

Don't distort Bangla

PM urges all

UNB, Dhaka

Underscoring the need for further enriching Bangla, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called for building massive awareness to avoid distortion of the mother language.

"We want people to know different languages, but in doing so there shouldn't be any distortion of our language, and everyone should remain aware and cautious in this regard. Massive awareness should be created among people," she said.

The PM was inaugurating a four-day programme marking the International Mother Language Day 2016 and the Martyrs' Day at the International Mother Language Institute in the capital.

Hasina said she personally believes since the world has turned into a global village, people need to learn various languages for the sake of their livelihood while there is nothing wrong in learning multiple languages.

"But, we see very often a culture of forgetting Bangla among some people who consider it as an act of great virtue...it hurts me. Besides, there're people who think that their prestige would get perished if they couldn't enrol their children in English medium schools," she added.

Hasina also noted that there are some persons who consider pronouncing

Bangla in English accent as a great thing.

Describing the background of establishing the International Mother Language Institute, she said the aim of her government is to further develop and enrich Bangla so that it could stand tall in the global arena and continue to attract more attention to the global community.

The PM also suggested that the institute authorities should continue efforts to preserve the languages of small ethnic groups so that their future generation could learn and practise those.

Hasina said Ekushey February belongs not only to Bangladesh, now it is globally recognised as the International Mother Language Day. "We want that people across the globe should know our culture and heritage."

She also called upon all to expand the use and practice of the mother language and create mass awareness through the media in this regard. "We should also aim to further flourish our own culture and uniqueness through the mass media and the entertainment media," she said.

Recalling with deep respect the martyrdom of all the language heroes alongside the role of Bangabandhu in the language movement, she said now this Ekushey February is being celebrated



People gather at the temple in Shonapota of Debiganj in Panchagarh where Jogeswar Dasadhikari, a Hindu priest, was killed yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Priest killed, devotee shot

FROM PAGE 1
Shonapota around 6:30am, police said.

They quoting locals said Jogeswar heard noises of stones being pelted on the temple roof and went out in the foggy morning to see what was going on, reports our Thakurgaon correspondent.

Two to three assailants were waiting for him and they stabbed him indiscriminately, said OC Babul.

Wounded Jogeswar ran towards a house in the backyard of the temple but the criminals chased him and slit his throat there. He died on the spot, said the OC.

Devotee Gopal Chandra Roy, 35, who lives in the temple, said he was in the kitchen and was singing kirtan, a form of devotional song, when he heard Jogeswar's screams. He rushed outside and saw a man pointing a gun at him.

The man started firing at him and he was hit in the arm. When the criminal was trying to reload, Gopal scaled a wall and made his escape, reports our Rangpur correspondent.

Hearing gunshots, Nitai Das, 40, ran towards the temple compound and saw Gopal making his escape. He also saw criminals stabbing Jogeswar.

When the criminals were fleeing, they hurled a homemade bomb at

Nitai injuring him.

Nitai was in Debiganj Upazila Health Complex for treatment.

Gopal was in Rangpur Medical College Hospital and a doctor there said a bullet pierced through his left elbow and that his life was not in immediate danger.

Locals said they saw three people flee the village on a motorbike.

Police went to the spot and sent the body of Jogeswar to Panchagarh Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

They said they collected a blood-stained machete, a bullet and a bullet shell from the scene as evidence. They were unclear about the motive behind the killing.

Members of different law enforcement agencies including police, Rapid Action Battalion, Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) had collected evidence from the spot.

Giasuddin Ahmed, superintendent of police in Panchagarh, told BBC Bangla Service that they formed a committee to probe the killing while CID, the Special Branch, and Rab were assisting them.

Replying to a query on whether it was a planned attack on the religious minority, the SP told BBC Bangla Service that they were investigating the

incident keeping two to three aspects in mind.

"Jama'atul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB) is also in our list of suspects," the SP told AFP.

Jogeswar's elder brother Rabindranath Roy filed a murder case with Debiganj Police Station accusing three unknown people, said Inspector (investigation) Aiyub Ali of the police station. Police also filed an illegal arms and explosive case.

Rabindranath said the temple did not have anything worth stealing and that their family had no enmity with anyone.

A life-long bachelor, Jogeswar built the temple in 1998 just half a kilometre away from the upazila headquarters selling off his land and other properties, said Rabindranath.

He had been living there and several hundred devotees from nearby villages visit the temple and offer prayers each day, he added.

With the killing of Jogeswar, at least three clerics were attacked in last five months across the country.

Pastor Luke Sarker of Pabna and Italian Pastor Piero Parolari, who lives in Dinajpur, were attacked in their homes on October 5 and November 18.

Law enforcers have claimed that banned militant outfit Jama'atul

Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) had carried out the attacks.

On November 3, police, quoting the confessional statement of JMB suspect Rakibul Islam, said the outfit led the attack on Pastor Luke Sarker in Pabna on October 5 as "he was preaching Christianity among people".

In his deposition, Rakibul said four other JMB men and he planned to kill the pastor, according to police.

Luke was attacked by three motorbike riders in his house in Schoolpara area of Ishwardi.

Traumatized by the attack, Luke left his home three weeks later.

Shariful Islam, who was caught red handed during an attack on an ISKCON temple in Dinajpur on December 10, confessed before a court on December 17 that he was involved in the shooting of Piero Parolari too, police said.

JMB suspect Shariful admitted that he was among the three people who carried out the attack near the BRTC Bus Terminal in Dinajpur town on November 18, said police.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Puja Uddhapan Parishad and Bangladesh Hindu Buddha Christian Parishad in statements yesterday strongly condemned the killing and demanded trial of the killers and their instigators.

4 Bangladeshis die in Riyadh car crash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four Bangladeshis nationals, including a couple, were killed and two others injured in a road accident at Al-Kharj city of Saudi Arabia's Riyadh on Saturday morning.

The victims have been identified as Abbas Ali, 45, his wife Rehana Parvin, 32, residents of Bhogti village in Keshabpur upazila of Jessore and Selina Parvin, 35 and her son Sayed, 18 from Jhenidah Sadar upazila.

Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, second secretary (labour wing) at Bangladesh embassy in Riyadh confirmed this to The Daily Star yesterday over phone. The injured are Selina's husband Syful Islam, 45 and their daughter Shammi, 14.

"The accident took place when a truck hit a private car carrying six

Bangladeshi nationals who were returning after performing Umrah hajj. They were asleep in the car," Rahman said.

The bodies of the deceased have been kept at the mortuary of a local hospital at Al-Kharj city, 77km from Riyadh.

The bodies of Abbas and his wife Rehana will be brought back to Bangladesh while the bodies of Syful's wife and son will be buried in Saudi Arabia, Mizanur said quoting the families' relatives.

Abbas and Syful were working in a company in Saudi Arabia for several years; he said adding that their families had recently gone to Saudi Arabia on visit visas. Both families were friends for many years.

The embassy will assist the families to complete necessary procedures, the official added.

Police role questioned as probe going nowhere

FROM PAGE 1

Police Station around three months after he was assigned to probe the case.

Hours after the incident, police claimed the three were killed in a mob beating at Kazipara in Mirpur.

However, in the first information report filed on February 23, they said the boys were beaten and shot by a mob of 100/150 people after they were caught while preparing to carry out an arson attack.

Victims' families say the way police have been dealing with the probe makes them suspect that a bid is afoot to cover up how and why their boys were killed and who were involved.

"We are left with no choice but holding police in suspicion for the murders," Jyotsna Rani Das, mother of Sumon, told The Daily Star yesterday.

THE INCIDENT

Last year, the BNP and its allies had launched a violent movement to dislodge the government. The movement lasted about three months since January 5, the first anniversary of the 10th parliamentary elections that the opposition combine had boycotted.

The government and the police were struggling to contain the violence that saw numerous public transports being firebombed by arsonists and at least 75 deaths already.

Around 7:00pm on February 22, locals caught the three boys on suspicion that they were preparing to firebomb a public transport on Rokeya Sarani opposite Monipur High School in Shewrapara of Mirpur, according to witnesses.

The trio were then taken to the office of a local cable TV operator, Mahbubur Rahman who is president of the pro-government Awami Jubo League's Ward-14 unit in Dhaka (North). About two hours later, the three boys were handed over to a police team, added the witnesses.

Mahbubur confirmed this version to The Daily Star. Police, however, claimed to the media immediately after the incident that they had found the three critically injured in a mob beating at Kazipara, and rushed them to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The boys were declared dead in the early hours of February 23.

QUESTIONS OVER PROBE

Sub-inspector Masud Parvez of

Mirpur Police Station on February 23 filed a case, stating that three "unidentified" arsonists were beaten and shot to death by a mob.

The bodies bore at least 56 bullet wounds, said sources in the DMC morgue.

Interestingly, police never sought the autopsy reports from the morgue authorities, a must for dealing with such cases.

Residents of Baishbari, located some 400 yards from the cable operator office, said they had seen police carrying away the three bullet-riddled bodies from an alleyway there around 10:00pm.

A middle-aged woman, who lives in a building beside the alley, said there was no mob there.

"There was no crowd. Rather, multiple gunshots rocked the area in two phases," said the woman, whose identity is being withheld for security concerns.

The building owner, also not being named, echoes the woman's words.

At least a dozen other locals described the incident along this line.

Asked why the victims were not

named in the case, SI Masud said, "Because we did not find the families [of the victims] after the murders."

He, however, said he knew that two of the bodies were handed over to their families on February 24.

It was SI Masud who did the bodies' inquests in the early hours of February 23 at the hospital, and prepared the list of items seized from the spot of the incident.

The seizure list did not include the bloodstained ropes believed to have been used in tying up the victims' hands, the cartridges or the bullets that were found by The Daily Star correspondents on the spot the morning after the incident.

Masud claimed he failed to notice all the evidences and thought the investigation officer would include those later.

However, the then IO, SI Syed Asaduzzaman, had said, "I thought the seizure list included all the evidences."

COURT ORDERS IGNORED

Since the case was filed, a Dhaka court at least on two occasions had directed the police to inform it about progress of the investigation.

But the cops disregarded the

orders on both occasions.

So far all that police have submitted to the court are a one-page FIR and the inquest reports.

WHO IS THE IO?

These correspondents contacted eight officials of Mirpur Police Station, including Officer-in-Charge Bhuiyan Mahbub Hasan, over the past few months to know who the investigating officer (IO) of the case was.

But none could say anything with certainty.

At one stage, OC Mahbub said the investigation was transferred to the detective branch of police.

However, court documents, which usually contain the notice of any such transfer, do not bear out his claim.

Police documents submitted to the court still show SI Syed Asaduzzaman as the IO.

The Mirpur OC could not be reached on his phone for further comments despite several attempts since Friday.

NONCOOPERATION TO VICTIM FAMILIES

Ever since the murders, families of Sumon and Robin visited Mirpur Police Station at least three times to

see if "the culprits had been identified".

But they were not even given a copy of the statement of the case police had filed over the murders.

"Police said they would be in trouble if we got the case statement. They treated us as if we were not human beings," said Sumon's mother Jyotsna.

She then filed a separate case with a Dhaka court on December 28 last year.

"I want justice. I will spare no one. Now that I have lost my son, I have nothing more to lose," Jyotsna said.

Sumon's father Johnny Rabi Das finds the police reaction regarding the murders "suspicious".

"It all affirmed the widespread suspicion and my belief that cops were involved in the murders," said Johnny.

Another victim, Robin, was an orphan. His uncle Sujon would not talk about the matter for fear of reprisals.

The boys were friends and known for attending political programmes for money.

Love for language

FROM PAGE 1

school established by Jahangir for the school dropouts in the village.

As the clock struck 12:01am yesterday, the International Mother Language day, teachers, students, among the progressive of the village, paid homage to the language heroes, placing wreaths at the Shaheed Minar.

An emotional Jahangir said, "We built the Shaheed Minar to keep alive the memories of the heroes who laid down their lives to establish Bangla as a state language. We want our upcoming generations to know what they [the martyrs] did for us."

Placing wreaths, Robin Khan, a social worker and director of Rangpur Group, thanked Jahangir and the others for their efforts.

Sadeque Ali, a villager, said, "We had tried to build a Shaheed Minar several times but every time we faced obstructions from influential people."

"But, we have finally defeated the religious zealotry and we are proud of that," he said.

Withdraw cases against 2 editors

FROM PAGE 1

publishing without verification a few reports based on information given by the Task Force Interrogation (TFI) cell during the military-backed caretaker government rule in 2007.

On February 16, a Narayanganj court issued a warrant for Anam's arrest in a case filed by a private lawyer but revised the order a day later to issue a summons.

In recent years, Bangla daily Prothom Alo, its Editor Matiuur Rahman and some journalists of the daily saw 55 cases filed against them on charges of criminal defamation and "hurting religious sentiment", HRW said.

The charges against Matiuur Rahman stem from a series of articles the paper ran on alleged irregularities in the purchase of power tillers by a local government office and a cartoon published in the paper's political satire section, it added.

"Criminal charges against editors

of the leading newspapers in Bangladesh are a clear attempt to intimidate all media in the country," said Brad Adams, Asia director at HRW.

"A government controlling almost all seats in parliament and all national executive authority has to be particularly protective of a free press - or risk turning Bangladesh into an authoritarian state."

The cases are part of a larger, organised assault on independent media in Bangladesh, HRW said.

"Bangladeshi authorities have closed critical media houses, jailed editors, tried bloggers, and charged journalists with contempt of court for reporting unfavorably on government actions. The editor of Amar Desh newspaper, Mahmudur Rahman, has been jailed without trial since 2013 on charges of sedition and unlawful publication of intercepted conversations," reads the statement.

"Both The Daily Star and Prothom Alo have faced government retaliation for their reporting. Media personnel have alleged to Human Rights Watch that this includes a ban on advertising by large private companies in the two papers. Several corporate sources speaking anonymously stated that they had received these instructions in an article published by Al Jazeera in October 2015," it adds.

"Defamation should not be treated as a crime," Adams said. "If a newspaper intentionally publishes false information that harms an individual's reputation, then a civil defamation case is the proper remedy, so long as a fair and impartial trial can be assured. But Bangladesh should not be in the business of jailing journalists for what they write."

HRW called for repeal of the sedition law, which it described as overly broad and vague.

"Bangladesh's sedition and crimi-

nal defamation laws are contrary to the country's international human rights obligations. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Bangladesh ratified in 2000, prohibits restrictions on freedom of expression on national security grounds unless they are provided by law, strictly construed, and necessary and proportionate to address a legitimate threat.

"Such laws cannot put the right itself in jeopardy. The United Nations Human Rights Committee, which interprets the ICCPR, has said that state parties should move toward abolishing criminal defamation and that no one should ever risk imprisonment for defamation."

Activists and human rights defenders have faced charges, arrest, and intimidation. Bloggers who have expressed atheist sentiments have been killed, yet others have faced charges of insulting religious feelings.

"These criminal charges are clearly a form of retribution against political enemies of the government."

"And while it is going after journalists, the government has taken no action to hold members of DGFI accountable for the extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and torture that took place during the caretaker period," Adams said.

In 2007, The Daily Star ran 11 reports based on information given by the TFI cell, without being able to verify those independently. Of those reports, seven were on alleged corruption of Khaleda Zia, her two sons and other BNP leaders, three on alleged graft of Hasina and one on the then chief conservator of forests, Osman Gani.

Presently, the cases being filed against Mahfuz Anam allege that the reports published by this newspaper led to the arrest of AL chief Sheikh Hasina, thus defaming her.