

N'GANJ 7-MURDER Ex-Rab officials produced in court without handcuffs

UNB, Narayanganj

The prosecution on Wednesday raised objections before the court over the stance of the police while producing three detained and dismissed Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) officials without handcuffs, ignoring the Jail Code in the sensational seven-murder case.

The three accused and dismissed elite force Rab-11 officials -- Lt Col Tareque Sayed, Maj Arif Hossain and Commander SM Rana -- already made their confessional statements before a magistrate in connection with the grisly killings.

Police, however, produced the remaining 27 accused in the dock following the Jail Code.

Responding to the prosecution objection, Senior Judicial Magistrate HM Shafiqul Islam asked the police to comply with the prescribed Jail Code in this regard from now on.

"All are equal in the eye of law. But the way the three accused people have been produced in the dock is not lawful," said the court, fixing May 11 for the next routine date of hearing.



Children jump between carriages of a train at Tongi Railway Station with little awareness of the danger. The authorities concerned seem to have no interest in getting these children off the trains and rail lines. There have been cases in which children hurled brick chunks at moving trains injuring passengers. PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Condition of Manna stable

Medical board formed
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The condition of detained Nagorik Oikya Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna is stable, says head of the medical board formed to examine him.

The Dhaka Medical College Hospital authorities yesterday constituted the six-member medical board for Manna who was taken to the hospital on Tuesday night after he had complained of chest pain.

"He has had a previous heart ailment and came to the hospital with chest pain. He is now at the Coronary Care Unit and his condition is stable," said Cardiology department head Prof Abdul Wadud Chowdhury, also the chief of the medical board.

Members of Detective Branch (DB) of police took Manna, who is on a 10-day remand in a sedition case, to the DMCH from the DB office on Minto Road around 10:50pm.

Manna was arrested on February 24, a day after the leak of his controversial telephone conversation with BNP leader Sadeque Hossain Khoka, who is now in the USA for treatment.

In the conversation, Manna, also former organising secretary of the ruling Awami League, is heard talking to Khoka about strengthening the anti-government movement, among other issues.

5 to die for killing

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced five former employees of Sir Salimullah Medical College and Mitford Hospital to death for killing a youth in 1999 over a feud involving other staff of the hospital.

Judge Ruhul Amin of the Fourth Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka also handed down life term imprisonment to three other former hospital employees for the murder.

The court also fined the trio Tk 10,000 each, in default, to serve one more year in jail.

Those who were given death penalty are Dulal alias Anu, Bellal Hossain, Sharif Mahamud Hossain alias Panna, Amzad Hossain and Waliullah Khan alias Bulbul.

Sumon alias "Pagla Sumon", Salauddin alias Sujon and Zabed Miah were sentenced to life in prison.

Seven other accused were acquitted as charges against them were not proven.

Of the 15 accused, only Dulal and Bellal were present at the court when the verdict was read out yesterday. The others remain fugitives.

The punishment for the fugitives would be effective from the day of their arrest or surrender, the court said.

According to the case statement, a group of fourth class employees of Mitford hospital, led by Amzad and Dulal called 22-year-old Khorshed Alam, out his home on May 23 in 1999 and later killed him on a field behind the hospital.

They murdered Khorshed, son of Siddiqur Rahman, who was the then president of Mitford Fourth Class Employees' Union, in connection with a conflict with his father over a union election, according to the prosecution.

Later, Siddiqur filed a murder case against the 15 people with Kotwali Police Station.

Tech-wise ready, priority-wise not

FROM PAGE 1

religious fundamentalists, including the now-arrested Shafiur Rahman Farabi.

But while the cops sat on the threats on Avijit's life, they took relatively prompt action against the people posting critical comments about political figures. Just two days before Avijit was hacked to death, Chittagong police arrested a union-level leader of Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal, BNP's youth wing, for uploading a doctored image of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on his Facebook wall.

Iftekhar Mahmud Jipson, Juba Dal president of Shinguli union of Mirsarai upazila, had posted the photo on November 1, 2014, almost a year after Avijit had received his first known death threat from Farabi.

On September 24 last year, a Dhaka court sentenced Tonmoy Mollick, a youth from Khulna, for writing and composing a satirical song about Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Earlier on June 27, 2013, Buet teacher Hafizur Rahman Rana was handed seven years' imprisonment for threatening to kill the PM.

Ironically, a website called jasimuddinrahmani.wordpress.com, dedicated to the teachings of Jasimuddin Rahmani, the "spiritual leader" of rising militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team, still contains a video that calls upon the Muslims of Bangladesh to start a jihad against "murtads" (apostates).

Posted on December 29, 2013, the 14:43-minute video is titled "Why murdering [blogger] Rajib was a farz [must] and why murdering his associates will be a farz."

At 2:51 minute of the footage, a voice from the background says: "After the

murder of this black sheep Rajib, starting with murtad [apostate] Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina all other ministers and MPs termed him a martyr."

The video was available on the website as of last night.

"If law enforcers scan the internet for threatening contents, how can these websites still remain active?" asked a blogger, requesting anonymity.

According to Sumon Ahmed Sabir, an IT specialist, the whole issue is about setting priority and political will of the government.

He argues that if it were an issue of technical expertise or lack of coordination, the government could not have closed down over 100 websites in the last three months alone for uploading anti-government contents.

"In other words, they [the authorities] are active on cyberspace when it serves their own political agendas, never otherwise," said Sabir, managing director of Bangladesh Computer Emergency Response Team, which deals with computer threats and vulnerabilities.

Supreme Court lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua agrees. "If law enforcers can trace people making derogatory comments in any part of the country about our esteemed political figures, we can safely assume they have the capacity to do so for other threats as well."

Last week, the state minister for home claimed Farabi had been under surveillance, raising serious questions about the authorities' response to his threats on Facebook to kill Avijit for his writing against religious bigotry.

Asked by the BBC Bangla why Farabi was not arrested even though law enforcers were aware of those threats, Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, the state minister, said, "We were investigating those [the threats] and taking prepara-

tions accordingly but the incident [the killing] happened all of a sudden."

But under the Information and Communication Technology Act, police can arrest anyone for issuing death threats online without requiring to prove it.

The 2006 Act was amended last year with provisions for harsher punishments for cyber offence, though there are criticisms about certain other provisions of the law.

"The threat that you will be murdered is a very specific criminal offence. The police can take action on its own under section 57 of the ICT Act," said Jyotirmoy Barua, a barrister at the Supreme Court.

"It's not just the person who made the original post who can be tried. Those who commented on the post supporting the death threat can also be tried," he added.

Asked why the government seems reluctant to go after the religious extremists, one blogger requesting anonymity said, "The government seems to consider atheist bloggers as nuisance putting the government in a difficult situation. The government thinks if it stands for the bloggers, it will be blamed for nurturing atheism."

Kowshik Ahmed, another blogger, said there was a tendency to label all bloggers as atheists. "That's why the government fears that if it supports the bloggers and their secular beliefs, it will become the target of Islamists."

Contacted, Sheikh Md Rezaul Hyder, special superintendent of Criminal Investigation Department, said although various law enforcement agencies have state-of-the-art technologies for monitoring cyber threats, they carry out surveillance and take action only when a case is filed.

A senior Rab official went further, saying there were no clear guidelines about how they should respond to such threats.

Interestingly, when Farabi had been issuing threats to kill Avijit, he was already facing charges of threatening to kill the imam who administered the funeral prayers of blogger Rajib, who was killed in February 2013.

Allegedly a member of banned militant outfit Hizb ut-Tahrir, Farabi continued to use Facebook even from the Kashimpur high security prison while awaiting trial for threatening to kill the imam.

A top CID official with experience of dealing with cybercrimes said most law enforcement units have their own wings to monitor such offence, but there was no coordination cell to systematically watch for malicious web contents round-the-clock.

Also, tracking down the creator or administrator of many sites or the people posting such contents on Facebook and Twitter is difficult because the servers are located outside Bangladesh.

Asked how threats such as those against Avijit go unnoticed by law enforcers, Col Ziaul Ahsan, additional director general of the Rapid Action Battalion, said, "Every month at least 300 people are killed, but how many of them [the perpetrators] can we catch? If we can catch even 3%, that's a lot."

"Haven't we been able to arrest the killers of blogger Rajib? We have caught those who hacked the Rab website and the High Court website."

Over the last few days, the Daily Star also tried to reach the state minister for home for his comment on the issue, but he did not pick up the phone. He also did not respond to the text message asking him three questions for the same.

Can Tigers rewrite

FROM PAGE 1

against the Kiwis down under.

The Bangladesh bowling attack got back into rhythm against England but they are expected to face a much stiffer challenge against the vaunted New Zealand batting line-up while the Bangladesh batsmen will face the main challenge from two seamers -- Tim Southee and Trent Boult -- and veteran spinner Daniel Vettori; all three among the top five wicket-takers in the tournament.

The city of Seddon Park and its cricket venue are nothing new for many of the current

Bangladesh players. Mashrafe toured here with the team in December 2001 for a Test match while Tamim Iqbal, Imrul Kayes, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad, Shafiul Islam and Rubel Hossain were all part of the side that played two Test matches in February 2010.

The memory of that last visit may not be pleasant as the Tigers lost both the Tests by big margins, but it is also a chance for them to create a small piece of history; something they have already showed they are capable of.

Anxiety grips victim families

FROM PAGE 1

The other abductee is Anowar Hossain, 38, of Goyeshpur village in Noakhali.

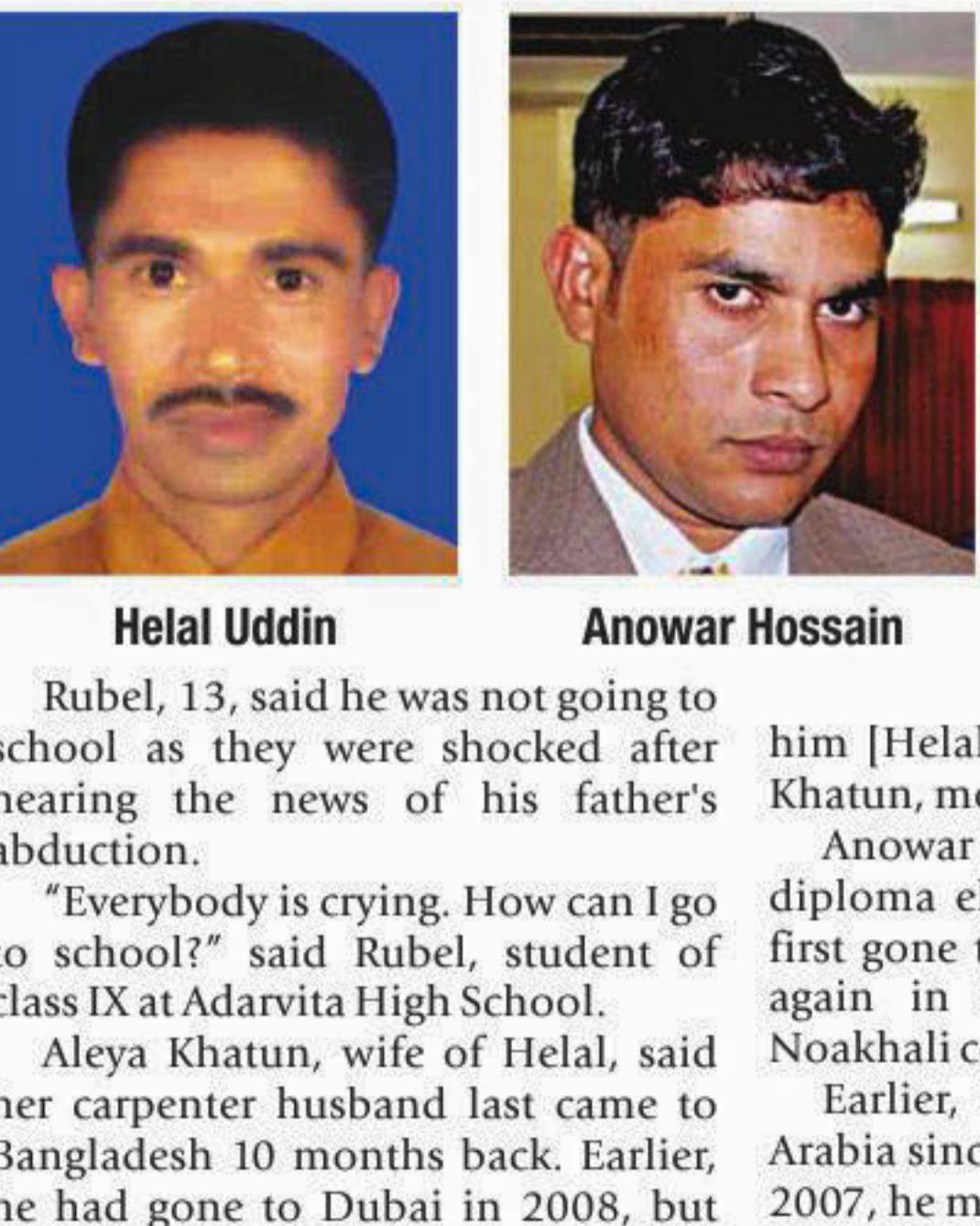
Seven other foreigners -- four Filipinos, an Austrian, a Czech and a Ghana national -- were also kidnapped.

Bangladesh foreign ministry in a press statement on March 9 said terrorist group ISIS had abducted them.

But State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam yesterday told journalists that no militant group in Libya claimed responsibility for the abduction of the two Bangladeshis.

Bangladesh embassy officials in Tripoli said they were in touch with embassies of the Philippines and Austria and also with the Libyan authorities for their rescue.

Families of the two are passing their days in fear and total uncertainty.



Helal Uddin Anowar Hossain

returned home only after six months. Then in 2009, he went to Libya to seek his fortune.

He spent Tk 10 lakh for the job. He managed the money by selling his land and also by borrowing from relatives.

"We still have a debt of Tk 5 lakh," she told The Daily Star over the phone.

"Please help us find him [Helal Uddin]," appealed Aleya Khatun, mother of five children.

Anowar Hossain of Noakhali was a diploma electrical engineer. He had first gone to Libya in 2010 and then again in 2012, according to our Noakhali correspondent.

Earlier, he had worked in Saudi Arabia since 2001. Upon his return in 2007, he married Marufa Khatun. The

couple have two children -- Rahin, 7, and Raisha, 5 -- who are studying at Matuail Creative International School in Dhaka.

After hearing the news of his abduction on Tuesday, she tried to contact Anowar several times over the phone, but did not get any response.

Then she contacted Anowar's friend Moinul Hossain in Libya who quoted Anowar's company as saying that ISIS took him hostage.

She last talked to Anowar on March 5 and everything was fine then. But everything turned upside down all of a sudden, she said, adding that she was passing days in anxiety.

Mahmud Iqbal, Anowar's brother-in-law, said he was in touch with foreign ministry officials in Dhaka and the Bangladesh embassy in Tripoli for the immediate release of his relative.



Afroza Begum crying for her son Anwar in Begumganj of Noakhali yesterday. Anwar was abducted in Libya. PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

Bangladeshis to be relocated if crisis deepens

FROM PAGE 1

"Libya is now witnessing a security risk as internal fighting is going on among different groups. We are observing the entire situation. In any emergency we will relocate our people to the neighbouring countries like Tunisia or elsewhere," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The minister added he would seek assistance from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) or Red Cross to send the Bangladeshis to safer zones. He however did not elaborate on the process of relocation.

"I advise our people to avoid the con-

flict zones and not to take any risk for work in the war situation. They should be mentally prepared to go to other places in the case of any emergency," Mosharraf said.

The government may relocate around 50,000 Bangladeshis working in Libya after two Bangladeshi nationals were taken hostage allegedly by Islamic State militants on March 6.

The ISIS militants allegedly kidnapped the two Bangladeshis -- Helal Uddin from Jamalpur and Anowar Hossain from Noakhali -- along with seven other foreigners from al-Ghani

oilfield to the south of the Libyan city of Sirte.

"I believe the two Bangladeshis will be released soon as they do not belong to any of the conflicting groups," the minister said, expressing his hope.

The Bangladeshi migrants are facing serious security threats while moving from one city to another in the face of severe internal conflicts since May last year.

Their perils have caused serious concern among their family members back home.

A son of one of the Bangladeshi migrants has recently posted on the

website of Bangladesh embassy in Tripoli, expressing his concern.

"I can't study properly. All the time I have to worry for my father. I fear something may happen to him," wrote Kabir Hossain. "... Sir, I want my father back in Bangladesh. I don't know how you will do it," he added.

Suraia, daughter of another Bangladeshi migrant, wrote, "My father lives in Al-Quwarsha, Benghazi. You [embassy officials] know the situation there better than we do. There is no gas, water or electricity supply. People are struggling for life there."

Expressing concerns over the loss of her father's passport, she wrote, "Please advise us how my father can get a new passport or if there is any alternative to returning to Bangladesh without it."

Officials at the Bangladesh embassy in Tripoli admitted that they had been passing days with serious security risks as the oil-rich country could not have come out of political turmoil for long.

"It is almost impossible to run normal activities in this volatile situation. We can't help people who want to return home because there is no air link between Libya and Dhaka now,"

Ahsan Kibria Siddiqui, first secretary at the embassy, told The Daily Star over the phone.

At least 27 Bangladeshis have so far died in Libya in the last 10 months since June 2014. Of them, at least six were killed after they were caught between two or more fighting groups.

The government has suspended sending workers to Libya since May last year due to this situation.

Libya has been witnessing internal conflicts among several groups since the overthrow of its long-time ruler Col Muammar Gaddafi in October 2011.