

Bank official kidnapped in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Unidentified criminals kidnapped a private bank official from the city's Sultanabad area on Thursday. Akhtaruzzaman, suspended manager of Exim Bank's Rajshahi branch, was abducted in a microbus around 1:30pm, said victim's father Afsaruddin in a case statement filed with Boalia Police Station yesterday.

Around six people in a microbus went to the spot, and the vehicle sped away after Akhtaruzzaman was taken inside the microbus. His mobile phone was found switched-off since the incident, said Afsar.

Akhtaruzzaman, a resident of the city's Seroil Morthpukur, was then having tea sitting at a printing press at Sultanabad, said his father.

Akhtaruzzaman was also a senior vice-president of Exim Bank and suspended six months ago.

Shahadat Hossain Khan, officer-in-charge of Boalia Police Station, said they were investigating the incident. "We have assigned officials to find him [Akhtaruzzaman] out."

Akhtaruzzaman filed a case with a Rajshahi court, challenging his suspension order, said Nurul Habib, another vice-president of Exim Bank's Rajshahi branch.

LITVINENKO KILLING

Papers urge UK to punish 'thug' Putin

AFP, London

British newspapers yesterday welcomed an inquiry's finding that Russian President Vladimir Putin "probably approved" the killing of ex-spy Alexander Litvinenko, labelling Putin a "thug".

Litvinenko died of radiation poisoning in 2006 after drinking tea laced with radioactive polonium at a London hotel. The judge-led inquiry into what happened published its long-awaited findings on Thursday.

Many newspapers insisted that Prime Minister David Cameron's government must go further in punishing Russia over the Litvinenko killing, despite ministers' hopes that Putin could help bring an end to the conflict in Syria.

Relations between Britain and Russia were already in deep freeze before the inquiry's findings were published, over a series of issues including the situation in Ukraine and the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 there in 2014.

Britain announced no fresh sanctions over the Litvinenko killing, instead summoning Russia's ambassador to London and imposing asset freezes on the two chief suspects, Andrei Lugovoi and Dmitri Kovtun.

Hasina

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her for the announcement.

He said Bangladesh was moving ahead in the fields of knowledge, science, technology and economy under the leadership of Hasina.

The CJ urged all to get united so that the success is sustained.

Bangladeshis

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kept at a special centre in the capital city's satellite suburb of Hulhumale before they are deported.

Early this month, the Maldives government began fining businesses that employed expatriates as cashiers. Although fines ranging from MVR10,000 to MVR50,000 can be levied, the government imposed an initial fine of MVR10,000.

In last April, economic ministry declared that any expatriate to work as a cashier in shops, cafes and restaurants without documents would be deported. Immigration department had also stopped approving quotas for expatriates brought to the Maldives for the purpose.

Only Maldivians are allowed to work at the local market where products manufactured in the islands are sold. However, most of the stalls are occupied by expatriate workers.

Kazi Sarwar Hossain, Bangladesh's high commissioner to the Maldives, yesterday told the Channel i over the telephone that there are rules in the Maldives that the citizens of only that country will get appointed to the posts of cashier and accountant in business organisations.

If foreigners work in those posts, the Maldives government takes legal action against them as per the rule, he said, adding that the detained Bangladeshis were working as cashier and accountant at a market.

The envoy also said legal assistance was being given to the detainees.

Steps had also been taken so that the Bangladeshis, who will lose their jobs for the Maldives government's decision, could get new jobs, he added.

Some 50,000 to 60,000

Bangladeshis are believed to work in the Maldives.

Millions in US brace for monster blizzard

AFP, Washington

The eastern US braced for a monstrous blizzard yesterday that has prompted thousands of flight cancellations and the looming shutdown of Washington's public transportation system.

The US capital and the surrounding area could see up to two feet (61 centimeters) of snow accumulate in a short time from Friday to Saturday, coupled with fierce winds and blinding squalls, weather experts said.

The federal government in Washington is closing at noon Friday because of the storm. As several states made frantic preparations, as far south as Kentucky the governor said he too was shutting down government offices on Friday.

So far more than 4,500 flights originally scheduled for Friday and Saturday within, into or out of the US have been cancelled, according to the flight monitor flightaware.com.

No standards

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"People once had no idea about water purification but the rising water pollution has forced them to look for solutions," said a director of a company that imports water filter equipment.

Marketers make numerous and sometimes preposterous claims about their products, but experts and consumers say it is very hard to be sure.

Shah Md Abdul Khaleque, who recently bought a purifier, said he purchased it in good faith. "But I don't know if it really purifies water."

To reassure himself, he boils the water before putting it in the "purifier".

Monzur Morshed Ahmed, principal scientific officer and research coordinator at Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR), said some people brought in their water filters to them to see if the claims were true.

"Such claims are not always true," he told The Daily Star.

"A uniform national standard and monitoring mechanism for water filters or purifiers is necessary so that people get quality products. Unsafe water is one of the main sources of many water-borne diseases," Ahmed said.

The government can designate labs, for example at the BCSIR, to test water filters if the BSTI cannot do it alone, he noted.

The main domestic market for water purifiers is Dhaka and its surrounding areas. However, the demand is increasing in other districts as well.

While makers of bottled drinking water and natural mineral water have to get mandatory certification from the BSTI, companies manufacturing and marketing water filters do not need any such approval.

"We are yet to take any initiative to develop any standard for water purifying filters or kits," BSTI Director (standard) Rezaul Karim told this correspondent.

But why? Prof Abul Kalam Azad, additional director general of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said the health service office did not feel the urgency to work on water purifiers and filters as no one

Tens of millions of people could be affected by snow, and millions more by ice and other dangerous conditions, the National Weather Service said.

"You put all the ingredients together, you can get a storm like this and it's happening in real time," NWS director Louis Uccellini said.

With authorities warning the storm could bury Washington under more snow than it has seen in nearly a century, officials announced they would take the unusual step of closing down the city's rail and bus system from Friday night until Monday morning.

The Metro system -- the second busiest in the US after New York -- serves about 700,000 customers a day in Washington, Maryland and Virginia.

It is likely the longest closing in the system's 40-plus year history, The Washington Post reported.

Rail carrier Amtrak said it will be running fewer trains over the weekend between Virginia and Boston.

had filed any complaint about it.

Moreover, the country lacks the capacity to test all health-related machineries and equipment. The DGHS just attaches a condition that the equipment should be certified by the US or the EU authorities.

"As water filters and purifiers are usually imported, we think that these are imported based on the approval from some other authority. However, we will discuss the issue," he said.

But even if they are approved by the country of origin, there should be a domestic standard to protect consumers against deception, said ABM Faroque, professor of pharmaceutical technology at Dhaka University.

Experts suggested that the government make rules so importers collect quality certificates from the exporting countries.

Commerce Secretary Hedayetullah Al Mamoon said the import policy was formulated based on recommendations of various agencies and stakeholders.

"Had we got recommendations, we could have considered them and taken steps accordingly," he said.

In the meantime, some local and foreign brands of water purifiers and filters have flooded the market. Depending on the quality, they cost between Tk 1,000 and 1,50,000.

A top official of a company admitted that many people were being fooled by cheap and ineffective products and that no certification was needed for importing his brand.

Dhaka Wasa has the capacity of generating 240 crore litres of water a day against the need for 225 crore litres.

But studies found various bacteria, including e coli and coliform, in the Wasa water. If consumed, these germs can cause diseases like diarrhoea and typhoid, said Dr Aliya Naheed, a scientist at the icddr.

The good news is Wasa is replacing its old pipes with new ones, which should be good enough to ensure quality water. It should go for a campaign after replacing all the old pipes, said Khairul Islam, country representative of UK-based WaterAid Bangladesh.

BNP national council

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move would reorganise and strengthen the party as well as rejuvenating its central and grassroots units.

He, however, said the date could be changed later, if required.

Another senior BNP leader told this correspondent that the council would be deferred if the first phase of union parishad polls took place at the end of March.

Contacted, BNP standing committee member Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman said there was possibility that tonight's meeting would discuss party reforms as well as the council.

He, however, did not elaborate on the matter.

The ruling Awami League has announced that its 20th triennial council would be held on March 28.

The BNP's charter says the party will have to hold its national council in every three years. But the previous one took place on December 8 in 2009.

According to several party leaders, the BNP was about to hold the sixth council in 2013 but had to change the plan at the last moment after the government started arresting its senior leaders, and raided their central office at Naya Paltan.

They fear similar "government oppression" this time as well.

After the crushing defeat in the 2008 general elections, the BNP had reorganised all its units across the country. It went for the fifth council afterwards.

The council re-elected Khaleda as the party chairperson and created a new post of senior vice-chairman. Khaleda's son Tarique Rahman was elected to the post. Khandaker Delwar Hossain was elected as the secretary general.

After the death of Delwar in 2011,

Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir became the acting secretary general.

According to BNP insiders, the sixth council would bring no change in the top leadership of the party. Also, Fakhru is likely to become the secretary general, even though a portion of the party is against the move.

A senior BNP leader said tonight's meeting at Khaleda's Gulshan office would also discuss the upcoming UP polls as well as the party's organisational activities ahead of the elections.

The meeting may discuss the recent comment of Chief Justice SK Sinha that a judge's act of writing a judgment after his retirement goes against the law and the constitution, said party sources.

Recently, the Supreme Court Bar Association has demanded restoration of the caretaker government system, claiming the verdict against it was illegal as it was signed by a judge after his retirement.

The BNP has been demanding restoration of the caretaker government for long.

BCL men

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followers of BCL JU unit vice-president Ariful Islam. They are Abu Sadat Sayem, a master's student of government and politics; Jahid Hasan and Jamshed Alam, second-year students of Bangla and international relations respectively.

The BCL men, however, denied the allegations and said it was the teacher who hurled abuse at them.

JU Proctor Prof Tapan Kumar Saha said they did not yet get any formal complaint about the incident. He said legal action would be taken after proper investigation into the matter.

It may be

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development of such weapons, they said at a January 19-23 meeting of billionaires, scientists and political leaders in the snow-covered ski resort of Davos.

Angela Kane, the German UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs from 2012-2015, said the world had been slow to take pre-emptive measures to protect humanity from the lethal technology.

"It may be too late," she told a debate in Davos.

"There are many countries and many representatives in the international community that really do not understand what is involved. This development is something that is limited to a certain number of advanced countries," Kane said.

The deployment of autonomous weapons would represent a dangerous new era in warfare, scientists said.

"We are not talking about drones, where a human pilot is controlling the drone," said Stuart Russell, professor of computer science at University of California, Berkeley.

"We are talking about autonomous weapons, which means that there is no one behind it. AI: artificial intelligence weapons," he told a forum in Davos. "Very precisely, weapons that can locate and attack targets without human intervention."

Russell said he did not foresee a day in which robots fight the wars for humans and at the end of the day one side says: "OK you won, so you can have all our women."

But some 1,000 science and technology chiefs including British physicist Stephen Hawking, said in an open letter last July that the development of weapons with a degree of autonomous decision-making capacity could be feasible within years, not decades.

They called for a ban on offensive autonomous weapons that are beyond meaningful human control, warning that the world risked sliding into an artificial intelligence arms race and raising alarm over the risks of such weapons falling into the hands of violent extremists.

"The question is can these machines follow the rules of war?" Russell said.

How, for example, could an autonomous weapon differentiate between civilians, soldiers, resistance fighters and rebels? How could it know that it should not kill a pilot who has ejected from a plane and is parachuting to the ground?

"I am against robots for ethical reasons but I do not believe ethical arguments will win the day. I believe strategic arguments will win the day," Russell said.

The United States had renounced biological weapons because of the risk that one day they could be deployed by "almost anybody", he said. "I hope this will happen with robots."

Alan Winfield, professor of electronic engineering at the University of the West of England, warned that removing humans from battlefield decision-making would have grave consequences.

"It means that humans are deprived from moral responsibility," Winfield said.

Moreover, the reaction of the robots may be hard to predict, he said: "When you put a robot in a chaotic environment, it behaves chaotically."

Roger Carr, chairman of the British aerospace and defence group BAE, agreed.

"If you remove ethics and judgement and morality from human endeavour whether it is in peace or war, you will take humanity to another level which is beyond our comprehension," Carr warned.

"You equally cannot put something into the field that, if it malfunctions, can be very destructive with no control mechanism from a human. That is why the umbilical link, man to machine, is not only to decide when to deploy the weapon but it is also the ability to stop the process. Both are equally important."

Islamist gunmen

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rescued many people who had been trapped inside the restaurant's hall, where a party was taking place when the attack started on Thursday.

An eye witness told The BBC that a wedding ceremony was taking place in the hall of the restaurant when the attack happened.

Witnesses said that gunmen entered the restaurant from the direction of the beach. They shouted "Allahu akbar," the Arabic phrase for "God is great," as they attacked.

"They randomly fired at people sitting near the beach before entering the restaurant," said witness Ahmed Nur, who was strolling along the shoreline when the attack happened.

Al-Shabaab attacked Kenyan peacekeepers in southwestern Somalia last week.

The al-Qaeda-linked group said it had killed about 100 Kenyans and seized weapons and military vehicles.

The Kenyan government has given no death toll, but said there were some fatalities.

Despite being pushed out of Somalia's major cities and towns, al-Shabaab continues to launch deadly guerrilla attacks across the Horn of Africa country.

African Union troops, government officials and foreigners are frequently targeted.

Patients in Ctg

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severe back pain but was refused to be admitted there. Her family members also tried to get her admitted to some other private clinics but to no avail. Finally, they rushed her to the CMCH.

Jewel, son-in-law of Majeda, said they had been trying to get Majeda admitted to a private clinic since Thursday evening.

Contacted, Md Saiful Islam, emergency medical officer of the CMCH, said they received an overwhelming number of patients in the hospital yesterday.

"The well-off patients, who usually prefer visiting private clinics, are also coming to this hospital," he said.

A total of 145 new patients got admitted to the CMCH until 1:00pm yesterday, he said, adding that the number is much higher than what they receive in a normal day.

Rokhsana Begum, who is now admitted to gynaecology ward, came here after her family members failed to get her admitted to a private clinic.

"We took her to three private clinics, but all refused to admit her. So we brought her here," said Rokhsana's brother Kabir.

The rush of patients was also seen at cardiology and paediatrics wards.

The number of patients receiving treatment at cardiology ward is now 246, although its capacity is 60, said hospital sources.

Besides, the 65-bed paediatrics ward is now accommodating 170 patients, they added.

Prabir Kumar Das, an associate professor of cardiology department of the hospital, said the number of patients in cardiology ward increased fourfold.

"We are in a tremendous pressure to provide healthcare services due to the rush of patients," he said.

Meanwhile, many patients had to return from diagnostic centres without performing tests and many critical patients were refused to have appoint-

ments of consultants in private chambers.

Swapan Das, who was suffering from liver complications, yesterday went to the Centre for Specialised Care and Research (CSCR) for some diagnostic tests but was refused.

"I went to three diagnostic centres to have some tests done but all of them refused... Where will I go now?" Swapan asked.

Contacted, Mujibul Haque Khan, president of Chittagong unit of Bangladesh Medical Association, said they would form human chains in front of every hospitals and clinics today, protesting the filing of the cases against doctors and attacks on physicians at different hospitals at different times.

"We will organise a press conference at Chittagong Press Club in the afternoon and declare our further programmes," he said.

Regarding patients' sufferings, he said doctors were providing healthcare services round the clock at the CMCH.

"We have asked the private clinics to keep their intensive care unit and coronary care unit open for the sake of critical patients," he said.

On January 10, Meherun Nesa, 22, niece of expatriate welfare minister Nurul Islam, died at a private clinic in Katalganj area following a caesarean operation due to alleged negligence of doctors. Another doctor at CMCH mistakenly left a bandage inside the body of Nur Absar, son of Jibal Hossain, during a recent surgery, according to the case statements.

The accused doctors are Shamima Siddique Rosy, Mahbubul Alam and Assistant Registrar Rana Chowdhury of CMCH. Rosy performed the c-section of Meherun at Surgiscope Hospital.

On Tuesday, the two cases were filed with a Chittagong court against the three physicians alleging negligence in duties.

American Airlines sued

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class. They were assigned seats in the first and third row, respectively.

Anand and Alam said they switched seats with strangers after boarding, so they could sit next to each other.

Several minutes later, a white female flight attendant asked W.H. to get off the plane, the lawsuit alleges.

"I thought it was an evacuation or something, so I didn't think nothing of it, but then she told me to take my bags, and when I went back into the plane I saw I was the only one standing," said WH, a fashion designer.

The flight attendant then asked MK, who works as a construction worker, to leave.

The other two -- one Hispanic and the other, Pakistani -- had fallen asleep and were not kicked off, they claim.

Passengers surrounding Alam and Anand started making racist comments and clutching their children "as if something was going to happen," the suit charges.

"Then we were asked to get our belongings to get off the aircraft," said Alam, a general contractor who runs his own construction company.

"They were told to 'just be peaceful,' making it seem like they were a threat, making other passengers uncomfortable and wanting to get off the flight," said Tahanie Aboushi, who represents them.

When they got off the plane, a jittery agent from American Airlines told them they made the crew uncomfortable.

"She said the stewardess and the captain felt uneasy with us being on the flight," WH said. "There were inconsistencies of our behaviour traveling as a group, because two of us upgraded and two of us didn't."

"They didn't cite any basis of inappropriate or boisterous behaviour; their situation wasn't a security issue or threat," charged Aboushi. "It's the plaintiffs' position that the reason they were taken off the flight is because this

is blatant discrimination."

MK says he asked the agent if they were thrown off because of their appearance. Alam has a darker complexion. WH has a beard.

Anand wears a turban and a beard, in keeping with his Sikh tradition.

The agent said their appearance "did not help," according to the suit.

The flight took off, leaving the four men behind.

The gate agent told them they had to wait to see whether the captain and crew of the next flight would agree to let them on board, they claim.

"They said it was protocol," said Anand, who works as a personal banker.

The captain of the flight that Anand and Alam had originally booked agreed to take the four men to LaGuardia Airport.

The four men are seeking damages, alleging the airline "disgracefully engaged in the discrimination ... based on their perceived race, color, ethnicity, alienage and/or national origin," the lawsuit reads.

Matt Miller, an American Airlines spokesman, said the company had yet to receive the lawsuit and could not comment.

Under federal guidelines, airlines are accorded the latitude to stipulate when flight captains may and may not refuse to transport a passenger. The pilot and flight crew in this case were contracted through Republic Airlines, a source said.

The men are also suing Republic Airlines and American Eagle, which were operating the plane under the banner of American Airlines. Republic and American Eagle could not immediately be reached for comment.

"I've travelled many times and never thought this would happen to me," said WH, who is reconsidering a trip to Amsterdam because of this experience. "It never crossed my mind that I would ever feel discriminated against. I felt like a criminal."

[From CNN, New York Daily News]

44 migrants die

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The latest incidents bring the number of people killed on the eastern Mediterranean route in the past year to at least 900, said IOM spokesman Joel Millman in Geneva.

The total number of arrivals in Europe by sea rose to about 37,000 in January, more than six times the combined figures for the same month in 2014 and 2015, usually a slow month due to the bad weather.

EU member states have been split about how to end the crisis, with Austria the latest to draw fire when it decided to impose a limit on its asylum seeker intake.

Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz said the measure serves as a "wake-up call" to push Europe to find a joint solution.

Merkel has so far resisted demands for a quota, after nearly 1.1 million asylum seekers arrived in Germany in 2015.

She has instead promised a "tangible reduction" in new arrivals, and is counting on international efforts to deliver.

Merkel won some backing from US President Barack Obama, who in a phone call late Thursday pledged to contribute "substantially" at a Syria donors' conference in February.

At the Davos summit of business and political elite, US Secretary of State John Kerry also made a call for a 30-percent hike in international aid for refugees.

But Merkel is well aware of the pivotal role played by Turkey, which not only shares a border with war-torn Syria but is also a launchpad for thousands of migrants.