

Rajuk frees

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the basement of two buildings in and around Road-8, said another Rajuk Executive Magistrate Md Abdul Hamid Mian, the team leader.

They also fined the two building owners Tk 2 lakh each, he said. The drive continues until February 4 except on the weekends.

On November 22 last year, the housing and public works ministry in a meeting decided to free the basement parking lot from illegal occupancy to help resolve horrendous traffic problem. Housing Minister Mosharraf Hossain chaired the meeting.

Vote for 'boat'

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unleashed terrorism. There will be no place for them. Bangladesh is moving ahead and will continue to do so... we will establish Bangladesh as a prosperous and developed country," she added.

About the atrocities "unleashed by the BNP-Jamaat" ahead of the January 5, 2014 polls and during January to March last year, the premier said nobody at that time could escape from "Khaleda Zia's vengeance".

Those culprits who burnt innocent people to death would not be spared, she said. "Cases have already been filed in those places where incidents of violence had occurred. Everyone involved in such crimes will be brought under trial."

Hasina, also the AL chief, blasted BNP founder Ziaur Rahman for illegally grabbing power and stopping the war crimes trial after the assassination of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. She said the war crimes trial is being held now and the verdicts are being implemented.

She said when the country is moving ahead and people are living in peace, BNP chief Khaleda is unhappy.

The PM said although her previous government (1996-2001) had taken an initiative for setting up refuelling facility at Osmani International Airport in Sylhet, the BNP-Jamaat government halted the activities. After assuming office again in 2009, the then AL government took initiatives to set up the facility at the airport.

Hasina said a process is underway to set up two more medical universities in Rajshahi and Chittagong. A previous AL government had established the country's first medical university, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, in the capital, she noted.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid, State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak, and AL advisory council member Suranjit Sengupta spoke, among others.

Prior to addressing the rally, the premier inaugurated and laid the foundation stones of 22 development projects from the meeting venue.

25.5kg gold

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intelligence team recovered around 23.2kg of gold bars from two seats of a Malaysian Airlines flight that landed at the airport around 9:30pm.

In another incident, gold bars weighing around 2.3kg were found at a toilet of a Regent Airways flight about an hour later. The flight came from Bangkok and was heading for Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

"An investigation is underway to find out the culprits," said Moinul.

Istanbul mosque

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welcome at Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Mosque in the city's historical Üsküdar district.

Photographs of Mustafa Efe, the mosque's imam, playing with the feline visitors have gone viral online. According to news reports, he started allowing stray cats inside the place of worship last year, to help them escape the cold weather. The imam is apparently well-known for his good humour, diligence, and kindness towards animals.

Efe posted a few pictures and videos of the cats on his own Facebook page and one clip actually shows a mother cat carrying her babies in her mouth, one-by-one, into the mosque.

"Our mosque's Friday guests," the imam wrote. "A surprise awaiting us at the sermon today. The kitty has found the heart of compassion and mercy."

Obama anger at Michigan water crisis

AFP, Detroit

President Barack Obama expressed anger Wednesday at a high-profile health scare in Flint, Michigan, where lead-tainted water is believed to have sickened residents.

Wading into a debate that has seen local authorities accused of putting lives at risk by cutting corners and trying to save money, Obama said, "You can't short-change basic services that we provide to our people."



A bulldozer demolishes an illegal structure in the capital's Sobhanbagh yesterday during an eviction drive conducted by a mobile court of Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

IS or al-Qaeda

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investigations found the group, which had been meeting since 2013, supported the armed jihadi ideology of terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State.

Quoting the country's home ministry, the newspaper further wrote that some of them had considered waging armed jihad overseas, but they were not planning any terrorist attacks in Singapore.

Breaking of this news by the Singapore media led to confusion as it was learned that detectives in Bangladesh arrested 14 of the 26 returnees on December 21 and silently produced them before a Dhaka Court with remand prayers. The other 12, who returned on different dates, were allowed to go to their families.

But in an apparent unusual practice, none of this was disclosed to the Bangladesh media.

In the case statement, police mentioned that the 14 were arrested near Abdullahpur Bus Stand under Uattara Purba Police Station.

However, officials in the DB wishing anonymity said they arrested the militant suspects soon after their return at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport following information from the Singapore authorities.

Monirul Islam, joint commissioner of Detective Branch at Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), said the 27 Bangladeshi workers were followers of Jasim Uddin Rahmani, convicted war criminal and Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delawar Hossain Sayeede and Indian Islamic preacher Zakir Naik.

They used to gather at Angulia Mosque near Mostafa Market in Singapore after prayers, listen to the recorded sermons of the three and have discussions.

The joint commissioner, who was briefing journalists at the DMP media centre yesterday, also said before travelling to Singapore, the

Bangladeshis were not linked to any militant outfit.

He also said some of the 27 workers, who went to Singapore two to eight years ago, are followers of Jamaat-e-Islami.

"We detained all the 26 and questioned them. We found that 14 of them have links with Jasim Uddin Rahmani and Ansarullah Bangla Team," Monir said.

He further said the 14, now arrested, had sent some funds for Qawmi Madrasa based-Islamist organisation Hefajat-e Islam and for the release of Jasim Uddin.

Meantime, questions have been raised about the release of 12 others though they were among those who have been deported for, what the Singapore authorities say is, "supporting armed jihad ideology of terrorist groups such as Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda".

Monir said, "We did not find any militant link against 12 others. So, we allowed them to go to their families, but they are under close watch."

Replying to a query, he said no other Bangladeshi was deported for militant link from any other country.

Meantime, the media in Singapore continue to run follow-ups widely on the arrest of 27 Bangladeshi workers.

"Some even distributed leaflets calling for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, according to Bangladeshi workers interviewed who knew some of them," says a report of The Straits Times under the headline "Radicalisation of Bangladeshi workers arrested under ISA dates back to 2013".

Among themselves, they circulated videos of radical preachers as well as footage put out by supporters of terror groups like the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The members donated money to outfits linked to these groups, the newspaper wrote.

Putin

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with radioactive polonium at an upmarket London hotel.

Andrei Lugovoi and Dmitri Kovtun, two Russians identified as prime suspects by British police, probably carried out the poisoning under the instruction of Russian security services, the inquiry said.

Prime Minister David Cameron's office called the findings "extremely disturbing" but the government did not announce sanctions in response, instead summoning Moscow's ambassador to London for talks.

It did, however, impose asset freezes on the two alleged perpetrators named by the inquiry.

There were cries of "Yes!" at the High Court in London as the main findings were read out. Litvinenko's wife Marina, dressed in black and accompanied by her 21-year-old son Anatoly, embraced supporters afterwards.

She has spent years pushing for a public inquiry to be held and had called for sanctions against Russia and a travel ban on Putin.

"I'm very pleased that the words my husband spoke on his deathbed when he accused Mr Putin of his murder have been proved true in an English court," she told reporters outside the court.

She told AFP after the hearing: "I can't say it is what I hoped for but I really appreciate it."

Russia dismissed the findings, calling the inquiry "politically motivated".

"We had no reason to expect that the final findings of the politically motivated and extremely non-transparent process... would suddenly become objective and unbiased," foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a statement.

Lugovoi, now a far-right, pro-Putin lawmaker in Russia, described it as

"absurd".

Judge Robert Owen, the inquiry's chairman, said he was "sure" that Lugovoi and Kovtun placed polonium-210 in the teapot at the Millennium Hotel's Pine Bar, where they met Litvinenko on November 1, 2006.

"The FSB operation to kill Litvinenko was probably approved by Mr (Nikolai) Patrushev and also by President Putin," the report said.

Patrushev is a former director of the FSB, the successor organisation to the Soviet-era KGB spy agency, and has been a key security official since 2008.

Polonium-210 is a rare radioactive isotope only available in closed nuclear facilities.

The report, which contained classified evidence redacted from the version made public, said this suggested that Lugovoi and Kovtun "were acting for a state body rather than, say, a criminal organisation".

There was "no evidence" to suggest that either Lugovoi or Kovtun had any personal reason to kill Litvinenko and they were likely to be acting under FSB direction, Owen added.

Shortly after the report was published, London's Metropolitan Police issued a statement stressing they still wanted the pair to be extradited. "Our objective will always be to put them before a criminal court," it added.

Litvinenko, an ex-KGB agent turned freelance investigator who also worked for British intelligence, accused Putin of ordering his killing in a statement before he died on November 23, 2006.

Owen said there were "powerful motives" for the killing. Litvinenko was seen as "having betrayed the FSB" and had regularly targeted Putin with "highly personal public criticism", including an accusation of paedophilia.

Act of revenge

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Morshed, 22, and sister-in-law Lamia, 25.

Mahfuz held a grudge against the family since he was beaten at a family arbitration over his romantic relations with Lamia a few weeks ago, police said, adding that the murders were an act of revenge.

Addressing a press conference at his office yesterday, the police super said Mahfuz went to Taslima's rented house on Friday evening.

When Taslima's son Shanto opened the door, he gave the kid Tk 10 and asked him not to tell anyone that he was there.

He then hid under a bed and stayed there till he was spotted by Mosharraf around 2:30am. Mosharraf woke Taslima up and told her how Mahfuz was hiding under the bed. However, Mosharraf then asked Mahfuz to sleep with him on the bed.

In the two-room house, Mosharraf was sleeping in one room and the four others in another.

After about an hour, Mahfuz brought a grinding stone from the kitchen and hit Mosharraf in the head. As he began to scream, Mahfuz choked him to death with a shirt.

In the morning, Mahfuz feared that he would be caught, and planned to kill others, said the SP.

After Taslima sent Shanto to school in the morning, Mahfuz called Taslima. When she came to his room, he struck her in the head from behind with the grinding stone. To confirm her death, he strangled her with a piece of cloth.

He then went after Lamia, who was awake. She jumped from the bed seeing him enter the room. Mahfuz threw the stone at her, hitting her but not fatally. When Mahfuz was looking for something to strangle her, she picked up the grinding stone and tried to hit him back, but ended up striking Sumaiya instead, according to the statement.

As the child, who was sleeping on the bed, began to scream, Mahfuz hit Lamia in the head with the stone again, knocking her down this time. He then strangled her and Sumaiya to confirm their deaths.

Around 7:15am on Saturday Shanto returned from school, after learning there would be no class that day. When the kid asked him why there was blood all around, Mahfuz banged his head against the wall and strangled him to death as well.

After this, he locked the house from outside and left, said the SP, quoting the confessional statement.

Abul Khayer, who is investigating the case, said Mahfuz's emotional involvement with lamia led to the murders.

Taslima's sister-in-law Hazera Begum went to the house in the city's Baburail area around 9:00pm on Saturday.

She found the door locked and could not reach any of them by phone.

Suspecting something was wrong, she along with neighbours broke into the flat and saw the bodies. She then called the police.

Neighbours said they heard no screams from the flat. They also did not see any visitor in the house that day.

Rehman Sobhan

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Indian film star Sharmila Thakur read parts of the book at the ceremony. Chinese Medical Board Chairman Lincoln Chan, Emeritus Prof Amio Bagchi, development economist Prof Siddiq Osmani, Bangladesh's political scientist Dr Rounaq Jahan, and AK Shivkumar, also took part in the discussion.

Sage Publications Chief Executive Vivek Mehra gave the welcome address at the ceremony.

Earlier, former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh unwrapped the book in New Delhi.

JP ministers to resign

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people's minds, he told The Daily Star in an interview by phone.

Ershad said the three ministers may step down after the party central council to be held in April.

Earlier on Tuesday, he told a press conference at his Banani office that he would request the PM to relieve him of the special envoy's post as he wanted to travel different parts of the country to look after his party affairs.

The former army chief-turned politician yesterday said the JP wants to be an alternative to BNP in politics, keeping the next general election in mind.

To achieve the goal, Ershad said he would strengthen the party grassroots, and bring changes in the leadership.

The JP, he said, will hold its central council to reorganise the party and have an able leadership as per opinion of the council members.

"All the leaders, including myself, will resign from party posts ahead of the council meeting, paving the way for picking a new leadership. The councillors will choose the leaders. I will be in the party only if they [councillors] pick me," he added.

He pledged to do everything needed for restoring people's confidence in the JP and the party's image which was tarnished by its previous mistakes.

"Before the next parliamentary election, we want to complete all the tasks that include uniting all nationalist forces," he added.

The former president observed that people withdrew their support for the BNP due to its recent "anti-people and violent activities". "We want to be an alternative to the BNP by addressing our shortcomings. The BNP has no future in politics due to its wrong and anti-people policy."

About the recent change in the JP's secretary general post, Ershad said the

decision sent a positive message to the country's people as well as to party men who have been inactive for a long time.

At one stage, he handed the phone to Ruhul Amin Hawlader, who replaced Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu as JP secretary general on Tuesday.

Hawlader said they will have an extended meeting by this month after a long time. The presidents and general secretaries of the party's district units and the chiefs of its front organisations will be present, he added.

"The meeting will decide on the roadmap for the council and discuss strengthening the party to bounce back from its present poor organisational state," said JP lawmaker Hawlader.

QUADER ON NATIONAL POLLS
Newly appointed JP co-chairman GN Quader told different media that he believes Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina might go for an acceptable mid-term election as the PM "doesn't consider the present political situation to be comfortable".

Quader, younger brother of the JP chief, said he personally backs an inclusive mid-term election.

Ershad on Saturday appointed him as the JP's co-chair, a post which does not exist in the party's charter.

He said JP presidium member Raushan Ershad, also the leader of the opposition in parliament, wants the three JP ministers resign from cabinet and the JP plays the role of a real opposition party.

The JP has three of its leaders in the cabinet. They are Water Resources Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud, State Minister for Local Government and Rural Development Mashiur Rahman Ranga and State Minister for Labour and Employment Mujibur Haque Chunnun.

SC to hold hearing

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observed that Sub-inspector Masud Shikder, who had been accused by Rabby of torturing him for money, should be sacked.

The stay order came in response to a government appeal. The chamber judge also sent the petition to the full bench of the apex court for hearing.

The SI and his subordinates beat up the BB official and demanded Tk 5 lakh on January 9 in the capital's Mohammadpur, according to the complaint. Following public outrage and protests, the central bank governor wrote to the inspector general of police (IGP), seeking justice for the young journalist-turned-banker.

With marks of physical assaults and mental trauma, Rabby was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

During yesterday's hearing, Attorney General Mahbub Alam told the court that the government had already begun departmental proceedings against the police personnel, including Masud Shikder, of Mohammadpur Police Station.

Besides, the primary investigation found evidence of torture and the SI has already been closed, he said, adding that a fully-fledged inquiry would now be conducted into the incident, and then the responsible police officers punished.

The government's move to seek a stay on the HC order came two days into the IGP's claim that the incident had occurred due to Rabby's refusal to let the law enforcers frisk him and an altercation with policemen.

At a community-policing event at Aminbazar on the outskirts of the capital, IGP AKM Shahidul Hogue said that preventing police from discharging their duties was a criminal offence, and a case could be lodged against the offender.

Then he went on to narrating the January 9 incident.

"Around 11:45pm, he [Rabby] was passing by Geneva Camp. There was a police checkpoint. Police wanted to frisk him, but he would not allow."

Showing identity cards is not enough to make police believe that he is that person, as identity cards can be "fake", the IGP said.

Police should have taken the man to the police station and verified the identity and then the man should have

been given a lift home. But things did not happen this way and so the SI was suspended, Shahidul said, adding that another reason behind the suspension was to ensure a fair investigation.

The IGP's statements, however, contradict the versions of Rabby and witnesses.

Rabby, an assistant director of BB, said there was no police checkpoint. "On that night, a policeman suddenly grabbed my [shirt's] collar from behind and tried to label me as a yaba trader. Can this be a process of searching?"

Raped second

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sought justice through arbitration.

Infuriated, Monu and his accomplices forced their way into the victim's house in the wee hours of Monday, tied up her husband and son, and took turns to rape her in another room and left, police said, quoting the victim's husband.

Later, her family members found her unconscious and took her to Habiganj Sadar Hospital.

Mohosin Kabir, resident medical officer at the hospital, said the woman was seriously injured.

Nirmalendu Chakrabarty, officer-in-charge of Baniarchang Police Station, said the victim filed a case with the police station, accusing Monu Miah, his accomplice Ustar Miah and 2-3 unnamed people.

Police arrested Monu yesterday and were trying to catch other criminals, the OC added.

The victim's husband said, "Monu had long been asking my wife to have an illicit relationship with him but she refused. This is the reason why he raped my wife."

However, Idris Miah refuted the allegation brought against his brother Monu.

Meanwhile, people of the Hindu community expressed outrage over the incident.

Trilok Kanti Chowdhury Bijon, president of Habiganj chapter of Bangladesh Jatiya Hindu Mohajot, said, "This brutality is not at all acceptable."

He demanded immediate arrest of other culprits and exemplary punishment of them.

'EU must avoid British exit, but not at any price'

AFP, Davos

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls warned yesterday that it would be a "very bad thing" if Britain left the EU, but warned that British demands cannot be met at any price.

A British EU exit "would undoubtedly be a bad thing, a very bad thing," Valls told reporters on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos. "There needs to be a deal, but not at any price."

Valls was speaking just hours before British Prime Minister David Cameron was set to lay out his vision of Britain's place in the world in a speech at the Swiss ski resort.

Cameron hopes to strike a deal on renegotiating Britain's ties with

Brussels at an EU summit next month, before calling a referendum on the country's membership on the EU. He will campaign to stay in the union.

An in-or-out referendum on British membership of the bloc will be held by the end of 2017, with commentators believing it could come this year if a deal is reached in February.

Britain needs the backing of France and Germany, the decisive powers in the EU, for any reform deal.

British Foreign Minister Philip Hammond on Tuesday said his government is willing to consider alternatives to one of its key demands for a four-year ban on top-up benefits for low-paid EU migrants working in Britain.