

Killing of bus driver sparks protest

Indefinite strike called on Dhaka-Sylhet highway

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transport workers yesterday called an indefinite strike on Dhaka-Sylhet highway in protest at the killing of a bus driver allegedly by some angry passengers at the city's Sayedabad Monday night.

Around 10 to 12 passengers of Shyamoli Paribahan beat Babul Chandra Dey, the driver of the bus, indiscriminately as he did not leave the terminal on time Monday night.

Helper of the bus, Shamim Mollah, a witness to the incident, told The Daily Star that the bus reached Sayedabad from Fakirapool around 10:00pm and was scheduled to depart for Sylhet at 10:30pm.

But the bus did not leave the terminal by 10:40pm as the driver was waiting for a passenger who was on the way to catch the bus, Shamim claimed.

The passengers meanwhile got agitated and asked the driver to start. An altercation between the driver and passengers then ensued, and some 10 to 12 passengers beat him indiscriminately, leaving him unconscious, he added.

Shamim took seriously injured Babul

to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead around 11:45pm.

Jatrabari police arrested four passengers in connection with the killing.

Abdul Wadud Nayan, president of Sarak Paribahan Sramik Union (Sayedabad unit), said Babul was a former member of the union's Sylhet unit. Transport workers of Sylhet called the indefinite strike in protest against the killing, he added.

SAINIK LEAGUE LEADER KILLED
Rubel Hossain, general secretary of Sainik League (Kafur unit), was hacked to death allegedly by rivals over a factional feud on Monday.

Relatives of Rubel said a group of six to seven criminals, including local Krishak League leader Kamal and Jubo League leader Saiful, hacked him in front of his Purba Kazipara residence around 10:00pm.

He was taken to the DMCH around 11:45pm where doctors declared him dead.

DMC morgue sources said there were at least 20 stab marks on his body.

Kafur Police Station OC Sikder Shamim Hossain said police detained



President Abdul Hamid shakes hands with his Vietnamese counterpart Truong Tan Sang at the presidential palace in Hanoi on Monday. Hamid is there on a three-day state visit focused on bilateral ties.

PHOTO: AFP

Death for Siraj

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"We are happy today.... Although the day came after a long wait, we are happy to see the killer [Siraj] of my uncles tried and punished at last," prosecution witness Shishir Kumar Biswas told The Daily Star.

His four paternal uncles were killed at Dakra Kalibari Temple in Rampal upazila in an act of genocide committed under the leadership of Siraj on May 21, 1971.

The prosecution, victims' families and freedom fighters also expressed satisfaction at the verdict. The defence counsels, however, said they will challenge the verdict in the higher court.

The prosecution had brought seven charges against the three accused. Of the charges, four were leveled at Siraj alone, two at all the three accused and one at Akram and Latif.

The five charges that carried death sentence for Siraj are: act of genocide at Ranajitpur under Bagerhat Sadar upazila that killed 40/50 Hindus on May 13; act of genocide at Dakra Kalibari Temple under Rampal upazila on May 21 that killed 600/700 Hindus; killing of 19 at Kandapara Bazar in Bagerhat Sadar upazila on June 18; killing of seven people at Chulka Bazar under Bagerhat Sadar upazila on October 14; and killing of 42 people, including 40 Hindus, at Shakhrikathi Bazar in Kachua upazila on November 5.

Tribunal Chairman Justice M Enayetur Rahim said all these crimes were worst and barbarous and particularly shocking to the conscience of

mankind.

"Sheikh Sirajul Haque alias Siraj Master had direct complicity and substantially participated, abetted, contributed and facilitated commission of such barbarous types of crimes and as such no punishment other than death will be equal to the said horrendous crimes...." he added.

Though Siraj had committed such crimes, he never showed repentance. So the court did not find any reason to give him a lesser punishment, said the judge.

After the execution of a death penalty, Siraj's other sentences will merge with it, said the tribunal.

The accused, however, was acquitted on a charge of abduction and killing of five people of as many villages under Kachua upazila on October 22.

Khan Akram was handed down "imprisonment for life till his natural death" for killing a freedom fighter at Teligati Bazar of Moreganj upazila on December 13.

The tribunal expressed disappointment over the failure of the investigation agency and the prosecution in bringing the co-perpetrators of the crimes to book. "We are constrained to express our dissatisfaction at such un mindful investigation into the case," read the verdict.

Siraj and Akram were produced before the tribunal at 10:55am. The three-member tribunal read out the summary of the 133-page verdict in around an hour and 20 minutes. Two other members of the tribunal are Justice Jahangir Hossain and Justice

Anwarul Haque.

Clad in white panjabi, pajama and prayer cap, Siraj was seen hearing the judgment from the dock in the courtroom while Akram was seated on a chair in the dock, wearing brown panjabi and black trousers.

Syed Sayedul Haque Sumon, the conducting prosecutor of the case, said they were happy with the verdict.

A correspondent from Bagerhat reports: Freedom fighters, victims' families, and Awami League leaders and activists brought out processions in Bagerhat to hail the verdict. They demanded the government ensure prompt execution of the judgement.

Akram's lawyer Sarwar Hossain said they would challenge the verdict with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court as they did not get "justice".

Abul Hasan, the state-appointed defence counsel for Siraj, said he would advise his client to file an appeal. As per the International Crimes Tribunal act, the convicts will get 30 days from yesterday to file appeals with the apex court.

Sirajul Haque, son of Harejuddin Sheikh of Gotapara under Bagerhat Sadar upazila; and Khan Akram, son of Joyal Abedin Khan of Daibaggahati under Moreganj upazila; were arrested in June and July last year.

The prosecution produced 32 witnesses, including the investigating officer of the case, before the court while five witnesses defended Akram and Latif.

With the yesterday's verdict, two war crimes tribunals have so far

HC pummels

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hazardous industries to Savar.

The secretary told the court that 10 of the tannery owners didn't make any preparations to shift their industries to Savar where the government set up a central treatment plant for Tk 600 crore, said the counsel.

Mosharraf also gave the HC the names of the 10 tannery owners.

They are: Arefin Shamsul Al Amin, managing director of Rana Leather Industries Ltd; Sayedul Haque Master, proprietor of M/S Juliet Enterprise; Mahbubur Rahman Panna, proprietor of M/S Pubali Tanneries; Giasuddin Ahmed Pathan, managing director of Rumi Leather Industries Ltd; Abdus Salam, proprietor of M/S Salam Tannery; Rezaul Karim Ansary, proprietor of Karim Leather Ltd; Abdul Wadud Mia, proprietor of M/S Mahin Tannery; Abdul Wahab, proprietor of M/S Nabipur Tannery; Mafiz Mia, proprietor of M/S Asia Tannery and Akbar Hossain, managing director of M/S Paramount Tannery.

Asked about the 10 owners' failure to take steps to relocate factories, Mizanur Rahman, treasurer of Bangladesh Tanners Association, said several of the

10 tanneries were facing problems over ownership. "They are yet to decide on relocation of their factories."

He said most of the 200 tanneries in Hazaribagh didn't have the ability to bear the relocation cost. "The government's compensation package will at best cover 10 percent of the total cost."

Following the 2001 HC verdict, the industries ministry took a project to move the tanneries to a new tannery town in Savar in 2003, and allocated 155 industrial plots there.

But there was little progress in relocating the factories, and the delay in implementation increased the project cost to Tk 1,079 crore from Tk 175.75 crore over a decade, said officials of the industries ministry.

The government now intends to complete the project by 2016, they said.

According to the Department of Environment, the tanneries in Hazaribagh discharge around 22,000 cubic litres of toxic waste into the Buriganga every day.

In a 2012 report, the Human Rights Watch said the Hazaribagh tannery area was one of world's most polluted places that affect the health of people living around those.

Checks and balances

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political activists, among others, the group yesterday came up with a number of recommendations, including direct election of the president with a larger electoral college and entrusting him with more power except the power to dissolve parliament.

Former TIB executive director Manzoor Hasan, former caretaker government advisers M Hafizuddin Khan and Rasheda K Chowdhury, Executive Director of Policy Research Institute Ahsan H Mansur, Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumder, eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik and local government expert Tofail Ahmed were present at the programme on behalf of the group.

The overlap of prime minister's roles as head of the executive branch and leader of the House and also the party must come to an end, it said.

It also recommended amending article 70 of the constitution to allow floor-crossing on important policy issues with some exceptions.

Discussants suggested that appointment to key cabinet posts, including home, defence, finance and law ministries, chief justice, senior judges and independent commission chiefs be openly debated, vetted and confirmed by parliamentary standing committees concerned.

Reading out the keynote paper, Manzoor Hasan said bringing checks and balance of power between the PM and the president was a must for the sake of a

functioning democracy.

ATM Shamsul Huda said no government took enough care of the country's democratic institutions. As a result, these institutions failed to work properly as competent persons were not appointed there.

"No government has passed laws on appointing chiefs of different statutory and constitutional bodies. Instead, they appointed the people of their choice," he added.

Under the current system, the prime minister is all too powerful while the president has no power, he added.

"What is the meaning of empowering the president to appoint the chief justice when it all depends on the will of the prime minister?" said Hafizuddin.

Eminent political scientist Rawnak Jahan thinks that first it must be made sure that the current system in different democratic institutions can work properly, before bringing any changes.

Shahdeen Malik said the post of president became useless because there was no work left for him to do except for appointing the PM and the CJ.

"But appointment in the two posts happens automatically as the chief justice will be appointed according to the seniority while the majority party in an election will select the prime minister. There isn't much for the president to do here," he added.

Ahsan H Mansur said that in the US, the authority thoroughly verified the past records of a person before appointing him as CJ. "Why can't we

Hamid visits Ha Long Bay in Vietnam

UNB, Hanoi

President Abdul Hamid yesterday visited Ha Long Bay, a Unesco World Heritage site in Vietnam.

The president, his wife and members of the entourage, by two boats, went to different points of Ha Long Bay famous for its breathtaking landscape.

On his way to the Bay, Abdul Hamid visited an organisation, "Hong Ngoc", run by physically challenged people, and witnessed the process of making traditional Vietnamese dresses and stone sculptures.

Ha Long Bay covers an area of 1,553 square kilometres and includes 1,969 islands, of which 90 percent are limestone islands and islets.

Indian home minister to visit border

Vows to check 'illegal immigration'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh yesterday said "illegal immigration" from Bangladesh was a matter of serious concern, and that he would soon visit the border areas to see the situation.

"I will visit the India-Bangladesh border soon, probably within this month. I want to see the situation along the border as we are committed to checking illegal immigration," he said at a seminar organised by All Assam Students Union.

Rajnath Singh said the BJP-led NDA government wanted to completely seal the India-Bangladesh border.

"We want to take all possible steps to check illegal immigration. All loopholes have to be plugged," said the Indian home minister.

In the 1980s, All Assam Students Union waged street protests against undocumented people from Bangladesh in the north-eastern Indian state.

Yesterday's seminar on "30 years of Assam Accord: issues, challenges and implementation" was organised on the eve of the three decades of the signing of the pact, which was aimed at detection and deportation of illegal immigrants from Assam.



Convicted war criminal Sheikh Sirajul Haque boards a prison van yesterday after being sentenced to death by the ICT-1 for committing crimes against humanity and genocide during the Liberation War.

PHOTO: STAR

US leaves us out

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basket and reduce its reliance on garment, as the US is a sizeable market on its own.

The sooner the country fulfils all the conditions, the better it is, and it is not only for gaining the GSP but also for ensuring rights for the workers, the economist added.

"I am not interested at all in taking any more initiatives to get back the GSP. We have fulfilled almost all conditions given by the US. We have nothing more to do," Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed told reporters yesterday.

There is no reason except a political

one for not giving the privilege to Bangladesh, he said. "Even Pakistan, where the human rights are violated and the working condition is bad, was given the GSP."

Among the major reforms the country carried out were the amendment of the labour law to allow full freedom of association by the workers and completion of inspection of 3,669 factories for structural, electrical and fire safety.

Although delayed, the labour and employment ministry hired additional 200 factory inspectors, as per the conditions set by the US.

It allowed registration of more than

350 trade unions and opened a publicly accessible database of the garment sector.

The government also arranged training programmes for industrial police as per the conditions.

Apart from taking steps in line with the conditions, the government also lobbied hard with the Obama administration for reinstatement of the trade privilege.

The country has however failed to formulate the rules for applying the amended labour law of 2013 and bring change in the law to allow full freedom of association for factory workers of the export processing zones.

The government also could not arrest the killer of labour leader Aminul Islam, who was tortured and brutally killed in Tangail in April 2012.

To date, the government only managed to seize assets of the suspected killer of the trade union organiser with the Bangladesh Centre for Workers Solidarity.

The US agreed to renew the privilege following requests from its businessmen, who said they were losing \$2 million everyday due to the suspension of the programme.

The new scheme will last until 2017 and make trade benefits retroactive to

July 31, 2013, when the whole system was put on pause.

The commerce minister in his reaction said it was unfortunate that Bangladesh has been included with Russia, which was also not given the GSP status.

Many countries don't want the rise of Bangladesh, Ahmed said.

He went on to raise questions on the role of some trade union leaders who do not actually work in any factory but lobby with some international organisations and propagate against Bangladesh.

They are also responsible for not giving the GSP to Bangladesh, Ahmed

said, while expressing hope that the US would reconsider its decision at the upcoming meeting of the Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum Agreement.

Bangladesh exported \$34.7 million under GSP in 2012. The top GSP imports from Bangladesh included tobacco, sports equipment, porcelain china and plastic products.

In fiscal 2014-15, Bangladesh exported goods worth \$5.58 billion to the US, with 95 percent of them being garment products, which were subjected to 15.61 percent duty. A year earlier, the amount was \$5.58 billion.