

# Prime suspect

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Islam Abid and Sohel masterminded the murder.

Abid, a cousin of Nizam Hazari, shot Ekram twice from close range with a 7.62mm pistol provided by Jihad, Rab said.

Jihad, who had rivalry with Ekram, also gave four more pistols to Shanan, Saikat, Sifat and Sunny. They followed Abid and opened fire. After the murder, they returned the firearms to Jihad, Rab said quoting Abid.

Inspector Abul Kalam Azad, the investigation officer in the case, said illegal firearms were used in the killing.

Two other top suspects -- Sohel and Sunny -- are still on the run.

Ekram, who was also president of Phulgazi AL, was shot and then burned alive in his car in broad daylight in Feni on May 20.

His driver and three other people in the car were injured when the attackers stabbed them with sharp weapons and then beat them up.

According to the confession of the eight, Sohel, also known as "Ruti" Sohel, asked some of the attackers to set Ekram's car ablaze to ensure his death.

Abdullahil Mahmud Shiblu, councillor of ward-5 of Feni municipality, and Jihad oversaw the entire mission from some 30 yards away, Rab said, quoting an arrestee.

Shiblu surrendered to Feni police on Saturday.

Intra-party feuds and rivalry over establishing supremacy in Phulgazi were the reasons behind the murder, Rab said.

Ekram's enmity with Jihad, joint general secretary of Phulgazi AL, intensified following the election of Anandapur union under Phulgazi upazila in 2011.

Jihad competed in the polls but lost to Harunur Rashid, whom Ekram backed.

Enraged, Jihad supported BNP-backed candidate Mahtab Uddin Chowdhury Minar, instead of supporting Ekram, in the upazila election early this year. Ekram, however, beat Mahtab.

Irked by Jihad's activities, Ekram had suspended him from the local AL committee. But his suspension was withdrawn in the face of pressure from Nizam Hazari.

The Bilashi cinema hall area where the killing took place is controlled by Shiblu, once a key member of Jainal Hazari's so-called steering committee.

He started to get closer to Nizam Hazari after the AL took office in 2009 and subsequently became president of ward-5 AL.

Meanwhile, investigators yesterday got eight days to quiz each of nine suspects, including Abid, Shanan, Saikat, Sifat and Shiblu.

At the remand hearing, Shiblu protested his innocence and said he had surrendered as his name was mentioned by some of the detainees at the Rab press briefing on Saturday.

Of the eight other suspects, five claimed to be innocent, while Abid claimed Rab personnel tortured them during interrogation to get confessional statements.

Senior Judicial Magistrate Md Khairul Amin passed the remand order, after Feni police produced the nine before his court seeking 10 days' remand for each.

The court also ordered five days' remand for four people arrested earlier in connection with the killing.

Also yesterday, a team of Bangladesh Upazila Parishad Chairmen Association went to Feni and held a press conference, demanding transfer of the case to the Criminal Investigation Department of police.

In another development in Phulgazi, Ekram's followers set fire to the house of Alamgir Hossain, one of the arrested suspects in the case, yesterday afternoon.

# Egyptian jihadist group Ansar denies 'leader' slain

AFP, Cairo

Egyptian jihadist group Ansar Beit al-Maqdis denied yesterday that Shadi al-Menei has been killed, after security sources identified him as its leader and said he had died in an ambush.

The group also denied Menei was its leader, in a statement published on Islamist militant Internet forums accompanied by a picture of him reading a report about his "death" on a laptop.

The picture could not be immediately authenticated.

Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, based in the Sinai Peninsula, has spearheaded attacks that killed hundreds of policemen and soldiers since July last year when the army ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi.

"They announced that they killed Shadi al-Menei and that he was the emir (leader) of the group. He was neither killed nor was the emir," the statement said.

# HSC maths questions

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"The education minister sent five to six copies containing [the allegedly leaked] questions for me to check. Some of them were posted on Facebook pages. I checked those, but found no matches," said Prof Taslima Begum, chairperson of Dhaka Education Board.

"How can I accept it if someone comes to me after the exam and shows me some questions, claiming that those were leaked?"

The examinees will not face any problem as the authorities are taking precautions, she said, urging all not to do anything that creates confusion among the students.

Meanwhile, Buet and Dhaka University students demonstrated before the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday evening, protesting the authority's move to hold the exam even after the leak.

They said even as the question papers of public examinations were being leaked, the government was dismissing it as "rumour".

Nabila Tabassum, an MBA student of DU, described the leak as utter dishonesty. "And dishonesty can never be the

key to success and that's why we're protesting."

Naziur Rahman, a third-year student of Buet, demanded that the government bring the culprits to book.

The students will go to the Dhaka Board with "evidence" of the alleged leak today.

Since the exam began on April 3, there have been repeated allegations that question papers of some subjects, including English second paper, two papers of both physics and chemistry, got leaked.

The board had to postpone the English second paper exam following such allegations.

The education ministry and the Dhaka Board authorities then formed two committees to inquire into the leak.

The committees were given 15 days to submit the reports, but they sought more time.

The probe body formed by the ministry is expected to place its report this week.

Some 11,41,374 examinees are taking the exams from 8,104 educational institutions across the country.

# Court boycott

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Forum, a platform of pro-BNP lawyers, observed the court boycott programme from 10:30am to 1:00pm yesterday.

All the judges of the Appellate Division of the SC and most of the judges of its High Court Division sat in the courtrooms on time and discharged their judicial functions almost normally, though the presence of lawyers was poor.

Some judges of the HC Division did not sit in the courtrooms in the morning due to the absence of lawyers, court sources said.

Leaders and activists of the Ainjibi Forum staged a demonstration on the court premises to protest at not being allowed to hold the rally on the SC premises where BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia was scheduled to attend as the chief guest.

During the boycott programme, the forum leaders locked the gate of the SC building in front of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) office, restricting the lawyers' entry into the court building.

However, Ainjibi Forum leader and Supreme Court Bar Association president Khandker Mahbub Hossain attended the Appellate Division to move a case in the morning.

Khandker Mahbub said he went to the apex court before the start of the court boycott programme.

He moved a petition that prayed to the Appellate Division to allow advocate Tajul Islam to place arguments on behalf of war crimes convict Jamaat-Islami leader Muhammad Kamaruzzaman during the hearing of his appeal against the death penalty awarded by the International Crimes Tribunal-2.

The apex court rejected the petition. Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Forum Secretary General AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon, who is also secretary of the Supreme Court Bar Association, said the lawyers spontaneously boycotted courts across the country in protest at Saturday's government's action.

The judges of Dhaka court ran their judicial functions as usual. Even the president of Dhaka Bar Association Mohsin Mian, also an Ainjibi Forum leader, moved cases before a court.

# Youngest

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(16), a Class IX student from the Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh, and completed the feat on Sunday morning.

Anand and Purna are both students of Andhra Pradesh Social Welfare Educational Society.

"They climbed Everest at 6:00am today after a 52-day long expedition," he said.

"Purna created a record by becoming by youngest girl to climb the Everest," he said.

The duo were selected among about 150 children who were initially chosen for adventure sports as part of the society's initiative to promote excellence in the students of the society, he said.

Twenty of them were sent to a prestigious mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling for training and nine among them were sent on expedition to Indo-China border earlier.

The two students with a higher degree of toughness and endurance were sent to the Everest Expedition in April, he said.

The two students were now returning to the base camp, the official added.

# BASIC Bank MD fired

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directive," said the letter.

Not only that, a further Tk 30 crore loan was extended to the same client, according to the letter.

To show the financial health of the bank to be better than it is, BASIC Bank showed a host of classified loans to be regular ones, which is again a grave offence.

The state-run bank also did not monitor any of the loans it gave out, putting the institution in serious jeopardy. "It showed gross negligence and a lack of sound judgement on your part," the letter said.

The bank also promoted its two general managers Ruhul Alam and Md Selim to deputy managing director by violating rules.

Copies of the letter were forwarded to BASIC Bank's chairman and the finance ministry's banking division as well.

One of the best-run banks until 2009, BASIC Bank has been mired in financial irregularities in recent years.

Islam, who assumed the position of MD in 2010, failed to take actions after a host of financial irregularities involving around Tk 3,500 crore had been detected at the bank between 2012 and 2013.

The BB investigators found 12 counts of irregularities by BASIC Bank in giving out loans, which include no verification of customer's creditworthiness, absence of KYC procedures, and extending loans to defaulters.

The majority of the anomalies were detected in the bank's Dilkusha, Shantinagar and Gulshan branches in Dhaka.

In a bid to check the irregularities, the

BB had signed a memorandum of understanding with BASIC Bank in July last year, where the bank pledged to execute a number of actions by December 2013.

The agreement obliged BASIC Bank to limit its single borrower exposure to 15 percent of the bank's total capital, but it overshot the ceiling for 61 of its clients, giving out Tk 2,111 crore more in loans than it should.

BB stipulated that the bank raises its capital adequacy ratio (CAR) to 11 percent by the end of 2013. The CAR on December 31 last year stood at 4.5 percent.

It was also supposed to make up the capital shortfall of Tk 128.21 crore in 2013, but in reality, the capital deficit widened to Tk 647.38 crore by the end of December.

The state-owned scheduled bank also fell short in cash recovery last year: it was supposed to be a minimum of Tk 212 crore but BASIC Bank managed Tk 142.82 crore.

The troubled bank's non-performing loan ratio by the end of 2013 needed to be 5 percent, but it stood at 11.72 percent.

Another target was to transform the loss-making branches into profitable ones during the course of the year, which, again, it failed to. Of the total of 68 branches, 33 remain loss-making.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday served notice on BASIC Bank's former deputy managing director Abdul Monayem Khan and his wife and general manager Md Zainul Abedin Chowdhury, his wife and son.

Both officials were suspended on April 15 along with other top officials for financial irregularities.

# HRW says sorry to ICT

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against the rights body, its Asia Director Brad Adams and associate for HRW Asia Division Storm Tiv.

The Tribunal-1 would decide whether the contempt proceedings would be initiated against HRW on July 15.

On July 15, 2013, Tribunal-1 awarded Ghulam Azam 90 years' jail finding him guilty in all five charges of crimes against humanity and genocide committed during the Liberation War.

The prosecution filed the contempt petition after HRW posted an article on its website claiming that the trial of the former Jamaat ameer was "deeply flawed" and "had not met international standards".

It also said the "judges had improperly conducted an investigation on behalf of the prosecution" and expressed worries over "collusion and bias among prosecutors and judges".

The HRW's reply reads: The tribunal does not have the jurisdiction and authority to initiate this contempt proceeding against the opposite parties who are American nationals and are subjected to the jurisdiction of American law in respect of the alleged publication which was published in the official website of the HRW from the territorial jurisdiction of the United States of America.

Hence, the publication was made beyond the territorial jurisdiction of the tribunal and therefore the contempt proceeding against them is liable to be dismissed, the reply said.

The HRW claimed that it had reported certain issues which merely compared the ingredients of a "fair trial" with international instruments and that there was no malice or criminal intent.

It said the question of showing disrespect and disregard for the tribunal and its judges by them was not only misconceived but also a motivated step taken by the chief prosecutor and its team.

"The opposite parties, being the non-residents of Bangladesh, did not have any knowledge about the contempt law and proceeding of Bangladesh and lack the perspective to accurately assess whether their sincerely offered comments on the trial would be perceived in Bangladesh as expressing a disregard, which in no way was intended and as such they may be exonerated for those lack of knowledge," said the reply.

Prosecutor Tureen Afroz said since the report spread through the internet to this country, it was under the jurisdiction of the tribunal.

"Even if it was published in USA only, the tribunal could take action against HRW on the basis of passive nationality and protective jurisdiction," she added.

Termining the report's allegations baseless and biased, the prosecutor said, "It has seriously damaged the dignity of the tribunal before the world."

In January 2009, when the government decided to commence trial under the International Crimes (Tribunal) Act, 1973, the HRW said it might not meet international fair trial standards and might be subject to political influence.

Another prosecutor Tapas Kanti Baul said, "The Human Rights Watch has been vehemently criticised worldwide for its motivated activities as a rights organisation."

If proved, the accused would have to serve one year in jail or pay Tk 5,000 as fine or suffer both.

## TIB FINDS

Tk 1,000-1,500 bribe given for each tonne of food grain under Test Relief and Work for Food

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Municipalities bribe Tk 40,000-80,000 to auditors

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Suppliers bribe politicians, mayors/chairmen, officials 10-15% of funds meant for procuring logistics

# Bribe 10pc

FROM PAGE 1  
Many households get included in social safety net programmes because of political influence and nepotism, said Rabiul.

At least 34.1 percent households have to give a bribe of Tk 4,521 on average for settling disputes through arbitration, the TIB says.

In order to get work orders, contractors bribe ruling party men 10-15 percent of the allocated money. They also give bribes to government officials to get payments for completed work.

"Contractors are even paid against fake projects or before completion of their work," said Rabiul.

In case of Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction projects, some 15-20 percent of the funds are misappropriated through collusion among mayors, executive engineers and town managers, the study shows.

In city corporations and municipalities, officials embezzle part of the cleaners' wages and take bribes for supplying water illegally.

Drivers steal fuel from waste carriers, while employees misappropriate money through fake bills for repairing office vehicles.

Apart from these irregularities, local government bodies suffer from a number of institutional weaknesses.

Forty percent of posts in municipalities and 20 percent in district councils remain vacant. Besides, there are delays in releasing allocated funds for projects.

"In case of recruitment and posting, local bodies have to depend fully on the government," Rabiul said.

At least 23 percent of union parishads and 29 percent of upazila parishads have no permanent offices, and lack necessary logistics.

The standing committees at union and upazila parishads also remain inactive, says the corruption watchdog.

Ruling party ministers and lawmakers have total control over project approval and special allocations.

Appointment of bureaucrats, instead of elected representatives, as district council and city corporation administrators remains a major barrier to strengthening local government bodies, says the TIB.

Local government expert Dr Tofael Ahmed said the projects at local level are not well-planned.

The projects are designed in such a

way that they involve less than Tk 2 lakh each and there is no need for floating tenders, he said.

TIB Trustee Board Member M Hafizuddin Khan said the poor, mostly in rural areas, are deprived of services due to massive corruption.

He suggested reinstating the Local Government Commission to coordinate all activities of local bodies, and reduce the control of the government.

Mashiur Rahman Ranga, state minister for LGRD and cooperatives, said he had taken note of the TIB findings and would take steps to check corruption and make the local government bodies more efficient.

"Local government institutions have to be more independent financially," he said.

Salahuddin M Aminuzzaman, professor at Dhaka University, said the study should have focused either on urban or rural government institutions to avoid generalisation.

The TIB made 18 recommendations that include reviewing related laws, enhancing skills of the staff and keeping lawmakers away from local development work.

DU Professor Zarina Rahman Khan also spoke at the discussion moderated by TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman.

# Wild elephants

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However, things started being different as these Elphas maximuses bred and tripled their number over the past years while men continued to increase the encroachment on the wildlife habitats.

A highly intelligent species, the elephants are now returning what the humans did to them.

Almost every night, the crop-raiding giants come down the hills and choose croplands as an easy source for their nutrition. People of the areas, however, are certainly not glad about this.

"How can we survive if they (elephants) destroy all our crops?" said a farmer of Nakugaon village in Sherpur's Nalitabari. The elephants rampaged through at least 20 acres of rice fields in the village last week.

"We have stopped doing everything except guarding our farmlands from dusk to dawn," said Saheb Ali, a farmer of Tarani village of the same upazila.

Hundreds of farmers like him are spending sleepless nights with spears, torch and sticks to protect their only source of livelihood from these largest land mammals that too are badly in need of food.

Worse still, the villagers fear for their lives every day as more than 50 people were killed by the marauding elephants in the past 17 years, according to the district administration.

Both the number of the elephants and the people of the area have multiplied since 1994. An ever-increasing population is destroying the habitats

and grazing zones of the elephants, forcing the giants to raid the villages, says local green activist Mannan Sohel.

The wild elephants cannot return to the forests of Meghalaya either as India has erected barbed fences on the border, say local foresters.

In a desperate bid to rid themselves of elephant attacks, locals want electricity connection to the villages immediately, as elephants fear light at night, Mokhlesur Rahman, chairman of Sherpur's Nalitabari upazila parishad, told The Daily Star.

Zakir Hossain, deputy commissioner (DC) of Sherpur, however, said the administration was working to find a way to ensure peaceful coexistence of the elephants and humans.

"The lives of the wild elephants are valuable but the lives of people are more valuable. Though it is tough to ensure a peaceful co-existence, measures are being taken to save both," he said.

Different organisations, with the help of local administration, are conducting awareness programmes among the locals to keep them from harming the animals.

When asked about the demand of the environmentalists to create a sanctuary for the endangered species in the area, the DC said, "Where will I shift the people then?" -- a question that reveals a disturbing picture of the severely damaged equilibrium of nature; a question that has no easy answer.

# He's in thick of things

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In the leaked conversation, which reportedly took place on April 29, Nur Hossain, the prime accused and a sworn enemy of Nazrul, sought the lawmaker's help in fleeing the country. With assurance, Shamim said, "It will not be a problem."

Shamim admits to have had the conversation but says it was published partially.

On condition of anonymity, one of the family members said the lawmaker could have made Hossain, over whom he had much influence, patch things up with Nazrul and thus "forestall the murder".

Despite Nazrul's repeated pleadings, Shamim did nothing. As a result, Nur went ahead with the hit he took out on Nazrul, said the family member.

"Nobody could have thought of touching Nazrul without Shamim's consent."

Shamim himself claims nothing happens in his area without his knowledge. "I can even tell you if a stray dog has just gone mad in the area," he said at a press briefing over the leak.

It was Shamim's suggestion following which Nazrul had been living in Dhaka after a death threat issued by Hossain in public in February.

Yet, according to his statement at the briefing, the MP told Nazrul the night before the abduction: "Go to court, take bail."

Nazrul followed the "advice." He was last seen leaving the district courthouse premises around 1:30pm on April 27.

Talking to The Daily Star on May 18, Shamim regretted his failure in saving the life of "such an obedient follower." He had earlier told Nazrul: "I cannot help you in this regard, Nazrul. I cannot save you."

associates, for a number of reasons Nazrul had drawn the wrath of the influential AL leader, much feared as a crime lord in Narayanganj.

Towards the end of last year, he was given the task of overseeing the widening of a road in his ward by Narayanganj Mayor Selina Hayat Ivy. He also attended the last victory day procession organised by the mayor.

Shamim did not like Nazrul's getting close to his arch-rival Ivy, who beat him by a margin of over 1,00,000 votes in the last NCC mayoral polls.

In the polls, Nazrul got elected ward councillor by defeating candidate Iqbal Hossain, another accused in the seven-murder case.

According to local political activists, despite being a BNP cadre Iqbal was backed by Shamim. However, the lawmaker denies it.

Nazrul also joined a programme organised by a civil platform to demand the arrest of Shamim's nephew Azmiri Osman on the allegation of killing schoolboy Tanvir Mohammad Twaki.

Meanwhile, the rivalry between Nazrul and Hossain, enemies since the tenure of military dictator Ershad, intensified over the work of the road.

Nazrul wanted part of a shop removed for a widening of the road, which connects his neighbourhood Mizmiz with Dhaka-Chittagong highway.

Hossain bitterly opposed it as the shop belonged to one of his relatives. Enraged, he issued the death threat on February 2.

Shamim knew about it all.

"He [Nazrul] had informed Shamim Osman about the death threat," Selina Islam Beauty told The Daily Star.

Immediately after her husband was found dead, floating in the Shitalakkhya,

Selina said wailing, "Death won't spare you, Shamim Osman! Don't you think of that?"

Nazrul had also told Shamim that Hossain was trying to have him killed by some members of the Rapid Action Battalion and professional killers, she added.

After the abduction, Shamim told reporters: "I don't believe it can be done by Nur Hossain."

The lawmaker has this much faith in a man who stands accused in 15 criminal cases and four on corruption charges that placed him on the list of criminals wanted by Interpol in 2007, six years after he had fled the country in 2001.

He reportedly stayed in India till the end of 2008.

Shamim too fled to India and then to Canada after his party's polls debacle in 2001. He returned in December 2006 but left again the day before the 1/11 changeover the next year.

He returned in 2009 and so did Hossain.

"Shamim not only ensured Hossain's safe return in 2009 but also helped him become a councillor in the city corporation election, leaving no scope for locals to think other than that Hossain was Shamim's man," said an AL leader.

Posters can still be seen in Narayanganj city with a photograph of Hossain, urging people to strengthen the hand of Shamim.

"Bhai [Shamim] became increasingly dependent on Hossain," said a local Jubo League leader requesting not to be named.

A civil rights activist in Narayanganj said, "You must put together the pieces of the puzzle for getting a clear picture of the seven-murder."