

PM's remark won't sway trial

Law minister on Aug 21 cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday refuted BNP's allegation that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's comment linking party Chairperson Khaleda Zia's family with the August 21, 2004 grenade attack will influence the ongoing trial.

"She [Hasina] talked about the magnitude of the incident and why action [against the culprits] was not taken [by the then BNP-led government]. If her remarks are analysed this way, the trial won't be influenced," the minister told reporters, emerging from a conference at a city hotel.

On Thursday on the 10th anniversary of the gruesome attack on an Awami League rally, which killed 24 party leaders and injured over 300 people, Hasina said BNP founder Ziaur Rahman was behind the murder of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and his family was involved in the grenade attack.

Such remarks will influence the ongoing trial, said Khandker Mahbub Hossain, president of the Supreme Court Bar Association and an adviser to the BNP chief, the next day.

The attack was part of a conspiracy to kill Hasina and AL senior leaders, Anisul Huq said.

As many as 52 people are accused in two cases filed in connection with

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Rise in the water level of the Padma and strong currents disrupt ferry services at Mawa and Paturia, resulting in long queues of buses at Mawa and parking lot full of trucks, inset, in Paturia waiting to get across the river yesterday. PHOTO: STAR



Flood lingers in northern districts

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Shortage of drinking water had become a major concern for them as well, he added.

Mofazzal Hossain, chairman of Rajpur union parishad in Lalmonirhat Sadar, said he had sought relief materials for the flood-affected people of his area from the local administration on Thursday, but received no response till yesterday.

"So, I personally distributed some dry foods among the affected people."

The picture is almost the same elsewhere though the National Disaster Response Coordination Centre (NDRCC) claims 1,500 metric tonnes of rice and Tk 20 lakh have already been allocated as relief for 12 flood-hit districts.

"But in some places the amount of relief may be insufficient or the local administration perhaps is late in taking those to the victims," said Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of the NDRCC.

The Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) said 11 rivers were flowing above the danger level at 16 monitoring points yesterday.

Though water level of rivers in the northern districts was coming down, rivers in the central part, especially the Padma, are likely to swell up further, said FFWC Executive Engineer Amirul Hossain.

"The increase in water flow may cause flooding in the central districts, including Tangail, Munshiganj, Madaripur and Shariatpur in the next few days," he told The Daily Star.

Worse still, India is releasing three lakh cubic metre water per second through Gazaldoba Barrage into Bangladesh. This, coupled with heavy downpours, has caused recurrence of flooding in Nilphamari's Joldhaka and Dimla in the Teesta basin yesterday.

In Bogra, around 20,000 flood victims were passing their days amid sufferings as government relief materials were yet to reach most of the affected areas.

At least 46 educational institutes in Bogra and 52 in Gaibandha remained closed due to the flood.

Meanwhile, a three-year-old child drowned in floodwater at Saniazan of Hatibandha upazila in Lalmonirhat yesterday.

Milon Islam, son of Samad Miah, was sitting on a cot inside their house

as floodwater had submerged the floor of the house. The child at one point fell from the cot into the water while his mother was away.

Like the past few days, strong currents and erosion in the swelling Padma hampered ferry services on Paturia-Doulatdia and Mawa-Kawrakandi routes yesterday as well.

Twelve ferries out of 16 could be operated and the number of trips made by each ferry was halved, leaving hundreds of vehicles stranded on both the sides for hours.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation requested transport owners to avoid Paturia-Daulatdia route for 14 hours from 6:00am yesterday due to congestion of vehicles on both ends persisting over the last two days.

Interpol

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During primary interrogation, Tipu admitted his involvement in the crime and revealed how his associates Nurul Amin and Nuru Islam lured boys, aged between nine and fifteen, into the trap with job offers and then shot films and snapped pictures, in which Tipu himself acted, said the official.

After sending the video clips to his clients over the internet, Tipu used to get money from them through Western Union, using the bank account of his other associate Shaharul Islam, said Alam.

He used to pay the children about Tk 200 - 300, and they never complained to anyone since they came from very poor families, Alam added.

Tipu was caught red-handed with a child, but the child, after being rescued, initially denied he was being abused, although his medical report showed otherwise.

However, once he felt reassured, the child talked to police, said Alam. "Money is all that matters to these children as they are very poor," said Prof Ishrat Shamim, president of the Centre for Women and Children Studies. These street children also face many forms of exploitation, she added.

"Providing them with shelter might reduce the risk [of their getting exploited], but it is the demand side that needs to be controlled," she said.

Referring to a report published in the 1990s, Prof Nazrul Islam, chairman of psychology department at Dhaka University, said, "Street children, both boys and girls, get abused by seniors or strangers, and this is not a new experience for them."

Regarding the long-term psychological impact on these children, both Alam and Nazrul said these children would likely grow up with a negative attitude towards society, with no respect for law. Many of them might get involved in anti-social activities.

"Unless and until we can provide social and economic security, we cannot prevent such exploitation of children who are growing up on the streets," said Nazrul.

Textile industry on a rocky road

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last year was 59 million bales, of which it internally produced 33 million. The rest 26 million it procured from the global market.

But China right now is straddled with a huge carried-over stock of 69 million bales. To manage the carried-over stock, it discouraged further import by hiking duty on cotton.

This triggered off a global alarm that cotton demand will be less this year. Since June, cotton prices tumbled by 20 cents a pound from an average price of \$1 a pound.

And this has left Bangladeshi spinners in a bad situation.

They had bought cotton at a higher price of \$1 from the spot market. Since they could not take any hedging coverage, they were left in an open position meaning they were left uncovered for any fluctuations in the market.

The net result - they either have to swallow the loss or the garment manufacturers will have to buy yarn from local producers at a higher price which does not reflect the global trend.

The situation is in stark contrast with other textile countries like India and Vietnam which allow hedging.

As much as it may sound simple, cotton procurement is a complicated method. Buyers from around the globe

book their products at the Inter Continental Commodity Exchange, NY (ICE) where all agricultural commodities, metals like gold, copper, silver and even cattle are traded. ICE market is electronically active eighteen hours a day.

Every moment prices may fluctuate depending on a wide range of reasons starting from bad weather forecast to military conflicts to bad economic indicators of major countries.

The industry takes possession of its required raw material for future production from the commodity merchants, and then it needs to protect itself from the fluctuation.

A wide choice of hedging instruments is available. Buyers can opt for an instrument which will protect them against price slide once they purchase cotton or any other commodity. Under this arrangement, if a buyer buys cotton at \$1 a pound and the price goes down to 80 cents, the buyer will pay the lower price.

Or the buyer can go for a fixed price contract under which he will pay his spot price (the price at which he bought) no matter what the prevailing price is.

This sophisticated system works well, and all major commodity importing countries allow their importers this

facility. But Bangladesh, despite being the second largest garment manufacturer in the world, does not permit it.

When textile manufacturers faced such crisis in 2007, they demanded this facility from the Bangladesh Bank. The central bank set up a committee and said the committee might allow hedging on a case-to-case basis.

However, this proved useless as purchase decisions have to be made instantly as prices move fast and waiting for the committee's decision for days does not work.

Importers say cotton price was 75 cents a pound at the NY futures market on June 30 this year and it has slid to 64 cents now. If they had the hedging facility, they could have saved 11 cents straight.

The 2010-11 experience is another example of how our textile sector suffers because of open-ended deals.

From May 2010, the futures market started moving up on news that the Chinese production would be less.

The futures market in May 2010 was 70-80 cents a pound, and it went up to \$2.05 by March 2011.

But new information on global carried-over stock and new production influenced the futures market and price started dropping by April 2011. By July 2011, the price came down to \$1.

Bangladeshi spinners lost around \$500 million due to this fluctuation. Many of them refused to buy cotton at such a huge loss.

Members of the international cotton body (Cotton Merchant Association) went to arbitration against the spinning mills and obtained award in favour of them of around \$400 million. About 100 spinning mills were blacklisted and there were some lawsuits in Bangladeshi court.

Eventually, 70 spinning mills swallowed the loss and made some bilateral understanding with the merchants. But the rest 30 mills are still blacklisted.

This created a financial crisis in the industry. Lots of spinners are fighting back to recover. But they could have avoided the situation using hedging tools.

Bangladesh Bank, however, holds a different view on hedging.

It feels hedging is very costly and Bangladeshi businesses are not so wise to take advantage of it.

Some Chittagong-based businesses hedged commodities, especially edible oil, and incurred huge losses few years ago, bank officials say.

However, industry insiders say it is not really costly if risks are counted. A pound of cotton can be hedged for 3-4 cents only.

STEALING OF TWIN BABY AT DMCH

Investigators still in the dark

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Investigators are still in the dark about the whereabouts of the woman who stole an identical twin from the neonatal unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Meanwhile, Kawsar Hossain, the stolen baby's father, alleged neither the DMCH authority nor police are showing any interest in finding the three-day-old baby.

"Although two days have passed and investigators have been handed the CCTV image of the woman, they are yet to tell me any word of hope," said Kawsar.

No one from the DMCH came to talk to him or console him after the incident, he told The Daily Star.

Kawsar pointed finger at hospital staffs and said it was impossible for anyone to steal a baby without their assistance from the maternity ward.

The twin boys were born on Wednesday morning to Runa Begum, a housewife, and Kawsar, a security guard of an apartment building. The couple reside in Mohammadpur.

The incident exposes serious security flaws at the country's premier public hospital that has as many as 53 CCTV cameras installed and an adequate number of guards watching over its precincts.

Shabbagh Police Station's Sub Inspector Ferdous Alam Sarker, the investigating officer (IO) of the case, said a team of police are working to track the thief down.

Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah's contributions recalled

DU CORRESPONDENT

Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah, the renowned academician and secular social reformer, played a pioneer role in educating the Muslim community by merging religion based education with general education, speakers told a discussion yesterday.

The discussion on the contributions of Ahsanullah to the society was jointly organised by Political Science Association and Nalta Central Ahsania Mission at the senate building of Dhaka University.

DU Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique said when the Muslims in the then East Bengal, now Bangladesh, were lagging behind, Ahsanullah played a significant role in developing the concept of including general courses in madrasa education.

Anisuzzaman, professor of the philosophy department of DU, said in recognition of Ahsanullah's contributions to establishing the university, a dormitory should be named after him.

Former minister AFM Ruhul Haque and Prof Aminul Islam also spoke.

Ahsanullah was the first person to join Indian Education Service from the undivided Bengal in 1919. He established Ahsania Mission and many schools. He passed away in 1965.

Zia family

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"We strongly condemned the attack from the very beginning and demanded punishment for the real culprits. But what has the government done? It has changed the investigation officer of the case five to six times and appointed at last a retired police officer who has linked Tarique in the case," he said addressing a protest rally at the Jatiya Press Club.

The Bangla daily Amar Desh organised the rally protesting the detention of its acting editor Mahmudur Rahman as well as the suspension of the daily's publication for 500 days.

Fakhrul's remarks came after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Thursday alleged that BNP founder Ziaur Rahman was behind the killing of Bangabandhu on August 15, 1975 while his family was behind the August 21 grenade attack.

Referring to the poor health condition of Amar Desh acting editor, the BNP spokesperson said Mahmudur can be freed only when this government is ousted.

Columnist Farhad Mazhar said Mahmudur's detention is one of many instances of the present government's repressive policy.

"It is the responsibility of all citizens to stand by BNP. Otherwise, the public will have to suffer more," he said.

BNP chairperson's adviser Shawkat Mahmud, former president of a faction of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) Ruhul Amin Gazi, DAB Secretary General AZM Zahid and Prof Piash Karim, among others, spoke at the rally.

Souls of bauls bleeding

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harassment, that is until early August, when he had to pay the price for preaching love for mankind and equality of all.

On August 3, about 25 men, led by the village chief Abbas Ali alias Abbas Piddhan, attacked his akhra (a meeting place for bauls) in Chandpur village under Gangni upazila when he, along with his followers, was singing baul songs.

The attackers beat them up and threatened to oust them from the village if they did not say their prayers regularly at a mosque and abandon baul philosophy altogether.

On the following day at least 30 of Bakkar's followers from the village were summoned and forced to perform public penance before Mawlana Nasir Uddin who is an imam of a village mosque and an activist of Jamaat-e-Islami. Bakkar, however, managed to flee along with a few of his followers.

As he returned to his akhra on August

7 after lodging a complaint case with the Chief Judicial Magistrate's court, he was subjected to a brutal retaliatory assault at night.

A group of seven unidentified men pinned him down, gagged his mouth, blindfolded him and cut off his hair and moustache around 10:30pm.

"Baul philosophy is my religion and I have practised it for decades. I have never faced any trouble before. Nor did I bother anyone because I live in seclusion. Then why should I be subjected to such humiliation?" protested Bakkar who has since gone into hiding with many of his followers including Minhaz Uddin, Motaleb Hossain and Kuddus Ali.

Bakkar filed the case against Mawlana Nasir, village chief Abbas Ali and his aides Ramzan Ali, Sanwar Ali and Rouf. He said his lack of confidence in the police had led him directly to the court. He, however, did not lodge any complaint after the second attack.

The court ordered Raipur Union

Parishad (UP) Chairman Alfazuddin Kalu to investigate the matter and submit a report within a week. The chairman, having received the letter on August 8, sought an extension of two more weeks and is yet to submit his findings as of filing this report at 6:00pm on August 23.

According to local sources, Mawlana Nasir, Abbas Ali, Sanwar Ali and many of their aides had held a number of meetings where the Mawlana issued fatwa against the bauls.

"Baul philosophy contradicts Islam in so many ways. If anyone follows baulism, he must be stopped," Mawlana Nasir told this correspondent over the phone.

Following the incidents a sense of insecurity now prevails among bauls across the district, especially among Bakkar's followers and close associates, as the attackers got off scot-free and continue to issue threats to everybody practising baulism.

Meanwhile, different socio cultural

organisations and bauls in Kushtia, Meherpur and Chuadanga condemned the attacks and demanded exemplary punishment to the perpetrators.

"The government has to deal the attackers with an iron hand, otherwise the baul community will not survive," Mohammad Ali, the current caretaker of Laloh Academy in Kushtia, told this correspondent.

Meherpur Police Super AKM Nahidul Islam told this correspondent since the court ordered the UP chairman to investigate the matter they had not arrested the attackers.

"But the cultural ministry sent me a directive to address the matter immediately. I'll start a police investigation very soon to bring the attackers to book," he said.

BAKKAR AND HIS FOLLOWERS RETURN HOME

In a latest development, a team of at least 50 cultural activists comprising singers Anusheh Anadil and Shafi Mondol, baul

researcher Saimon Zakaria, and members of Chuadanga District Laloh Committee and many other local bauls met Bakkar in Meherpur on August 20. After an assurance of security from Meherpur police and the Gangni municipality mayor Ahmed Ali, they accompanied Bakkar and his followers to their village homes.

Blaming the government's laxity for the attacks, Shafi Mondol, a renowned baul singer, said bauls across the country are vulnerable to sporadic attacks masterminded by religious fanatics.

"Such heinous attacks are nothing new. Only they never make the headlines. The government is not taking any action against these attackers," said Shafi.

The last attack that drew some media attention took place at Char Ramnagar village in Pangsha upazila of Rajbari district in which 28 bauls were assaulted and their hair and moustache cut following instructions of a local imam.