

2 YEARS OF TAWKI MURDER

No headway in probe

Influential quarter 'obstructing' charge sheet submission

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Two years into the sensational murder of Tanvir Mohammad Tawki, the A-level student and son of cultural activist Rafiur Rabbi, law enforcers have yet to submit the charge sheet.

The Rapid Action Battalion, which is investigation the murder, could not make any tangible progress in their probe either.

Sultan Shawkat alias Bhromor, who had been arrested in the case, has allegedly fled the country after getting bail from higher court.

In a confessional statement before Senior Judicial Magistrate Court of Narayanganj, Bhromor said a gang led by Azmeri Osman, son of late Jatiya Party lawmaker Nasim Osman and nephew of Awami League MP Shamim Osman, killed Tawki.

He added Tawki was killed at the office of Azmeri in College Road area of the city on March 6, 2013, and his body was put in a sack and dumped in

the Shitalakkhya river at Charargope.

The body was found on the bank of the Shitalakkhya on March 8.

Meanwhile, Santrash Nirmul Tawki Mancha, a platform seeking justice for the gruesome killing, alleged an influential quarter was trying to obstruct the submission of the charge sheet.

Tawki's father lodged the murder case against seven people, including Shamim Osman and his son Ayon Osman on March 20, 2013.

Narayanganj Sadar Model Police Station first probed the case, later transferred to the Detective Branch of police.

Following a petition by Rafiur, the higher court directed the elite force to investigate the murder.

On March 5 last year, Rab Additional Director Col Ziaul Ahsan claimed the investigation was at final stage and the charge sheet would be submitted soon.

No light at the end

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rights. Ironically, it's those very people they claim to be fighting for have become the worst victims of the turmoil persisting for the last two months.

The BNP-led combine remains rigid on continuing the nonstop blockade and enforcing frequent hartals come what may. Their aim is to force the government to hold an early parliamentary election under a non-partisan administration.

The AL, which returned to the power for the second consecutive time through the one-sided January 5 election a year ago, vows not to give in to any pressure. It seems determined to foil the opposition alliance's street agitations through administrative measures, instead of making political efforts.

Held hostage by the political standoff, everyone is searching for the answer to one vexing question—when and how the situation will be normal. But nobody has the answer.

Even many senior leaders of both the AL and the BNP do not know about the strategy of their own camps. They do not have a voice in their own parties on this issue.

Exposing the sheer hollowness of the country's democracy, they commented that everything now depends on the wishes of the two top leaders—Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia.

And what did their rigidity bring about?

As many as 82 people, 65 of them had no political affiliations, were killed in arson attacks and other forms of violence since January 6.

In addition, extrajudicial killings increased alarmingly. At least 41 people

fell victim to this menace in the last 60 days of the blockade.

Deeply worried by the escalation of the violence, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon sent separate letters to Hasina and Khaleda in early February. He urged them to engage in constructive dialogue to peacefully resolve the current political crisis.

A group of eminent citizens of the country on February 7 sent letters to President Abdul Hamid, Hasina and Khaleda and made the same demand.

And last week, 16 foreign envoys stationed in Dhaka wrote to Hasina and Khaleda, urging them to hold talks to find a way out of the crisis.

Prime Minister Hasina and her colleagues in the cabinet and the party are vehemently refusing to hold talks with the BNP.

The 20-party combine on the other hand has been enforcing hartals on all the working days since February 1, on top of the indefinite blockade.

The ongoing blockade is the longest-ever nonstop political agitation the country has ever experienced.

The previous major agitations took place in 1990 against the autocratic Ershad regime, in 1995-96 and 2006 against the then BNP-led governments, and in 2013 against the AL-led government.

But none of those was as long as the ongoing one and not so many lives perished in any of those.

The BNP-led alliance sets a record today by continuing the blockade for 60 consecutive days, a record that may get bigger as there is no apparent sign yet of bringing an end to the stalemate.

COALMINE GRAFT CASE

HC verdict on Khaleda's plea on March 10

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday fixed March 10 for delivery of the verdict on a petition filed by BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia for quashing the proceedings of Barapukuria coalmine corruption case against her.

The Anti-Corruption Commission filed the case on February 26, 2008, accusing Khaleda and others of causing a loss of Tk 159 crore to the state exchequer by awarding a contract for the operation of Barapukuria coalmine to a Chinese company abusing power.

Following a petition filed by Khaleda, the HC on October 16 the same year stayed the proceedings of the case against her case and also issued a rule upon the government and the ACC to show cause as to why the proceedings against her in the case should not be quashed.

Yesterday, the HC bench Justice Md Moinul Islam Chowdhury and Justice JBM Hassan fixed the date for delivery of judgment after concluding hearing on the rule.

During hearing, ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told the HC that the trial court will decide after hearing statements from witnesses and examining evidence and documents whether Khaleda abused her power.

run the trial proceedings of the case, he argued.

No lawyer appeared before the court for placing arguments for petitioner Khaleda, Khurshid told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, another HC bench yesterday adjourned for a week the hearing on two petitions of the BNP chief expressing no-confidence in the judge of a trial court dealing with Zia Orphanage and Zia Charitable Trust graft cases.

The HC bench of Justice Md Rezaul Haque and Justice Md Khasruzzaman fixed March 12 for resuming the hearing.

Khaleda filed the petitions on January 28, expressing her apprehension that she would not get justice from Abu Ahmed Jamadar of the Special Judge Court-3, as he earlier had not allow her prayer for adjourning the case proceedings.

In the petitions, Khaleda appealed to the HC to direct the government to transfer the cases to the court of another judge.

On March 3, she included two prayers in the petitions seeking stay on the lower court orders that issued arrest warrants on February 25 for her in the cases.

Yesterday, Additional Attorney General Momtaz Uddin Fakir told the HC that as a fugitive Khaleda has no right to move such petitions before this court.



Painted like a tiger and flying the national flag, a man celebrates the Tigers beating Scotland in their World Cup match yesterday. The photo was taken at TSC of Dhaka University.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Batting heroes fire together

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Prior to yesterday's game Bangladesh had chased down 300-plus totals just twice. They needed a good stand at the top and that came in the form of Mahmudullah and Tamim.

Both batsmen didn't force anything; rather they played according to the merit of the balls and showed plenty of maturity during their 139-run second wicket stand; a World Cup record for Bangladesh.

Riyad was unfortunately bowled off his back toe after Iain Wardlaw directed a yorker towards his feet but before that he made a well-composed run-a-ball 62. His dismissal however brought Mushfiqur to the crease only to establish more authority against the Scottish bowling attack.

Tamim was the next batsman to walk to the dressing room but by that

time Bangladesh reached into a comfortable 201 for three in 31.3 overs.

Tamim took his time and looked well settled for his first hundred in two years but pacer Josh Davey trapped him leg-before for 95; Tamim however broke Mohammad Ashraful's best score of 87 for Bangladesh in a World Cup. In his 100-ball knock, the left-hander stuck nine fours and a six.

Mushfiqur ensured that the run-rate would have not been an issue for his side as he smote six fours and two sixes during his 41-ball 60.

After his dismissal, Bangladesh required 72 in as many balls and that was superbly dealt with by Shakib, who was unbeaten on 52, and Sabbir, who made 42 off 40 balls.

The player-of-the-match award however went to Coetzer for his masterful knock; Scotland's first World Cup hundred and is now the highest

for a non-Test nation going past David Houghton's 142 against New Zealand in 1987. He toyed with the Bangladesh bowlers and hit 17 fours and four sixes.

After sent into bat, Scotland lost two early wickets but Matt Machan joined Coetzer to steady the ship and then a 141-run fourth wicket stand between Coetzer and captain Preston Mommsen made sure that Bangladesh are given a record target to keep their winning record intact against them.

Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who failed to complete his 10-over spell due to minor cuff muscle injury, had to struggle with rotating his bowlers.

On the field, Bangladesh lost Anamul Haque early, who suffered a shoulder injury that ruled him out of the World Cup.

Tough test for economy

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loss. It has hit farm incomes, weakened buyers' confidence in Bangladesh and put the investors at bay.

The transport sector is the worst victim of the agitation programme as protesters particularly targeted the sector for defying their call. As a result, movement of buses, trucks and lorries remained thin over the last two months. Several hundred vehicles have been torched and vandalised during this period.

Faruk Talukder Sohel, president of Bangladesh Bus Truck Owners Association, said: "Only people with emergencies are travelling by buses or having their goods carried by lorries."

Fearing arson attacks, most trucks and lorries have stayed off the highways. But those plying the highways charge higher fares for carrying goods, in some cases double the usual.

After a lull in last year, many businesses had planned to set up new units or expand their operations this year, but they have backed off due to the prolonged political stalemate, said Hossain Khaled, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Foreign investors are also not coming to Bangladesh. It's a particular blow for the country's economy. This happened at a time when some investors are relocating their factories to other countries from China due to rising production costs there.

Garment exporters have warned that the fall in orders would be steep in March-April. A large number of foreign and local tourists have cancelled their tour plans, hurting the tourism sector.

Too harsh a reality for an orphan

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lack of transport due to the ongoing blockade and hartals enforced by the BNP-led 20-party alliance.

Shakil, 18, who suffered 60 percent burns, did not survive. He died on February 28.

Though himself in flames, Shakil had made sure that Yasin got out.

"I'm still alive," said Yasin, grieving the loss of Shakil. "I did not have anything but a friend who gave his life for me."

They were the helpers of Asean Paribahan that operates on Dhaka-Narayanganj route, and they shared the dream of becoming a driver one day.

"I could remember Shakil strug-

BLOCKADE VIOLENCE, 2015

(Jan 5-March 5)

DEAD	INJURED
83 (66 were general people)	1322 (At least)

TOTAL KILLED IN ARSON ATTACKS

53

VEHICLES TORCHED & VANDALISED

654 (At least)

TOTAL KILLED IN 'SHOOTOUTS'

(Jan 5-Mar 5)

41

COST TO THE ECONOMY

Per day cost of shutdown (DCCI)

Tk 2,277 crore

Estimated cost of shutdown

(Jan 6-Mar 6)

Tk 1,36,620 crore

SOURCE: THE DAILY STAR REPORTS; DATA COMPILED BY STAR RESEARCH

The industrial sector, which accounts for 29 percent of the GDP, has been affected as transportation of raw materials, goods and products was disrupted.

Farmers could not sell their produce at fair prices. The supply of agriculture inputs such as diesel and fertiliser has been affected ahead of the boro season

when the country produces more than half of its rice.

Small businessmen, roadside shop owners and day labourers are struggling to earn their livelihood. Many have been rendered jobless.

Zahid Hussain, lead economist at the World Bank office in Dhaka, said he thought the country's economic loss from the blockade and strikes would be between \$1 billion and \$2 billion, meaning it has already cost the country's GDP by 0.6 percent to 0.8 percent.

"This is the immediate cost of production loss due to the blockade and hartals, which we might be able to recover once normalcy returns. But we won't be able to recoup the loss of confidence of investors and buyers in Bangladesh," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The economist said the investment scenario was already constrained by structural obstacles such as poor infrastructure, inadequate land and shortage of energy. The blockade and strikes have worsened the scenario.

"Even if we overcome infrastructural problems, which might not happen overnight, the investors and buyers would hesitate to come here because they want long-term stability. So, we must return to normalcy as soon as possible for the sake of economy," he mentioned.

International rating agency Fitch Ratings said renewed political tension and violence might negatively affect foreign investors' confidence in Bangladesh, raising risks to economic growth over the longer term.

Cops pick up lawyer Tajul, release later

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police last night released Tajul Islam, a defence counsel for Jamaat-e-Islami leaders being tried for war crimes, more than two hours after picking him up from his chamber in the capital.

Shishir Manir, another member of the Jamaat defence team, said cops picked up Tajul, three other lawyers and three of his staff from his office at Nayapaltan around 7:45pm and took them to Paltan Police Station.

On information, other members of the defence team rushed to the station with a 2012 order of the International Crimes Tribunal-2, which directed law enforcers not to harass Tajul, said Manir.

Paltan police released him around 10:30pm, terming the incident "a misunderstanding," said Manir, adding, "We have accepted their explanation."

A police official of Motijheel division, which covers Paltan Police Station, claimed several people entered into Tajul's chamber after explosions of several crude bombs in the area last night.

When police picked up seven men from his chamber, Tajul went with them, the official added, requesting anonymity.

Following a defence petition, the Tribunal-2 on November 29, 2012, directed the police to ensure security of Tajul's chamber and to remain alert about the lawyer's chamber and avoid any untoward incident.

The defence counsel had filed the petition after some plainclothes law enforcers allegedly entered Tajul's office and interrogated the lawyer present there.

2 Jubo League men killed

STAR REPORT

Two Jubo League leaders were hacked to death in Bogra and Natore last night over internal feuds.

Moniruzzaman Manik, 28, president of Bogra's Bandar unit Jubo League, was chopped to death by unidentified miscreants in the district town around 8:30pm, reports our Bogra correspondent.

Ratul Islam Rafi, 25, who was accompanying Manik, was also injured in the attack.

Locals rushed them to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital where doctor declared Manik dead.

Police and locals said Jubo League factions led by Manik and Md Samrat had long been locked in a feud over establishing supremacy in the area.

In Natore, Jubo League leader Siraj Sikder, 45, was chopped to death at Dompura Math under Natore municipality. He was an organising secretary of ward no-2 unit of Jubo League, the youth front of the ruling AL.

Shahatab Sikder, brother of the deceased, claimed Siraj had been involved in a dispute with Jubo League leader Sohel Rana over controlling a "gambling joint" in Dompura Math area, our Natore correspondent said.

On Thursday night, Siraj and Sohel had a fight around 8:00pm and at one stage Sohel chopped Siraj with sharp weapons leaving him critically injured, locals told The Daily Star. He was rushed to the Natore sadar hospital where doctor declared him dead.

"I would be anything but a driver."