prosecutor placed arguments on three out of five charges brought against Mobarak. His arguments were based on the testimony and cross-examination of the prosecution and

the defence witnesses.

The proceedings of the case were adjourned until today.

### ICT-2

The International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday completed recording the cross-examination of Golam Noor, 13th prosecution witness in the case against Syed Mohammad Qaisar.

Noor on Thursday testified that Qaisar along with his cohorts and the Pakistani army had launched a synchronised attack on 22 villages in Brahmanbaria that left 108 people, mostly Hindus, dead on November 15, 1971.

Qaisar's counsel SM Shahjahan yesterday completed his cross-examination saying his client was not involved in any such incidents and the witness had given "false testimony". The witness, however denied the defence's suggestion.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Shahinur Islam adjourned the proceeding until today.

Qaisar, a state minister of the Ershad regime, faces 16 charges, including genocide committed in Brahmanbaria and Habiganj during the war. The 73-year-old accused, however, pleaded not guilty before the court.

## PM, Khaleda call Modi

FROM PAGE 1

India would be strengthened in the coming days," Sayrul Kabir Khan, a staff of BNP chairperson's media wing, told The Daily Star.

Hasina called Modi around 9:00am.

She hoped Dhaka and New Delhi will continue working sincerely to resolve any problem through bilateral talks. She said Bangladesh always wants to keep friendly relations with its neighbours.

It could not be known what Modi told Hasina during the conversation.

Hasina-led Awami League has a

longstanding relation with the

Indian Congress, which suffered a debacle in the just-concluded Lok Sabha polls.

Earlier, as the election results were announced on Friday, Hasina wrote to Modi saying they can work together to take the bilateral relationship to "increasingly greater heights."

During her conversation, Khaleda hoped that India would move forward under the strong leadership of Modi, Sayrul said.

Congratulating Modi on behalf of her party as well as the people of

Bangladesh, Khaleda said she believed the new Indian PM would work sincerely to resolve all the bilateral issues between the two nations.

It could not be known what Modi told Khaleda during the conversation.

BNP leaders, including Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, Reaz Rahman, Sabihuddin Ahmed and journalist Shafiqe Rehman, were present during the conversation.

Earlier, Khaleda wrote to Modi congratulating him on his historic victory after the election results were announced on Friday.

## Dhaka to work more intensively with Delhi

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He reaffirmed that the government was very much on track to further intensify cooperation under regional and sub-regional mechanisms, including Saarc, Bimstec and BCIM.

The Saarc and Asean envoys reaffirmed the commitment of their governments to consolidate political and economic relations with Bangladesh under the regional cooperation framework of Saarc, Asean

and Bimstec.

The Asean ambassadors expressed their deep desire to enhance cooperation with the present government in the areas of trade, power, infrastructure and shipping.

They also stated that the promotion of 'Asean Dhaka Committee' (a forum of Asean ambassadors) is a testimony to Asean's continued engagement with Bangladesh.

Ambassadors and high commissioners from 14 Saarc and Asean coun-

tries, including Afghanistan, Bhutan, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam attended the briefing.

PM's Political Affairs Adviser HT Imam, International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, Foreign Secretary Md Shahidul Haque, among others, were present during the briefing.

## Tareque Sayeed faces case in Comilla

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"But he [Tareque] misbehaved with us and drove us away. He told us to meet him again and bring Comilla-9 lawmaker Tajul Islam along," she said.

Rab official Shahed could not be reached over the phone despite several attempts.

The court ordered the officer-in-charge of Laksham Police Station to submit a probe report to it, adds a correspondent from Comilla.

Meanwhile, a Narayanganj court placed ex-Rab officer Lt Commander SM Masud Rana on a seven-day remand yesterday, a day after two other former Rab officers Tareque and Maj Arif Hossain were taken on a five-day remand.

Rana was brought to the court in handcuffs around 4:45pm, hours after his arrest from the capital's cantonment area early yesterday for his alleged involvement in the seven murders.

Police sought his 10-day remand but

Senior Judicial Magistrate KM Mahiuddin granted seven days.

At the hearing, Rana claimed himself innocent, and said the place where the seven bodies were recovered was out of his duty area.

Police picked up Rana in the capital's cantonment area a day after the arrests of Tareque and Arif from the same area.

Their arrests came after the High Court on May 11 ordered law enforcers to arrest the three ex-Rab officials as suspects in the seven-murder case.

On May 6, the three officials were forced into retirement over the allegation of involvement in the killings of seven people, including Narayanganj panel mayor Nazrul Islam and lawyer Chandan Sarker.

Their names came up when Nazrul's father-in-law Shahidul Islam alleged that some officials of Rab-11 had killed Nazrul and others in exchange for Tk 6 crore from ward councillor Nur Hossain and his accomplices.

The Narayanganj court yesterday asked law enforcers to explain why Tareque and Arif were not shown arrested on the charge of killing the seven persons.

Mamunur Rashid Mondal, investigation officer of the case, will have to reply in four days.

The court order came after colleagues of slain lawyer Chandan moved a petition on the matter.

In the meantime, the government committee probing the gruesome murders talked to civil society members and took deposition of 17 people in the fourth round of public hearing.

On April 27, Nazrul, his four aides, and lawyer Chandan and his driver were abducted near Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah of Narayanganj.

Six bodies, including those of Nazrul and Chandan, were found floating in the Shitalakkhya river on April 30, and another was found the

following day. The other victims are Swapnil, Tajul Islam, Liton, Jahangir and Ibrahim.

### CASE AGAINST TAREQUE

In the first information report, the complainant said Rab held Saiful and Humayun along with 10 others from Harishchar area in Comilla Sadar between 9:00pm and 11:00pm on November 27.

Shahjahan Ali and the two other accused Rab men took away Tk 14 lakh from Saiful's factory, Bangladesh Flour Mill, at Daulatganj market in Laksham on that night.

Saiful, who was in his factory at the time, along with Jasimuddin, former assistant organising secretary of Laksham municipal BNP, fled the factory.

They then contacted Humayun, and along with him were going to Comilla by an ambulance. The Rab men intercepted the ambulance at Harishchar, and forced them into a pickup.

The elite force members handed

Jasimuddin over to cops at Laksham Police Station on the same night, but there has been no news of Saiful and Humayun since, according to the FIR.

Humayun's family members said they went to file a case with the Laksham police, but the then officer-in-charge refused to take the case. Later, they filed a general diary on December 1.

### PUBLIC HEARING

The seven-member inquiry committee held another hearing at Narayanganj Circuit House yesterday where representatives of the civil society, assistants of lawyers, drivers and shop keepers, and four staff of Rifles Club, gave depositions.

After her deposition, Shahina Islam Mukti, vice-president of Shujan Narayanganj district unit, said she told the committee that Nur Hossain carried out various illegal activities in the area with support from Awami League lawmaker Shamim Osman.

Shahina, also daughter of former BNP

lawmaker from Narayanganj-4 Sirajul Islam, said Hossain and other accused in the murder case are Shamim's men.

She claimed the seven murders could not have taken place without Shamim's knowledge.

Manzurul Haque, vice-president of Narayanganj Chamber of Commerce, said 34 representatives of 34 socio-cultural organisations and professional bodies gave deposition.

After his deposition, advocate AB Siddique, president of Narayanganj Nagorik Committee, told The Daily Star the seven murders took place because of failure of the law enforcement agencies.

Meanwhile, detectives released NCC ward councillor Jannatul Ferdous Nila around 9:30pm yesterday, about three hours after she was detained in connection with the case.

Asked about Nur Hossain's whereabouts, Narayanganj Superintendent of Police Khandker Mahid Uddin said police were yet to ascertain it.

## Nasa aims to land

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The technique would use a robotic probe to fly alongside a space rock for months or years, gradually nudging it off course with slight gravitational changes caused by taking boulders from the surface.

"We'd go into this enhanced gravity tractor position after we retrieve the boulder and demonstrate that we have even more gravity attraction capability by doing that," Lindley Johnson, program executive for Nasa's Near-Earth Object observations programme, told reporters in March.

The mission is being touted as a major step on the way to Mars. Nasa hopes to find an asteroid which is between seven and 10m wide for its mission.

They would then tow or push it towards Earth so that it ends up in a stable orbit near the moon.

In 2021 astronauts would then use an Orion capsule - a manned spacecraft - to land on the asteroid and bring back soil and rock samples for analysis.

This asteroid would also, probably in the 2030s, be used as a stop-off point for astronauts on their way to Mars.

Exact details on how Nasa plans to pluck an asteroid out of its trajectory are not yet known, but the most recent rendering shows it is captured and held inside what looks like a giant plastic bag.

Nasa has revealed two of its astronaut's have started training for an ambitious real life mission to land on an asteroid as a stepping stone to Mars.

On Friday, it revealed preparations for the mission were underway in a giant water tank used to simulate weightlessness. The space agency plans to land astronauts on an asteroid in the 2030s.

## PM wants the policy soon

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She said her government had ensured free flow of information through enacting the Right to Information Act. Besides, transparency and accountability -- the prerequisite of good governance -- have been ensured.

Hasina mentioned that after assuming office in 1996, her government allowed the first private television channel in the country, ensured freedom of the mass media and restored an environment of constructive criticism.

In continuation of that policy, she said the present government in its immediate past term gave licences to 31 private TV channels and 12 FM and 32 community radio stations.

The premier also listed other steps of her government, including introduction of journalists' assistance allowance from 2011, announcement of newspapers and film making as industry, and declaration of the eighth wage board for journalists.

But she regretted that "some people want to ignore the principle of democracy and journalism, don't want to abide by the constitution, and instead cooperate with militancy and terrorism, and confuse readers and viewers through a sugar-coated presentation of false information".

Hasina also said her government had ensured a free flow of information and created opportunities of introducing online media.

Terming 'responsible and free mass media' as an indispensable organ of a democratic system, Hasina said the information ministry had started its journey under the government of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman soon after liberation.

"But after the heinous and tragic events of August 1975, the mass media came under state censorship that helped prolong the tenure of illegal and unconstitutional governments," she told the officials.

Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu and Information Secretary Murtoza Ahmed, among others, spoke on the occasion as well.