



Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, Architect Mubasshar Hussain, and former cricketer of the national team Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu speaking to the press at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Plea to PM

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And now when their cries seemingly fall on deaf ears of different authorities, they have turned to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her intervention in saving the playground.

"We appeal to the prime minister to free the playground for all, as she herself is sensitive to environmental issues," said Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, vice-president of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa).

He made the appeal at a press conference of Dhanmondi Math Raksha Andolon, an allied movement of some 50 green groups, at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

In the absence of parks and playgrounds, most youths and children in the capital suffer from obesity and depression as they spend their life confined to the four walls of their houses, said Abu Sayeed, recipient of Ramon Magsaysay Award.

"We have no objection to naming the playground after the founding father's son Sheikh Jamal as long as the facility remains open to all," he said. "But should the name be exploited to serve the ends of an elitist business club, which is making the public playground an exclusive zone?"

"We now appeal to the prime minister, who is the chief executive of the

country, as the city corporation, police and the public works ministry have not freed the playground in compliance with a 2009 High Court order and a 2011 judgment," he continued.

One may recall that the immediate past administrator of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) told The Daily Star on May 22 that freeing the playground ultimately depends on directives of the Prime Minister's Office, as the occupying club bears the name of a member of the Bangabandhu family.

Architect Iqbal Habib, joint secretary of Bapa, former national cricket captain Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu were present at the programme.

Architect Mubasshar Hussain, convener of the movement, said that the playground was earmarked as an open park in the 1958 master plan of Dhanmondi residential area.

The club, formerly known as Dhanmondi Club and renamed in 2009, has been at the playground for around five decades without any authorisation. And last year, they barred public access to the playground, making it open only to club members.

In December 2009, the HC restrained any organisations -- public or private -- from altering the original

character of Dhanmondi playground.

The HC in 2011 ordered the then Dhaka City Corporation, police and public works ministry to open the playground to public and remove all illegal structures from there.

However, the order was not carried out. When the court was moved in this regard, several HC benches recently either declined or felt embarrassed to hear on the petition. However, a fourth bench last month decided to hear their petition.

In the meantime, the private club started building two lawn tennis courts, two badminton courts and a basketball court at the playground with Tk 1.63 crore public money provided by the Local Government Engineering Department.

At long last, the DSCC hung up a notice at the entrance of the playground, officially declaring it open to public on April 24. They, however, left the illegal structures in place.

In their latest move, the club authorities again locked the main gate and kept a small side gate open, restricting public access.

Interestingly, the notice the DSCC hung on the gate also disappeared at the same time.

Govt to confirm

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Earlier last month, the chief justice collected 10 judgments delivered by each of the six additional HC judges for evaluating their performance.

Sources said the CJ and other judges at the Appellate Division of the SC have scrutinised their performance.

The process of confirmation might be completed before Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina leaves for China on June 6 on a five-day visit.

Services of the six additional judges were supposed to be confirmed before June 13 as they were appointed on June 13, 2012 for two years, SC Registrar AKM Shamsul Islam told The Daily Star.

The then president Zillur Rahman had appointed the six additional judges to the HC. The president confirms the services of additional HC judges on the basis of the CJ's suggestions.

The CJ's recommendations are sent to the law ministry. The ministry then sends the suggestions to the Prime Minister's Office to forward those to the president.

The last Awami League-led grand alliance government (2009-2013) had appointed 60 judges to the HC, which has 90 judges now, including the six at two war crimes tribunals.

New hope

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This service is the first of its kind in the country, claimed Mohammad Abul Kalam, head of the Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

Doctors anticipated that the results of the surgery would be immense.

The DMCH is one of the major destinations for casualty emergency patients in the capital, where victims of road accidents, electrocution, explosions and torture find treatment.

Around 180 to 200 casualty patients arrive at the emergency department everyday, said a staff at the admission desk on May 26.

"The most serious acid burn victims can be treated here. In addition to helping treat road accident victims, this new service will allow us to save the body parts of electrocution victims. Even cancer patients are within the purview of this new technology," mentioned Kalam.

The new knowledge also holds out hope for those children who have lost fingers after picking up crude bombs, taking those for toys during the recent political unrest in the country, he added.

Sohel himself is excited by the prospect of returning to normal life. "I have a three-year-old daughter. I was a fruit vendor and have not been able to work for a year, but hopefully after the surgery I will be able to take care of my family again," he said.

Why car

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You just sit on it, start it up, and go!

The 15-pound, battery-operated, drivable suitcase is the brainchild of Chinese amateur inventor He Liangcai. On a full charge, the suitcase can transport two adults at 12 mph for a distance of up to 37 miles. It also has GPS navigation and a burglar alarm.

Essentially, the device is an electric scooter with a suitcase attached to it. The riders sit on top of the suitcase, and the handlebars feature a throttle, brakes and lights switch. During a demonstration, He Liangcai was able to ride the suitcase from his home to the Changsha train station in central Hunan province -- a distance of about seven miles.

He Liangcai said that he took 10 years to come up with the drivable scooter-suitcase. This isn't his first invention -- in 1999 he designed an award-winning car safety system. He lost his luggage while travelling to the US to collect the award, which is when he got the idea for the suitcase. Surprisingly, he is a farmer by profession, with very little formal education.

PM snubs concerns

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She also said it was not possible to file a case against the Jamaat on war crimes charges when a case over the party's registration was already pending with the Supreme Court.

She, however, urged people not to worry over the Jamaat issue and the trial of war criminals. "Have trust in me."

RAB, SEVEN-MURDER

Rejecting the call for disbanding the elite force, Hasina said, "Didn't the Rab kill more than 1,000 people in a year after its formation in 2004? But no criticism was made then. Everyone praised them then. But we've put them [Rab members] on trial whenever they've committed crimes."

About Narayanganj and Feni incidents, she said her government acted instantly. "We won't spare criminals whoever they might be or whatever the party they belong to. We are not sparing anyone."

On whether Shamim Osman helped Nur Hossain, the main accused in the seven-murder incident, flee the country, the premier said Shamim asked Hossain to surrender. "Is asking someone to surrender is helping him flee?"

She also questioned the authenticity of the news reports that claimed Shamim helped Hossain flee the country.

Hasina defended Shamim and said the telephone conversation between Hossain and Shamim would be investigated.

HC BENCH

The PM also talked about a High Court bench order for arrest of the three dismissed Rab officials for alleged involvement in the abduction and killing of seven people in Narayanganj.

She said, "When we were still investigating the matter ... and before that investigation was complete ... you tell us how come a High Court bench orders arrest of the three [Rab officers]?... Now if you want any evidence, seek it from the judges of that court ... they must have evidence as to what extent they [the three] were involved ... how much guilty they are, etc ... they [judges of the bench] can say it better. Collect information from them; give that [to us]. It will help us as well ... If the two judges of the bench that gave the arrest order provide detailed information, it will help expedite the case."

She continued, "When we struggle to take one step, some of them there take two/four steps and create such a situation that does not allow conducting a probe properly. It is a problem. I know my words are getting a bit harsh ... but what is real and true must be told."

As a reporter rose to ask a question, the PM said, "What? Scared? Will it warrant contempt [proceedings]? Doesn't matter. I don't care."

SUPPORT FOR LAW MINISTER

Defending Law Minister Anisul Huq, the PM said her government can do nothing with regard to banning Jamaat until the apex court delivered its verdict. "Everything depends on the decision of the higher court."

On Thursday, the law minister said the existing war crimes law was inadequate to try and punish any political party for its alleged crimes during the Liberation War in 1971.

Hasina said the minister's observa-

tion was realistic and correct from the legal point of view.

CREST FOR FOREIGN FRIENDS

About the crest issue, the prime minister said, "They are questioning the quantity of gold [in the shields] ... I think this is to bring it [the initiative to honour foreign friends] into question. Just like the Jamaat does not support our independence ... This is similar."

She added, "It is not important how much gold was there; it is important to honour the foreign friends and we did it."

Hasina, however, said those involved in the fraudulence would face action. She also went on to remind the journalists of the age-old proverb that goldsmiths steal gold even from their mothers' earrings.

The scandal triggered huge outcry, after the media reported that the BSTI in 2012 found each crest had only 2.363 grams of gold and 466.237 grams of brass. Each of those was supposed to contain 22.5 grams of gold and 339 grams of silver.

This forced the government to form a probe body that found the media reports to be true.

In its report, the committee said the government was robbed of around Tk 7.04 crore through the forgery. It held former state minister for Liberation War affairs ministry AB Tajul Islam and 12 others of his ministry responsible.

14 killed in Afghan blast

AFP, Ghazni

A roadside bomb killed 14 civilians in eastern Afghanistan yesterday, officials said, the latest violence in the country as US-led troops prepare to leave after 13 years of war.

The victims were travelling in the Giro district of Ghazni province after a wedding ceremony when the bomb ripped through their vehicle, district governor Abdullah Khairkhwah told AFP.

"Fourteen civilians were killed, seven of them were women, and the rest were men, as their minivan vehicles hit a roadside bomb," Khairkhwah said.

The district governor said the death toll could rise.

Ghazni provincial governor spokesman Shafiq Nang confirmed the incident.

Roadside bombs are commonly used by Taliban insurgents to target Afghan and foreign forces but often cause civilian casualties.

Attacks that kill civilians usually go unclaimed and there was no immediate admission of responsibility for the deaths.

Afghan MPs yesterday have summoned top security officials about security during an upcoming election run-off. Defence minister Bismillah Mohammadi said army forces were ready to handle security for the run-off, which will happen on June 14th.

"The enemies of Afghanistan have increased their attacks recently, because we are going to the elections run-off, and they want to cause this process to fail," Mohammadi added. "But they will fail."

Gypsies saying bye to rivers

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gypsy habitats in the country.

After studying up to class nine, he now teaches pre-primary school in his community of around 10,000 people.

"Our traditional professions are losing their demand. People no more believe in our spiritual healing service. Snake charming has also lost its popularity," said Hasina Begum, who once lived a conventional gypsy life but now runs a grocery shop at Porabari.

Tawny flocks wearing turbans, earrings, necklaces and bright apparels would roam here and there, spending their daily income in amusement without worrying about the next day -- this was once an everyday picture of gypsy life. However, those days seem gone for good.

"It's true that we are losing our heritage. But you see the world has changed so much ... It is not possible for us to survive by retaining it [the gypsy culture]," said Ujjal Miah, 30, also of Porabari.

Ujjal used to roam with his gypsy father until he was 15 and became a grocery shop assistant. He has been running his own shop for the last seven years.

The gypsies now prefer living in concrete abodes equipped with modern amenities to dwelling on boats or in tents at stranger places.

"A quality boat costs about Tk 1 lakh. After wandering for three months in the Sundarbans, we could earn around Tk 50,000. But repairing the boat damaged by salty water would cost at least Tk 30,000. At the end of the day, it appears non-profitable," said Rahmat Miah, an around 60-year-old man living on the outskirts of the capital at Kamarpada, home to some 200 gypsy families.

Only two or three people of his area are still in the snake charming business, he added. And Rahmat now spends time relating tales from his good old days to youngsters.

Soud Khan, an elderly member of the gypsy community living in Louhajang, Munshiganj, said the young generation was no more interested in their ancestral profession as it did not have any prospects and social dignity.

"Only those who don't have any other skills are retaining the profession," he said.

His observation was found somewhat right when Rezaul Ahmed of Porabari said, "Many people look down upon us. But we want to live with dignity like others in society."

Rezaul has completed graduation and is now looking for a "decent job".

According to the estimates of the Department of Social Services, there are around eight lakh people of the gypsy community in Bangladesh. The number is increasing.

However, the number of people retaining their hereditary professional identities is ever waning.

Concerned at this, Prof Meghna Guhathakurata, executive director of Research Initiative Bangladesh, which works on the gypsy community, thinks the government should help gypsies retain their culture by ensuring security for them, education for children and facilitating their trades.

3 AL men killed

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Superintendent of Pabna Police Mostain Hossain said they did not have the detailed information of the attack or of the casualties as no eyewitnesses were available.

Panic-stricken people fled the bazar following the attack. All the shops were reportedly shut down immediately.

No information on the number of attackers or the fate of those missing could be obtained as this correspondent could not reach anyone of the area despite several attempts till 10:30pm last night.

3 more make confessions

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The court also placed two other arrestees Mir Hossain Swapan and Jahidul Islam on two-day fresh remand each for quizzing further. The two were rounded up by the Rab.

Police yesterday produced the duo before the court upon completion of their five-day remand and sought 10-day fresh remand for each of them.

Meanwhile, Awami League activists in Phulgazi under the banner of "Ekram Mancha" blocked the Phulgazi-Feni road at Munshirhat for about one hour yesterday when a group of party men tried to join a protest rally in Feni town.

They chanted slogans against Feni-2 AL lawmaker Nizam Hazari, blaming him for the killing.

Speaking as chief guest at the rally, Nizam claimed himself to be innocent. He said if the probe found his connection with the killing, he would be ready to court arrest.

The district AL held the rally demanding speedy trial of the perpetrators.

Phulgazi upazila AL also called a hartal for tomorrow demanding immediate arrest and punishment of the killers.

Earlier, four arrestees -- Abidul Islam Abid, Kazi Shanan Mahmud, Chowdhury Nafiz Uddin Anik and

Helal Uddin -- admitted their involvement in the killing mission before the same court.

All the seven were picked up by the Rapid Action Battalion from Helal's residence in the capital's Bashundhara on May 23.

Ekram, who was also president of Phulgazi upazila AL, was first shot and then burned alive in his car near the Bilashi Cinema in Feni town on May 20.

QUIZZING BY RAB

During primary interrogation, Saikat, a private university student in Dhaka, told the Rab that Jihad Chowdhury provided him with a pistol and ammo on May 19.

He claimed that during the killing attempt, he pulled the trigger of the pistol, but it did not work.

Jihad, a close aide to Nizam Hazari and joint general secretary of Phulgazi upazila AL, allegedly masterminded the killing.

Shipon, a BBA student at another private university, told the elite force that Jihad, councillor Shiblu and Mister, a bodyguard of Nizam, asked him to come to the stadium area on May 20.

He said the trio distributed firearms and sharp weapons among the assailants the night before the killing.

Sifat told the law enforcers that he

reached Bilashi Cinema area around 8:30am on May 20. He saw Abid, Saikat and Shanan shooting at Ekram.

Abid earlier confessed to the Rab that he shot Ekram from close range using a 7.62mm pistol supplied by Jihad.

Following the murder, Ekram's brother Rezaul Haq lodged a case with Feni Model Police Station accusing local BNP leader Mahtab Uddin Chowdhury Minar and 34 unnamed people.

Minar was arrested by the Detective Branch of police in the capital's cantonment area on Tuesday and later placed on an eight-day remand.

Schoolboy

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him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), where physicians declared him dead.

The motive for the killing could not be known immediately.

DMCH camp police detained Akash and Hridoy, said hospital sources.

Talking to newsmen at the hospital, Akash said Shafiq had a quarrel with local youths Afzal and Raqib some days ago.

Inspector Mozammel Haque, camp in-charge, said they were interrogating some suspects.

American carried out Syria suicide bombing

AFP, Washington

An American fighting for a hardline Islamist group carried out a deadly suicide bombing, US officials said Friday, in the first such case in the war.

The confirmation came amid growing fears over the flood of foreigners into Syria, with no end in sight in the three-year war that has already left 162,000 people dead.

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki identified the suicide bomber as Moner Mohammad Abu-Salha.

Abu-Salha is thought to have been behind a truck bombing against regime forces on Sunday in the northern province of Idlib.

He went by the alias Abu Hurayra Al-Amriki. Abu Hurayra refers to a

companion of the prophet Mohammed and Al-Amriki means "the American" in Arabic.

Psaki agreed it was believed to be the first such suicide bombing carried out by an American since the start of the war in 2011.

Estimates of the number of foreign fighters who have flooded into Syria in the past three years range from between 9,000 to 11,000, with most believed to have come from neighboring countries.

Psaki could not give precise figures of how many Americans may be among them.

But The New York Times said about 100 Americans are believed to have traveled to Syria, mainly to join the rebels fighting to oust President Bashar al-Assad.