

Hearing today on bail for Tarique's aide

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court is set to hear a bail petition of Mia Nur Uddin Apu, personal secretary to BNP Vice-Chairman Tarique Rahman, today in a case filed in connection with Tk 21-crore bribery involving the murder of a Bashundhara Group director Humayun Kabir Sabbir.

The bribery case was filed on October 4, 2007 at Ramna Police Station claiming that several people are involved in receiving and giving the 21-crore bribe to ensure that Shafiat Sobhan Sanvir, son of Bashundhara Group Chairman Shah Alam, did not have to face the charges of murdering Sabbir.

On May 6 the next year, the ACC pressed charges against seven people including Sanvir, his father Shah Alam, Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman, former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar and Apu over the bribery.

Apu had been absconding but surrendered before the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Md Ataul Haque on June 18 this year and sought his bail in an extortion case.

However, the court rejected the plea and sent him to jail. Later, the personal secretary to Tarique was also shown arrested in the bribery case.

On June 19, Judge Bashudev Roy of Special Judge Court-3 of Dhaka fixed today for hearing the bail plea of Apu and asked him to be present. Roy passed the order after the lawyers of Apu filed a bail petition.

Tarique was arrested on March 7, 2007 after Amin Ahmed, proprietor of Al Amin Construction Company Ltd filed the extortion case against him and Apu on charges of extorting over Tk one crore from him on December 30, 2006. The BNP Vice-Chairman was also remanded in the case.

Tarique secured a bail from the High Court in the case later.

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Evicted by Border Guard Bangladesh, Gopa, her hand in the cast, along with the Adivasis who have been evicted from their homes is now living in a school in Khagrachhari. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: COURTESY

21 Adivasi families become homeless

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In 1997, but could not manage to build a home there until recently.

Gopa's ancestors came to the area in the 1960s when they were displaced from Rangamati due to the construction of the Kaptai Dam.

The BGB headquarters is being built on 29.81 acres of land where the decades-old Baghaichhari Government Primary School (No 2) is.

As the entire area is fenced off with barbed wire now, the school has become virtually inaccessible to its students, many of whom are from the evicted families.

"None of us will send the children to a school inside the headquarters that made us homeless in the first place," said Santosh Kumar Karbari,

a village elder who lost two shops there.

Meanwhile, around 80 people of the evicted families have taken shelter in three classrooms of the nearby Babuchhara High School. Women, children and the elderly have been living in inhuman conditions in the dingy rooms for over a month.

"Most of us have not been able to bring even kitchen utensils and clothes with us, let alone other necessary stuff. I don't know how long we will be able to live like this," said Mrinal Kanti Chakma, another evicted resident of the village.

Uncertainty grips them as they do not know where to go when the school opens after the Ramadan holidays.

The local administration as well

as the BGB, however, said the families were making "false claims" in the hope of making some quick cash in the name of compensation.

"A vested quarter, which does not want the headquarters to be built here, has instigated the indigenous people to make such irrational claims," said Major Kamal Uddin of BGB 51 Battalion.

Asked why the primary school had been fenced in, he said, "We will open the gates during school hours so the students can attend classes."

Md Masud Karim, deputy commissioner of Khagrachhari, admitted that fencing the school was a mistake. "I will tell them to remove the fence," he said while talking to journalists at his residence.

He asserted that the 21 families, claiming to have lost their homes, were doing so "to tarnish the image of BGB and hamper the administration's land acquisition process".

The indigenous people said the administration had offered 10 of them cash for their land and trees but they had rejected the offer outright.

"We want our homes back. No amount of compensation is as good as our homes," said Mrinal Kanti Chakma.

Nobokamal Chakma, the chairman of Dighinala upazila, said the authorities should have asked the opinion of the local government representatives before evicting the families.

BB looks

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Bacchu, who arbitrarily made decisions and granted hundreds of crores in loans to false and non-existent companies, Moniruzzaman said, "Bangladesh Bank has little to do with the boards of state-run banks. It [the BB] cannot punish or file any criminal case against the board under the banking laws."

The BB official said there was no question of making scapegoats of officials who aided Bacchu.

"Under the law, officials are responsible as a bank cannot disburse a single penny without the signature of the managing director or other officials concerned," he said.

"In the eyes of the laws, they [who helped Bacchu in the irregularities] were responsible."

On why the MD was removed nearly two years after the detection of gross financial irregularities in the bank, the BB official said the central bank was not empowered to remove an MD under the previous banking law.

"But we made no delay in updating the government in this regard," he said.

The governor also ordered the BASIC Bank chairman to strengthen the taskforce formed to recover loans and inform the board about the updates at every board meeting.

Elderly couple

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Mithu, 23, of Jhenidah, is a fifth-semester student of Fashion Design in Mymensingh's Rumdo Institute of Modern Technology.

He got acquainted with the couple through his sister, who used to be a tenant there two years ago.

On several occasions, he demanded Tk 35,000 in loan from the couple to pay his college fees, said Mazedur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Detective Branch of police of the district.

On Saturday, Mithu went to the couple's house, where they used to live alone, around 10:00pm and asked for the money again. Refused, he started slashing Rayhatunnessa with a machete in her chest and neck, police said.

When Abdul Haque came to her rescue from the adjacent room, Mithu attacked him with the machete.

Neighbours rushed to the spot on hearing screams, and caught Mithu when he was trying to run away. The neighbours then found the bodies lying in a pool of blood on the first floor of the house.

Police later recovered the bodies and also the machete used in the killing.

The couple have two sons who live in Dhaka, family sources said.

Man dies

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After she opened the door, police led by SI Zahid started searching the flat.

At one point, they beat her up. When she was screaming in pain, Sujana came out of the attic. "Police then cuffed him and took all of us to the police station," she said.

"At the police station they kept me in a separate room and started torturing my husband. I heard his screaming 'Save me ... they are killing me'," said Lucy.

She last heard him screaming around dawn as police released her and sent her to her parents' in Mirpur.

Later, police informed her of Sujana being in hospital. She came to know about his death around 12:30pm yesterday. She claimed that she saw several marks of injury in back of the head, face and hands of the body.

Lucy said Sujana's garment waste business was in Mirpur area. She claimed that he had been paying money, from Tk 5,000 to 25,000 a month, to local thugs and police. "SI Zahid is one who received money from my husband," she said.

"Over the last one year Zahid was demanding Tk 1 lakh a month from him but the amount was too high for my husband and he was delaying over it," said the widow.

"For this, Zahid harassed my husband several times. He even lodged a false arms case against my brother-in-law and put him in jail," she claimed.

Sujana's body has been kept at the mortuary of Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Morgue sources said a board will be formed to perform an autopsy today.

The SI could not be reached for comments.

The police have filed two cases against Sujana yesterday, one with Mirpur Model Police Station and the other with Hazaribagh Police Station.

Trader shot dead

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Agriculture Development Board office around 4:00pm.

They snatched the money after shooting Mamun thrice and stabbing Rahim indiscriminately. They drove away on three motorcycles, said locals and police.

Mamun died on the spot.

Md Abdur Rashid, officer-in-charge of Joypurhat Police Station, said they had started raiding several places in the district to arrest the killers.

The slain trader was shot in the head, chest and back at close range and Rahim was being treated at a local hospital with critical injuries, added the police officer.

China 'admits' trading in tiger skins

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Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Cites).

However, during the convention's standing committee meeting in Geneva, China reportedly said that it still banned tiger bones.

"A Chinese delegate said, 'we don't ban trade in tiger skins but we do ban trade in tiger bones,'" a participant in the meeting said.

Cites secretariat sources confirmed that a member of the Chinese delegation had said this.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang told the BBC Chinese Service he could not verify the reported admission, but he said that China will "investigate and combat" any illegal trade in tiger skins.

Between 5,000 and 6,000 tigers are believed to be in captivity in China. Wildlife conservation organisations have long demanded an end to the trade in skins.

Wildlife experts believe "tiger farming" in China has fuelled demand for the poaching and trafficking of the endangered species elsewhere.

They say the admission at the meeting will increase pressure on China to curb the practice.

Reports also say that the facilities where the captive tigers are held have been providing live animals and parts for illegal international trade.

'COMMERCIAL SCALE' According to officials and participants at the Cites meeting, the admission from China followed the presentation of a report which gave details of how the Chinese government had allowed commercial trade in skins from captive tigers.

"The report presented in the meeting created a situation that required China to respond," said a participant who did not wish to be named.

"Basically when the meeting focused on the findings of this report, the Chinese delegate intervened," he said. "It was the first time they admitted officially that this trade exists in China."

Participants say this created quite a sensation during the Cites meeting.

After the Chinese intervention... we too intervened and made it clear

that the investigations we have done with other organisations clearly show that the trade in China is happening on a commercial scale," said Shruti Suresh, a wildlife campaigner with the UK-based Environment Investigation Agency, which has investigated the illegal wildlife trade across the globe.

"The clarification was necessary because the Chinese delegate did not say that it was happening on a commercial scale, and there was a risk that the trade could later be misreported as something done for scientific research or, say, displays in the museums."

Member countries of the Cites are required to report on what progress they have made to ensure that trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

A new report on illegal wildlife trade suggests that around 1,600 tigers, both from captivity and the wild, have been traded globally since 2000.

'NON-FINANCIAL BRIBES' While China has been a major market for tiger parts, wildlife experts

say other South East Asian countries like Vietnam, Thailand, Lao, Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia are also emerging as consumers, where tiger farming is growing.

Reports say that in the past two years, there have been seizures of nearly 90 tigers likely to have been sourced from, or trafficked through, captive facilities across South East Asia and China.

"Demand-reduction efforts and enforcement and anti-trafficking activities are undermined both by the existence of facilities that keep and breed tigers for commercial purposes, and the lack of enforcement to stop trade from or through them," says a report by Species Survival Network (SSN), whose members include more than 100 wildlife conservation organisations.

"Trade in these specimens perpetuated the desirability of tiger parts and China's experiment in licensing the domestic trade in skins of captive tigers has done nothing to alleviate pressure on wild tigers, as evidenced through continued poaching in the wild."

A little more than 3,000 tigers are

believed to be left in the wild across the globe. More than half of those are in India, where 42 tigers were killed last year.

"If the Chinese government has admitted the trade in tiger skins, I think it is a forward step toward curbing illegal trade in tiger parts," said SP Yadav, deputy inspector general of India's National Tiger Conservation Authority. "Denial mode does not help solve the problem but once you accept what is happening, it's easy to move ahead."

The SSN report says the skins of tigers, leopards and snow leopards are valued among the political, military and business elite as luxury home decorations in China. "The outcome of recent corruption cases in China confirm they are 'gifted' as non-financial bribes to officials," the report says.

In 2005, China had announced that it was considering re-opening the domestic trade in tiger bone from tiger breeding facilities. Two years later, Cites parties adopted a decision calling for the phasing out of such facilities.

Islamist militia attacks rivals at Libya airport

US warns of 'widespread conflict'

AFP, Tripoli

Heavy fighting raged around Libya's main international airport yesterday as Islamist militia attacked liberal rivals in their Tripoli bastion, in an intensifying power struggle after a controversial June election.

Exchanges of fire with heavy weapons forced the closure of the airport as foreign ministers from the North African nation's neighbours were to meet in Tunisia to consider how to aid chaos-riddled Libya.

The assault on the Zintan group by rival Islamist militants also came after the UN pulled staff from Libya citing security reasons, and as the United States warned of further escalation.

An airport official said "rockets struck inside the airport perimeter around 6 am (0400 GMT)" and was followed by heavy clashes between the Zintan militia which controls the airport and rival gunmen.

Loud explosions and heavy gunfire was heard in the city centre, 25 kilometres (15 miles) away, AFP correspondents reported.

An airport source said Zintan fighters pushed back the assailants but

that clashes continued to rage around the facility, as witnesses reported seeing tanks deploy and smoke billowing in the area.

Authorities closed the airport for at least three days from Sunday after initially halting flights.

The former rebel Zintan militia helped topple strongman Moamer Kadhafi in the 2011 NATO-backed uprising, and is now well established in Tripoli, controlling the airport and military sites.

The heavily armed group, named after a hill town southwest of the capital, is considered the armed wing of the liberal movement which is jockeying for power with Islamists who dominate parliament.

Sunday's attack was claimed by the Operations Cell of Libyan Revolutionaries, a coalition of Islamist militias seen as the armed wing of Islamists within the General National Congress or parliament.

"The revolutionary forces arrive within the perimeter of Tripoli airport and clash with armed groups inside," it said on its Facebook page.

The fighting comes weeks after the contested June 25 general election to replace the Islamist-

dominated GNC, which has been mired in controversy and accused of hogging power.

Libya, awash with weapons since the 2011 uprising, has also been plagued by growing lawlessness while on the political front rival cabinets are jostling for power.

The embattled Tripoli government has been powerless to act and has struggled to establish a strong army and police force, allowing ex-rebels a free hand to act.

Sunday's clashes came just hours after the United States warned that the conflict could become "widespread" unless a new parliament is seated quickly and a new constitution drafted.

"The United States is deeply concerned by the ongoing violence in Libya and dangerous posturing that could lead to widespread conflict there," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said.

"We affirm our support for Libya's democratic transition and urge the seating of the new Council of Representatives as soon as possible."

She insisted that drafting a new constitution "must advance without interference or violence".

Pope seeks advice

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said a statement issued by Yunus Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

The leader of the worldwide Catholic Church invited the Nobel peace laureate and some other influential thinkers to a conference on "The Global Common Good: Towards a More Inclusive Economy" in Vatican City on July 11-12.

The Pope took the initiative to hold the consultation meeting on what is needed at the global policy level to overcome the social plagues that humiliate the dignity of people.

In line with his predecessors, the Pope has declared his opposition to the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and to an attitude of indifference that characterises today's political, economic and social situation.

He also expressed a keen interest in the social business idea developed by Prof Yunus and his view about the role of selflessness in the economy, according to the statement.

During the conference organised by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Prof Yunus highlighted his views about poverty, unemployment and state charity.

He explained to the church leaders how social businesses could create a world free from unemployment, poverty, and dependence on state charity.

"The present conceptual frame-

work of capitalist economy is morally wrong and is based on a very narrow interpretation of human beings, which assigns a role which is antagonistic to the unleashing of basic human qualities of sharing and caring," Yunus said.

Global thinkers who attended the meeting include Jose Angel Gurria, secretary general of OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development); Mark Carney, governor of Bank of England; Michel Camdessus, former managing director of International Monetary Fund; Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, finance minister of Nigeria; Donald Kaberuka, president of African Development Bank; Huguette Labelle, chairman of Transparency International, and Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Earth Institute of Columbia University.

On July 10, the founder of Grameen Bank delivered a lecture in Italian parliament on social business.

He had a meeting with Senator Ignazio Marino, mayor of Rome.

The mayor invited the Bangladeshi economist to help him launch a Grameen microcredit programme in his city, similar to the programme already implemented in New York.

Prof Yunus also met Jose Graziano da Silva, director general of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and addressed the staff of the UN agency.