



Left, farmers harvest rice from their fields and take it home at Mutrapur village in Kamalganj of Moulvibazar. Right, the crop is then processed and piled up for extracting the grains. This year there has been a good harvest of Aus rice, making a large number of growers happy.



PHOTO: STAR

Khaleda celebrates one of her birthdays

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia last night celebrated her 70th birthday at her Gulshan office despite calls from different quarters against it.

The Awami League has been urging Khaleda not to observe her birthday on August 15, as it is the National Mourning Day -- the day Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of his family members were assassinated by a group of army men in 1975.

Amid controversies over the authenticity of her birth date on August 15, different quarters questioned the taste and sanity of someone who would celebrate on the National Mourning Day just to mock this or her political rival.

The BNP has been claiming that it's not Khaleda Zia but the party leaders and workers who celebrate the day.

According to media reports, the former prime minister has mentioned three separate dates of birth in various documents -- September 5, 1946 in her matriculation exam form; August 5, 1944 in her marriage certificate; and August 19, 1947 in the record of her prime ministerial oath.

Then all of a sudden in late 1995 or early 1996, the BNP chief and her party men started celebrating her birthday on August 15.

This year, even some pro-BNP intellectuals said Khaleda should not celebrate her birthday on this day.

Despite the call, a smiling Khaleda cut five cakes, 70 pounds each, around 9:15pm.

Senior leaders, including standing committee members Jamir Uddin Sircar, Nazrul Islam Khan and Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, Khaleda's adviser Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, party vice-chairmen Abdullah Al Noman, Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and Selima Rahman, Joint Secretary General Mohammad Shajahan and BNP Dhaka city Member Secretary Habib-un-Nabi Khan Sohel, among others, were present.

Party's central executive committee, Dhaka city unit, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, Jatiyatabadi Swechchhasebak Dal and Jubo Dal brought these cakes, sources said.

Khaleda's office wore a festive look. It was decorated with lighting and glittering cloths.

To the newsmen, she said: "I want blessings from the countrymen."

Earlier in the afternoon, Jatiyatabadi Mahila Dal, BNP's woman wing, celebrated Khaleda's birthday at Selima Rahman's Banani residence.

However, unlike the past few years, there was no programme at the BNP's Nayapaltn central office.

Contacted, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif said Khaleda was expected not to celebrate her birthday as a gesture of respect to the Father of the Nation. "But it has been proved that she would not change her sick mentality."

Corrigendum

In one of the photos accompanying yesterday's story headlined "In mourning, in rage", Colonel Jamil Uddin Ahmad's name was erroneously mentioned as Colonel Safayet Jamil. We sincerely regret the inadvertent error.



Hamid, Hasina call Pranab

Wish his spouse's early recovery

UNB, Dhaka

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday telephoned Indian President Pranab Mukherjee and enquired about his wife Suvra Mukherjee's health.

Suvra Mukherjee, a Bangladesh-origin Indian, is now undergoing treatment at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the Army Research and Referral Hospital in New Delhi. Her condition is critical, according to Indian media reports.

President's Press Secretary Joynal Abedin said Abdul Hamid talked to his Indian counterpart over the phone from 7:39pm to 7:44pm, and wished Pranab's wife's early recovery from illness.

Hamid exchanged pleasantries with the Indian president and also enquired about his own health condition.

Pranab thanked Hamid for the phone call and expressed gratitude to him, Joynal added.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called Pranab around 7:15pm, enquired about Suvra's health and wished her early recovery, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim said.

During the 20-minute telephone conversation with Hasina, Pranab Mukherjee recalled Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the National Mourning Day.

He told the PM that he had already gone through the "Unfinished Memoirs of Bangabandhu".

Younger daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Rehana also talked to the Indian president, enquired about his wife's health and wished her early recovery.

Suvra along with her husband paid a visit to her ancestral home in Narail in 2013 when Pranab was on a state visit to Bangladesh.

Five killed

FROM PAGE 1 Zakir Hossain, officer-in-charge of Baghaichhari, said an arms case was filed against unnamed people in this connection.

The army claimed the victims were armed members of two regional political groups -- United Peoples' Democratic Front (UPDF) and Jana Sanghati Samiti (JSS-MN Larma).

The UPDF and the JSS, however, denied any link with those killed in the fighting.

"Certain quarters are trying to tarnish our image by involving our name with the victims," said a statement signed by Niron Chakma, head of UPDF's information division.

JSS-MN Larma's Information and Publicity Secretary Proshanta Chakma said they were a democratic political group and that they had no armed group.

This is the second time in the last five months that the army had gunfight with alleged criminals.

On April 23, a man named Ramesh Chakma was killed in a fight with patrolling army at Eguzzehhari area of Sajek union in Rangamati.

Bloggers wary of police now

FROM PAGE 1

Amid such a situation, some bloggers have stopped writing, some have changed their online identity while some are trying to leave the country.

"I would do anything but disclose my address and phone number to the police now. I believe if I do it, the information will be leaked to the Islamists in no time," said Shakil Ahmed, a Dhaka-based blogger who writes against religious extremism.

Pritom, an online activist from Barisal, recently received threats from suspected Islamist militants who accused him of being an "enemy of Islam".

"I don't know where my enemies are," he said.

Even fellow bloggers did not know the real name and location of online activist Oyasiqur Rahman, yet he was tracked down and killed, Pritom added.

"Only law enforcement agencies have the technologies to uncover the real identity of an online activist using a penname and his location," the blogger said.

Another blogger, who used to write under the pseudonym of Prithu Sanyal, had the same feeling after four youths intercepted him at a remote village in Sunamganj weeks after secular writer Ananta Bijoy Das was hacked to death in Sylhet on May 12.

"They told me, 'It's your turn now. Get ready.' I was shocked and surprised to see that they had located me. I never used my real identity while writing."

He stopped writing after that.

"I won't go to the police because I don't know who the enemy is," he said.

Another blogger, requesting anonymity, said: "In the last couple of years, I haven't found even a single statement that would make me trust police."

Fed up, he is now trying to leave the country.

"I have changed my email ID, phone number and address, and removed every picture of mine from the social media," said another blogger, also preferring anonymity.

"I wish I could change my face as well," said the online activist, who too is now trying to go abroad.

Blogger Maruf Rosul, also a Gonojagoron Mancha organiser, said no matter how insecure they felt, very few of them would ever go to the police.

"Firstly, they [bloggers] don't have any reason to trust police. Secondly, how long will the police protect individual bloggers? Unless they catch the masterminds, nobody is safe," he added.

"Bangladesh is not a secular country anymore. The police are well aware of the government's indifference to bloggers getting killed," said blogger Ananya Azad, 25, who recently moved to Germany for safety.

Four secular bloggers -- Avijit Roy, Oyasiqur, Ananta Bijoy Das and Niladri Chattopadhyay Niloy -- have been killed in the past seven months. Another blogger, Ahmed Rajib Haider, was hacked to death in February 2013.

Law enforcers' callousness in protecting bloggers is further evident in Niloy's allegation before he was hacked to death inside his Goran home on August 7.

In a Facebook post, he claimed he had gone to two police stations to file a General Diary (GD) seeking safety, but had been refused in both cases.

Blogger Shakil had almost a similar experience.

In January last year, he went to the capital's Hazaribagh Police Station to lodge a GD after getting death threats on his phone, but to no avail.

"The duty officer had told me that filing a GD was unnecessary and that police would patrol roads near my Hazaribagh residence at night and accompany me from Zigatola Bus Stand to my residence, if necessary," he said.

"But they did nothing until I contacted a friend of mine who is a high official in the police 10 days later," said an angry Shakil.

Rights activist Sultana Kamal thinks bloggers' disappointment with the police is justified.

"Judged by the way police are acting, there are reasons for the bloggers to suspect that they won't get adequate protection from the police."

"Moreover, the recent comment by the IGP [inspector general of police] on the bloggers' writings and the home ministry officials' decision, as we've heard, to identify and arrest the people whose writings may hurt religious sentiments, add to their fear that the police are not taking a neutral stand here."

"I feel police should be more active in bringing the killers to justice rather than going after the bloggers," she added.

After Niloy's murder, IGP AKM Shahidul Hoque warned bloggers against "crossing the limit" while writing.

When specifically asked about the bloggers' allegations, Deputy Commissioner (Media) Muntasirul Islam of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said their main objective was to ensure security for citizens.

"People want security from us and we provide it. This is how the system works."

"I urge all to have faith in the police. If any official in a police station refuse to register a GD and to take any step, the victims should report it to their supervising officers," he said.

In tears, in prayers

FROM PAGE 1

Later, Hasina recited from the Holy Quran at a room of the house. Rehana and Hasina's daughter Saima Wazed Putul were beside her.

The pavement of Dhanmondi-32 was overlaid with wreaths and bouquets, as thousands of mourners, wearing black badges and carrying black flags, paid their tribute to Bangabandhu.

They started to gather there and the adjacent areas since early morning and waited until the president and prime minister paid their respects and other ceremonies were completed.

Placing their flowers, they demanded that the fugitive killers of Bangabandhu be brought back to the country and punished.

The ruling party observed the day with a vow to not create any situation that could harm the prime minister and the Awami League, like in 1975.

Later, special prayers were offered seeking eternal peace for Bangabandhu and the other martyrs.

A milad mehfil was also held at the Darbar Hall of Bangabhaban.

State-run Bangladesh Betar, BTV and other TV channels broadcast special programmes while newspapers brought out special supplements highlighting the life, struggle and achievements of Bangabandhu.

The national flag was hoisted at half-mast and there were black flags atop all public buildings yesterday.

The AL and its associated bodies distributed food among the destitute across the country. Bangabandhu's speeches and patriotic songs were played on loud-speakers.

Black billboards, banners and posters were placed in the capital and other major cities, districts and upazila headquarters with slogans on Bangabandhu.

Placing wreaths at the Banani Graveyard, AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam said death sentences would surely be carried out after bringing back the fugitive killers of the Father of the Nation.

"The government is trying its best to extradite the fugitive killers of

Bangabandhu. The process will continue ... none of the killers will be spared," he added.

Ashraf, also the public administration minister, called upon the party activists across the country to remain alert and prevent the recurrence of such heinous act that stunned people on August 15, 1975.

"A situation was created for killing Bangabandhu that helped the killers ... Party leaders and activists should not create any situation that could harm Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League," said Ashraf.

Recalling the day, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, grandson of Bangabandhu, on his Facebook page wrote, "No one is more familiar with murder and loss than my family. It wasn't just one person who was murdered. The killers did not even spare my uncle's wives, one of whom was pregnant, and children. They shot a 10 year old boy, my uncle Russell, in cold blood. These people were monsters."

An all-religion prayer meeting organised by Sangbadik Samaj was held seeking salvation of the departed souls of Bangabandhu and his family members at the Jatiya Press Club.

Mahanagar Sarbojaneen Puja Committee also offered special prayers.

Teenage girl

FROM PAGE 1 providing her with notes and suggestions for the admission exams, he said.

The victim came to Dhaka about two months ago from Jamalpur to prepare for university admission tests. She has been staying at a female hostel in Mouchak market area.

One of the alleged rapists, who hails from the same village as the victim's, is a student of Tejgaon College, said Moshir.

Police are trying to locate the hotel as the victim could not remember its name.

The victim's father told journalists at DMCH that the rapists gagged her with a strip of cloth before they raped her.

A case was filed in this connection.

They support such killings

FROM PAGE 1

against those who demean religion and make derogatory remarks about the Prophet (pbuh), he said.

Muntasirul, however, said investigators were yet to ascertain the arrestees' connection with Niloy's murder.

Echoing his view, DMP spokesperson Monirul Islam said both Nahin and Rana had long been members of outlawed militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT). The DMP joint commissioner (Detective Branch) said this to a private TV channel yesterday.

DB officials said they had gleaned "vital information" from the two on the recent killings of secular online writers, including US-based Bangladeshi Avijit Roy.

The duo were arrested from the capital's Uttara and Mirpur on Thursday and placed on eight-day remand each by a Dhaka court on Friday.

Though they both were arrested in the Niloy murder case, they were

previously unknown to each other, according to DB Inspector Mahbubur Rahman, also the investigating officer of the case.

Niloy, who used to write against religious fanaticism and extremism, was hacked to death by, according to police, suspected ABT operatives at his Goran residence in the capital on August 7.

Nephew of State Minister for Labour and Employment Mujibul Haque Chunnun, Nahin was one of the two ABT operatives who were directly involved in the machete attack on blogger Asif Mohiuddin in January 2013, according to police. He along with three others was arrested in April that year but was later freed on bail.

In another development, Niloy's wife Asha Moni met the investigators at the DB office in the capital yesterday.

Asha, who was at the house when Niloy was killed there, narrated the whole incident to them, said DB

Inspector Mahbubur Rahman.

Although investigators earlier said they would bring the arrestees before her for an identity parade, the inspector said they did not do so for the sake of investigation.

"The arrestees are on remand now. It [the parade] would hamper the remand process," he said, adding that they would arrange it, if required, after the remand.

3 TAHRIR MEN HELD Meanwhile, three suspected members of banned militant outfit Hizbut-Tahrir were arrested in the capital's Pallabi Section 6 area while distributing leaflets on Friday.

Officer-in-Charge Dadon Bhuiyan of Pallabi Police Station said they had detained Abdullah Al Mamun, 33, of Sherpur; Yusuf Nurani, 28, of Chandpur; and AKM Mostafizur Rahman Muhim, 23, of Faridpur after the Jum'ah prayers.

Some leaflets of the organisation were recovered from them, the OC added.

He becomes blogger

FROM PAGE 1

tradition of freedom and religious tolerance. That should be commended, and protected. And no one should have to be afraid to say so," he said in his first own blog on Friday.

In the blog titled "Freedom of speech is a right to be defended," the UK junior minister also said a stable and democratic Bangladesh was an important international partner for the UK.

A week ago, a blogger called Niloy Neel was hacked to death in Bangladesh. He was the fourth blogger to be murdered in the country this year.

"I've been meaning to start my own blog for some time: last week's events made me determined that I shouldn't put it off any longer. Freedom of speech is a right to be defended."

"Not everyone agrees. A group called Ansar Al Islam claimed respon-

sibility [for the murder of Niloy] and said: 'If your 'freedom of speech' maintains no limits, then widen your chests for the 'freedom of our machetes'."

"This is extremism above all because it shows both extreme cowardice and extreme ignorance. Cowardice because five men with machetes put a single unarmed man to death. And ignorance because if you have good enough arguments, you really don't need to resort to murder," Swire wrote.

He said freedom of speech was only a threat to false and misleading ideas.

"In that sense, the four bloggers -- Niloy Neel, Avijit Roy, Oyasiqur Rahman and Ananta Bijoy Das -- are already vindicated in what they stood for."

Swire said it was very much in Britain's interests that "the rotten seeds of this type of extremism are not allowed to take root in Bangladesh."

"We've an important shared history -- we were the first European country to recognise Bangladesh's independence and the first country to receive its first Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -- and there are still very close links between our peoples today," he added.

He said half a million people of Bangladeshi origin were living in the UK and had enriched its society in many ways. "In my own world of politics, I'm delighted that there are now members with Bangladeshi heritage in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords."

"... I said in my statement last week, it's important for us too that these pernicious issues are dealt with urgently: that the perpetrators of these horrific crimes are brought to justice and that the flawed and cowardly ideas behind them are exposed for what they are."

Swire also welcomed the arrest of two suspects in the murder (of Niloy)