

DEATH OF A WORKER 7 hurt as 'factory guards' open fire on protesters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cig

Seven people were hit by bullets allegedly from security guards of Kabir Steel Ltd over the death of a factory worker in a road crash at the entrance to the factory in Sitakunda upazila of Chittagong yesterday.

Incensed at the death of Md Sumon, locals blocked the Dhaka-Chittagong highway for about two hours from 11:30am, said Sitakunda police.

The 28-year-old was run over by a long vehicle when he was entering the factory at the ship-breaking yard at Gamartol around 8:00am, said Saleh Ahmed Pathan, officer-in-charge of Barowalia Highway Police Station. The factory gate is around 50 feet away from the highway.

The youth from South Sonaichari village in the upazila died on the spot. The driver, however, managed to escape.

Hearing the news, locals along with the victim's relatives staged a demonstration in front of the factory around 11:00am.

Talking to The Daily Star, Sumon's relative Shahnaz Akhter said, "The factory authorities took the body inside and did not hand it over to us. They tried to cover up the fact that Sumon was run over by their vehicle."

As the protesters tried to vandalise the factory, security guards opened fire on them, leaving the agitators wounded, witnesses said.

Injured Shanaj Akhter, 25, Delwar, 22, Munna, 22, Osman, 22, Nurnabi, 20, Sahabuddin, 18, and Samir Ahad, 16, were sent to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH). All the seven are from Gamartol area in Sitakunda.

Rajib Palit, emergency medical officer at the hospital, said the injuries were caused by bullets.

Police later detained six officials of the factory. The agitators withdrew the barricade on the highway following assurance from law enforcers of taking legal actions in this regard.

Police sent the body to the CMCH for an autopsy.

MA Karim Dulal, director of Kabir Steel Ltd, said they have 75 security staff at the ship-breaking yard. One of them uses a licensed gun.

Md Gias, security officer of the factory, fired blank shots when the agitators tried to set a fuel storage tank on fire, claimed Karim. Gias is one of the seven officials detained by police.

The director stated that local lawmaker Didarul Alam owns the vehicle which was involved in the accident. The company uses it on rent, he added.



A bullet-hit man is being taken to hospital in Sitakunda upazila of Chittagong. Six others were injured after security guards of a steel mill allegedly opened fire on protesters who blocked the Dhaka-Chittagong highway and attempted to vandalise the factory following the death of a factory worker yesterday.

PM instructs ministries to work on dist council polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday instructed the law ministry to consult the ministries concerned to work on a modality of holding elections to district councils to run them by elected chairmen.

The PM gave the directive at the weekly cabinet meeting after the law ministry informed the cabinet that Zila Parishad (amendment) Act-2015 was withdrawn from parliament, source of the meeting told The Daily Star.

The cabinet in October last year approved drafts of local government acts, seeking amendments to four laws and one ordinance, aiming to hold local government polls on a partisan basis or with party symbols or independently.

Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star that as the Zila Parishad Act-2015 was withdrawn from parliament, cabinet's re-approval was necessary to this end.

"We have completed the formality at the cabinet meeting. Now, it is the government to decide how the elections to the zila parishads will be held," he added.

Another minister said the government wants elected chairmen in the zila parishads. If the election is held, it will be first of its kind in the history of Bangladesh.

At the cabinet meeting, the prime minister enquired about the electoral college of the district council, a senior minister told The Daily Star, seeking anonymity.

As per the existing law, upazila chairmen, municipality mayors and union parishad chairmen are the members of the electoral college, according to district council administrators.

In December 2011, the government appointed the administrators, most of them are top level district AL leaders, to 61 zila parishads, except three hill districts.

Girl dies

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blood coming out of her nose.

As the auto-rickshaw stopped, Akhiron to the nearby chamber of Juthi's physician father.

"By the time I returned, locals took her to a clinic," she said.

Juthi was later taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared her dead around 6:00pm.

Losing fish to tobacco

FROM PAGE 1

The new threat comes on top of a long term decline in the abundance of fish eggs. In 1945 around 5,000 kilograms of Indian carp eggs were laid in the river. By 2011 this amount had reduced to 210kgs, with a rise to 354kgs the following year. In 2013 just 70kgs of fish roe were deposited, while last year's result was even worse at 47kgs, according to research by Kibria.

The last thing the spawning ground needs is the added menace of tobacco, he warns.

Farmers, however, see things differently. Tajul Islam of Gorkhaha village in Manikchhari began growing tobacco in 2013. "Along with six other farmers," he says, "I started to cultivate tobacco when I saw farmers in the hill tracts were making good profit from the crop."

Jhontu Mia of nearby Chodurkhal village meanwhile, planted two acres with tobacco for the first time this year. "I used to grow rice and vegetables," he

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says, "but the profit for those crops is low. Besides, there is uncertainty in price and buyer availability. But with tobacco advance payment from tobacco companies is possible and they provide seeds, fertilizer and buyer certainty."

Both Tajul and Jhontu note that tobacco requires up to four times more fertilizer and pesticide than traditional crops.

In Manikchhari upazila early this month, The Daily Star found vast swathes of land under tobacco cultivation. Farmers estimate 150 acres across the upazila are being used for

this purpose, even though the official record at the Manikchhari upazila agriculture office is around 20 acres.

"Most farmers don't admit to farming tobacco," says upazila agriculture officer Shafiqul Islam. "In remote areas we often find tobacco fields but growers don't speak with us."

Tobacco farming is spreading to adjacent villages of Fatikchhari upazila's Narayanhat union in Chittagong district, also part of the Halda basin. Liton Debnath, the upazila agriculture officer there, says, "According to official records no upazila land is dedicated to tobacco cultivation, but I've heard some plantations exist."

Traditionally, much of the country's tobacco is grown in the northern region and in the hills in the Chittagong region, but farmers have started cultivating it as a cash-crop along the Halda only recently.

This goes against the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco

Control (FCTC) that Bangladesh signed in 2003 and ratified the following year, becoming one of the first countries to do so.

Sections 17 and 18 of the world's first public health treaty call on governments around the world to help farmers grow alternative crops and to take preventive steps to protect the environment and public health from tobacco damages.

But 12 years on, there is little government campaign against tobacco production and consumption.

With the incentives offered by tobacco companies to induce Halda hinterland farmers into discontinuing cultivation of traditional crops in favour of tobacco, the spawning ground of the Indian carp is under increased threat.

Unless change occurs, it's not unimaginable that a day may dawn when the Halda is more famous for tobacco than carp, with the native fish relegated wholly to Halda River memories.

Five JMB men

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Pradip Kumar Ray, additional district and sessions judge in Natore, however, acquitted two other accused -- Shafiqul Islam and Shahidullah alias Faruk -- of the charge.

The court fined each of the five convicts Tk 30,000. In default, they will have to serve one year more in prison.

Of the seven accused in the case, six were produced before the court while Shafiqul Islam, now in Gazipur's Kashimpur jail, could not be brought due to yesterday's Jamaat-enforced countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal.

Delivering the verdict, the judge said the five had confessed to their involvement in the bombings.

JMB men had carried out bomb attacks at eight significant places in Natore town, including the deputy commissioner's office, press club and bus terminal.

Pubic Prosecutor Sirajul Islam said they were happy with the verdict.

Amel Khan Chowdhury, defence lawyer, claimed that his clients did not get justice. They would appeal to the High Court.

On August 17, 2005, around 500 bombs went off at 300 locations in 63 out of the 64 districts across the country. The bombs exploded in half an hour from 11:30am.

Later, the JMB claimed responsibility for the blasts.

HC rejects writ

FROM PAGE 1

Quazi Reza-Ul Hoque and Justice Md Ashraf Kamal also discharged the rule issued earlier over the legality of the provision that gives Islam the status of state religion, he said.

The constitutional provision will remain in force following the HC order, added Murad.

Petitioners' lawyer Subrata Chowdhury told this correspondent that the HC rejected the petition without hearing his arguments on the jurisdiction of his clients.

He said once they receive the full text of the verdict, they would decide whether to appeal against it before the Supreme Court.

Replying to a query, the lawyer said they didn't move the writ petition earlier in the hope that political governments would annul the provision by amending the constitution.

After the filing of the writ petition, the HC on June 11, 2011 issued a rule upon the government to explain why the provision of the eighth amendment to the constitution, which made Islam state religion, should not be declared illegal. It also invited 12 amici curiae (friends of court) to give their opinions.

On June 30 the same year, parliament passed a bill on the 15th amendment to the constitution retaining Islam's status as state religion. The amendment, however, restored secularism as one of the four fundamental principles of the state, which had been omitted by a martial law regime after the bloody changeover in 1975.

Following an application by the writ petitioners, the HC in December 2011 issued a supplementary rule, asking the government to explain why

the provision of the 15th amendment to the constitution, which retains Islam's status as state religion, should not be declared illegal.

The government, however, didn't respond to the rule.

The writ petitioners include Begum Sufia Kamal, former chief justice Kemal Uddin Hossain, Khan Sarwar Murshid, Prof Kabir Chowdhury, Prof Mosharraf Hossain, Maj Gen (ret) Chitta Ranjan Datta (Bir Uttam), Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury, Badaruddin Umar, journalist Faiz Ahmed, Dr Borhan Uddin Khan Jahangir, Prof Anisuzzaman, Justice Devesh Chandra Bhattacharjee, Justice KM Sobhan, Syed Istiaq Ahmed and Kalim Sharafi.

Ten of them, including Begum Sufia Kamal and Justice Kemal Uddin Hossain, passed away, said Subrata.

A few months ago, the chief justice assigned the three-member HC bench to hold hearing on the rule, and the petition was included in its hearing list on February 29, he said.

HARTAL WITHDRAWN

The Jamaat-e-Islami withdrew its countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal yesterday afternoon after the HC rejected the writ petition.

The party made the announcement around 2:30pm through a press release issued by its acting secretary general Shafiqur Rahman.

The Jamaat, which stood against Bangladesh's liberation in 1971, had called the shutdown protesting "the conspiracy against Islam's status as the state religion in the constitution."

Though the hartal was in force till the afternoon, it had little impact on public life in the capital and elsewhere, as people were seen going about their business as usual.



Five JMB members being taken to a court in Natore yesterday. They were sentenced to life imprisonment in a case over a series of blasts in the district on August 17, 2005.

PHOTO: STAR

Beware when on easy bike

FROM PAGE 1

miracle, survived and doctors performed a c-section on her two months after the accident.

Sweetie is among 26 patients who went to the CRP with injuries from scarf strangulation in the last one year and a half.

"Before, we used to get patients with spinal cord injuries from attempted suicide by hanging incidents or from falling incidents. But they were few in numbers," said Muhammed Shahrir Zaman, research officer of the CRP.

When the number of patients the CRP received with injuries similar to Sweetie's began to rise, the research unit started to document those. The 37-year-old organisation on the outskirts of Dhaka in Savar specialises in spinal cord injuries, their treatment, and rehabilitation of the patients.

It discovered that most patients with spinal cord injuries last year were victims of accidents in which draping urnas and shawls around their heads and necks got tangled with motors of easy bikes due to the flawed design of

the vehicle.

Between May 2014 and July 2015, the CRP received 17 such patients, all female, aged between 11 and 32 years. Of them, 6 percent were passengers of traditional rickshaws and 88.2 percent were of battery-run auto-rickshaws.

Most of the patients reported that they were sitting on the seat just behind the driver facing the opposite direction to travel.

Among the patients, 77 percent were wearing urnas and 18 percent were wearing shawls, said Shahrir, adding that the majority of the patients came from rural areas but the accidents happened on roads near urban areas.

"Since battery-run auto-rickshaws go faster than traditional rickshaws, the thrust is sudden and strong and it displaces the lower vertebrae of the cervical region of the spinal cord," explained Israt Jahan Urme, registrar of medical service wing of the CRP.

Injury to the spinal cord, the communication system between the brain and the body, could leave a person paralysed for life.

"Not just the movement and sensation of the limb muscles, but victims also lose control of urination and defecation," explained Urme.

"If the spinal cord is completely dissected, then there is no possibility of recovery and such injuries are called complete case. Incomplete case patients, however, have some nerves impaired but the hands may retain some sensation," she said, adding that Sweetie was a complete case.

Sweetie came to the CRP in October hoping to get back some sensation on her limbs. Her life now circles around physiotherapies and occupational therapy lessons and learning wheelchair skills.

"When I first came here I had no feelings in my body, now I can move my right arm a little and sit up on the wheelchair with the help of the nurses," she said.

"If I can at least move in a wheelchair, I can see my son, Alif," she said.

She described how her elder sister breastfed and looks after the baby, her first born.

Another scarf strangulation patient Shirina Begum, 35, also said how she missed her youngest son, a student of class-I. Compared to Sweetie, she was at a better stage.

"I was going to Debidwar of Comilla from Boroshal Gor with my family on an easy bike. We had almost reached our destination when I felt a sudden pull on my neck and I fell to the floor," Shirina described, adding that she was wearing a shawl and an urna draped around her head.

CRP research officer Shahrir said majority of the patients they documented were students. "Most of them were not careful with their urnas, which they had worn around their necks," he said.

Founder of CRP, Valerie Taylor told The Daily Star, "This is an injury that can be prevented very easily through awareness."

The easy bikes are illegal in Bangladesh. They have no registration with the BRTA and the flawed vehicles contributed to accidents, in which people are left paralysed for life.

MONTHLY PAY ORDER

Teachers to get salaries under new pay scale

BSS, Dhaka

School, college and madrasa teachers and employees, who are enlisted for Monthly Pay Order (MPO), will get the six-month arrears of their salaries and allowances under the new pay scale next month.

"Teachers enlisted for MPO will get six months' arrears from July to December, 2015 under the new pay scale. They will get the arrears in April," Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid told BSS yesterday.

The arrears would cost the government Tk 2,053.50 crore, he added.