

ATTACK OVER 'EXTORTION MONEY'

DAE official dies in city hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), who was attacked while visiting his building under construction at Mugda on Sunday, died at a city hospital early yesterday.

Family members said Abdul Shukur, 61, who was on his leave preparatory to retirement (LPR), was killed by local goons for refusing to give them extortion money.

However, police suspect that the attack was carried out over land dispute.

Quoting witnesses, Salamat Ullah, victim's brother-in-law, said some 10 to 12 local extortionists dragged Shukur to the ground from a rickshaw and swooped on him with hammer and iron rods in Maniknagar area around 8:30am on Sunday.

Shukur was on the way to his four-storey building under construction in that area from his home in nearby Jannatbagh.

The criminals fled immediately after the attack.

Critically injured Shukur was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and was later shifted to National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD) as his condition deteriorated.

The DAE official died there around 12:30am yesterday, added Salamat.

After an autopsy at Dhaka Medical College morgue, the body was handed over to the family.

Salamat alleged that some local goons, led by one Sohrab Mollah, demanded Tk 25 lakh from Shukur after he started the construction of the building a few months ago.

Shukur had already paid the criminals several lakh Taka. But they were asking for the full payment, he said.

Enamul Haque, officer-in-charge of Mugda Police Station, said they arrested Sohrab as a suspect.

He, however, said land dispute could also be a reason behind the killing. Police were investigating, he added.

Half of Great

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And half the reef has already died or is dying, according to scientists.

The event is partly being caused by the strong El Nino weather system that swept across the world. But global warming is the underlying cause, say scientists, and so the bleaching and death is likely to continue.

"We've never seen anything like this scale of bleaching before. In the northern Great Barrier Reef, it's like 10 cyclones have come ashore all at once," said Professor Terry Hughes, conveyor of the National Coral Bleaching Taskforce, which conducted aerial surveys of the World Heritage site.

"Our estimate at the moment is that close to 50 percent of the coral is already dead or dying," Hughes told Reuters.

The Great Barrier Reef stretches 2,300 km (1,430 miles) along Australia's northeast coast and is the world's largest living ecosystem.

"There were some who said that the worst had passed. We rejected that, and they were wrong," Environment Minister Greg Hunt told reporters. "Let it be known that this is a significant event. We take it seriously."

US President Barack Obama embarrassed Australia 18 months ago by warning of the risk of climate change to the reef during a G20 meeting. Unesco's World Heritage Committee last May stopped short of placing the Great Barrier Reef on an "in danger" list, but the ruling raised long-term concerns about its future.

Australia is one of the largest carbon emitters capita because of its reliance on coal-fired power plants for electricity. Despite pledging to cut carbon emissions, Australia has continued to support fossil fuel projects, including Adani Enterprises Ltd's proposed A\$10 billion (\$7.7 billion) Carmichael coal project in the Galilee Basin in western Queensland.

Bangladesh moves

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independence by governments, ideologies and private-sector interests during last year.

Despite the two-notch elevation, Bangladesh's position is the lowest, except Pakistan's, in the South Asian scene. The index has placed Pakistan in 147th position, Sri Lanka in 141st, India in 133rd, Afghanistan in 120th, Nepal in 105th and Bhutan in 94th.

Analysing the overall global press freedom scenario, the RSF said it is "indicative of a climate of fear and tension combined with increasing control over newsrooms by authoritarian and oppressive governments and private-sector interests."

The 2016 edition of the World Press Freedom Index shows that there has been a deep and disturbing decline in respect for media freedom at both the global and regional levels.

The RSF prepares the index calculating points based on violation of media freedom. The higher the figure, the worse is the situation. The global indicator has gone from 3,719 points last year to 3,857 points this year, a 3.71 percent deterioration. The decline since 2013 is 13.6 percent.

Bangladesh has scored 45.94 points compared to 8.59 points scored by the top-ranked country Finland and 83.92 points allocated to the bottom country, Eritrea, in the list.

Bangladesh ranked 146 in last year's index.

This year's five highest ranking countries are Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark and New Zealand while the five lowest ranked countries are Eritrea, North Korea, Turkmenistan, Syria and China.

The Index shows that Europe (with 19.8 points) still has the freest media, followed distantly by Africa (36.9), which for the first time overtook the Americas (37.1), a region where violence against journalists is on the rise.

Asia (43.8) and Eastern Europe/Central Asia (48.4) follow, while North Africa/Middle East (50.8) is still the region where journalists are most subjected to constraints of every kind.

Among the major world powers, the United States' ranking, which suffered a huge slide (49th position in 2015) since 2009 (20th), is promoted to 41st position this year.

However, in its short note titled -- 'Freedom ends where national security begins' -- the RSF said, "The US media

Probe panel

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The two other members of the committee -- Mohammad Kaykobad of the computer science and engineering department at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, and Gokul Chand Das, additional secretary of the Bank and Financial Institutions Division -- and BB Governor Fazle Kabir were present during the report submission.

The panel will submit the final report within two months, said Muhith.

The minister declined to comment on the probe report. He said, "I will make comments once I read it."

Sources said the committee has analysed the steps taken by the central bank after the heist came to surface. It also went through the probe report from the cyber security companies FireEye and World Informatics.

The committee expressed dissatisfaction over on-duty BB officials not taking the issue seriously when they first found out about the anomalies in the bank's IT network, added the sources.

It also made some observations on the linking of BB's SWIFT platform with the IT network.

It is believed that the establishment of the link between the two platforms created opportunity for hackers to break into BB system.

The probe committee also recommended how BB will handle its future foreign currency transactions, said the sources.

freedom, enshrined in the first amendment to the 1787 constitution, has encountered a major obstacle -- the government's war on whistleblowers who leak information about its surveillance activities, spying and foreign operations, especially those linked to counterterrorism.

"Furthermore, the US journalists are still not protected by a federal 'shield law' guaranteeing their right not to reveal their sources and other confidential work-related information."

Russia also marked some improvement in terms of ranking from 152nd last year to 148th this time. In Russia chapter, the RSF noted, "Leading independent news outlets have either been brought under control or throttled out of existence. The leading human rights NGOs have been declared "foreign agents."

In the ranking, the United Kingdom slipped four notches down from 34th to 38th. The RSF observed, "Terrorist attacks have led to the adoption of draconian security legislation. The government reacted to the London public transport bombings in 2005 with a terrorism act the following year that restricts freedom of expression."

"The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) adopted in 2000 allows the authorities to obtain the phone records of journalists in cases of threats to national security."

"Worse still, despite a law protecting the confidentiality of sources, the police have since 1984 been able to ask the courts to order media outlets to hand over unpublished journalistic source material "in the interests of justice."

Saudi Arabia's position slipped one notch down from 164th to 165th. The RSF said, "There are no really free media in Saudi Arabia and all journalists censor themselves."

"The Internet is the only space where freely-reported information and views can circulate, albeit at great risk to the Internet's citizen-journalists. Like professional journalists, they are watched closely and critical comments are liable to be taken as a threat."

US provided

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about reports that the justice department and the FBI provided evidence of links of opposition BNP mouthpiece Amar Desh editor Mahmudur Rahman to the plot to kill Hasina's son Sajib Wazed Joy.

The official, however, refused to give further details of the nature of the assistance provided to Bangladesh.

"As a general matter, when the US government shares law enforcement information as part of a request for legal assistance, we do not comment on it," the official said.

"For questions about the Government of Bangladesh's investigation, I'd refer you to the Bangladeshi authorities," the official said.

Bangladesh police on Tuesday claimed to have found evidence about links of two detained pro-opposition senior journalists to abduction and murder plot of Hasina's son in the US.

Journalist Shafik Rehman, 81, an editor and an adviser to ex-premier Khaleda Zia, has been detained over the plot and is being quizzed by the police.

For 62-year-old Mahmudur, in jail since 2013 under several other charges, legal procedure is underway to secure a court order for his remand for interrogation, police has said.

In 2015, a New York court convicted US-based BNP leader Mahmud Ullah Mamun's son Rizvi Ahmed Caesar for bribing former FBI agent Robert Lustyk to get information about Joy's activities in the US.

According to media reports, middleman Johannes Thaler and the FBI agent were convicted by the US court after Caesar admitted that he intended to "scare, kidnap and hurt" Joy.

There are also allegations that some top leaders of the BNP and its allies met in the UK, the US and in the capital's Paltan and other parts of the country before September 2012 and conspired to abduct and kill Joy.

Govt claim

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contradicted the Bangladesh government's claims that the conviction a year ago of three men in New York for illegally obtaining confidential FBI records involved a plot to kill Joy.

Speakers also said the US court judge who tried the case specifically dismissed prosecutors' claim that the men planned to "physically harm" Joy, who lives in the US.

Taleya said the government's allegation that her husband was involved in a conspiracy "to kill Joy was out-and-out false and fictitious."

"The man who has introduced Valentine's Day in the country and love people can never be involved in a conspiracy to kill anyone. What an irony of fate that the man who spread love among people throughout his life, has been accused in a criminal case," she said.

"As his wife I have spent 59 years with him. But I have never seen him do anything wrong."

Taleya sought assistance from all quarters to free her husband.

Participants said that as a journalist, Shafik Rehman might have collected information on many people, including Joy. But there is nothing wrong with that.

"It is a journalist's job to collect information. But it doesn't mean that they intend to harm anyone with that information," said Prof Saiful Islam of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

Prof Dilara Chowdhury said human rights situation in Bangladesh was at the bottom now and the government was gradually turning into a repressive one.

"It seems people have no right at present to speak against or criticise the government and they have no human rights as well. It would be suicidal for all of us as well as for the country if we accept the present situation," she added.

Gonoshasthya Kendra founder Zafrullah Chowdhury said it was Shafik Rehman who congratulated Hasina with a rose after she gave birth to Joy. "And the government has now brought false charges against him only to cling to power."

"DIVERTING ATTENTION" BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday claimed the arrest of Shafik Rehman was meant to divert public attention from Bangladesh Bank cyber heist and Tonu murder.

At a programme at Dhaka Reporters Unity, he said the report in The Wire mentioned that Shafik Rehman and Amar Desh acting editor were not involved in the "conspiracy to abduct and kill Joy".

The arrest of Shafik makes it clear that the government was nervous, he claimed.

Yunus Centre trashes report

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international conference. The president of Grameen America paid these fees for attending the conference over 10 years. There is no mention of Muhammad Yunus as a donor anywhere on the website."

The news article gives impression that Yunus and Grameen have been given funds by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) because of influence exercised by Hilary Clinton.

Grameen companies around the world have been receiving funds from the USAID for at least last 30 years under Republican and Democratic administrations. This relationship is a long-term relationship developed long before Ms Clinton came to the state department, said the Yunus Centre statement.

The online newspaper claims that Yunus had business relationship with groups allied to him.

"This is completely false, because Prof Yunus does not have any business

relationship with any organisation anywhere, let alone the groups allied to Yunus," said the release.

Two US-based organisations, Grameen Foundation and Grameen America, have been linked with the report.

Grameen Foundation was founded in 1998 to raise funds to finance micro-credit organisations around the world. It has raised a total of \$198 million to support micro-credit programmes in 20 countries.

Among its many donors, the USAID was also a small donor, said Yunus Centre.

Grameen America was founded in New York in 2008 by a wealthy American, a dedicated Republican, with his own money. It became very successful and spread over 11 cities in the US, requiring more funds than the founder could personally provide.

He spent his time and energy to raise the money for the programme. The organisation now serves 65,000 women borrowers through 18

branches. It has given out \$380 million in micro loans with over 99 percent recovery rate.

Another organisation which received funds from the USAID is Yunus Social Business (YSB) which was founded in 2011 by two German young women professionals from Boston Consulting Group.

Headquartered in Frankfurt, YSB operates in Brazil, Colombia, Haiti, Albania, Bosnia, Macedonia, Tunisia, Uganda, Tanzania, and India. It has established 34 social businesses in these countries, investing more than \$8.6 million. It has created social business funds in several countries.

"All the organisations which promote Prof Yunus' ideas of micro-credit and social business are funded by many donors, banks, high net worth persons, and investors. The USAID is just one of the many organisations that have invested in these organisations for the quality and impact of their work, not for the favour of a friend in high place," said the statement.

Obama meets Saudi King

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before heading into bilateral talks.

"I and the Saudi people are very pleased that you Mr President are visiting us," Salman said.

Obama responded that the United States was "very grateful for your hospitality."

The president was earlier welcomed at the airport by Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz, the governor of Riyadh, after walking down a red carpet on the stairs from Air Force One.

Unusually, Saudi state news channel Al-Ekhbaria did not broadcast Obama's arrival as it did during his visit last year to pay respects after the death of Salman's predecessor king Abdullah.

Tensions between Riyadh and Washington have increased sharply due to what Saudi Arabia sees as Obama's disengagement from traditional US allies in the region and opening towards Iran.

'ALLIANCE-BUILDING' EFFORT Though the visit is being touted as an

"alliance-building" effort, "it will just as likely highlight how far Washington and Riyadh have drifted apart in the past eight years," Simon Henderson, of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, wrote in Foreign Policy magazine.

"For Obama, the key issue in the Middle East is the fight against the Islamic State... For the House of Saud, the issue is Iran."

Iran's emergence from international isolation after the nuclear deal has raised deep concerns among Gulf Arab states, who oppose Tehran indirectly in a range of Middle East conflicts.

The weeks ahead of the visit were marked by fiery exchanges from Saudis reacting with outrage to comments by Obama published in the April edition of US magazine The Atlantic.

He said the Saudis need to "share" the Middle East with their Iranian rivals, adding that competition between Riyadh and Tehran has helped to feed proxy

wars and chaos in Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

Arab News columnist Mohammed Fahad Al-Harhi yesterday became the latest Saudi commentator to lament "the United States' disengagement from assisting in resolving the region's problems".

Also clouding the visit is congressional draft legislation that would potentially allow the Saudi government to be sued in US courts over the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, in which nearly 3,000 people were killed. CLOUD CAST BY 9/11 BILL

Saudi Arabia has reportedly warned it could sell off several hundred billion dollars' worth of American assets if the bipartisan bill passes.

Fifteen of the 19 hijackers in the September 11 attacks were Saudi citizens. No Saudi complicity in the al-Qaeda attacks has been proven and the kingdom has never been formally implicated.

Obama has stated his opposition to

Broadcasters risk jail

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People can give their opinion to the information secretary's office or send emails to the ministry (secretary@moi.gov.bd, tv2@moi.gov.bd) till May 4.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, Information Secretary Martuza Ahmed said they would finalise the draft after considering public opinion and consulting all stakeholders.

It would then be sent to the cabinet for approval. The process might take a month to complete, he added.

On August 7, 2014, the information ministry published a gazette on the National Broadcast Policy 2014 for television and radio amid concern about a possible misuse of some of its provisions. The policy drew criticism from rights activists and media personalities.

On December 23, 2014, the government formed a 38-member committee to draft the Broadcast Act. The committee, headed by Prof Golam Rahman of mass communication and journalism department at Dhaka University, later co-opted five more members.

According to the draft act, a broadcast commission would be constituted immediately after the law comes into effect.

The seven-member commission headed by a chairman must have at least one female member. A search committee would nominate the members, who would then be appointed by the president.

The government, in consultation with the commission, would formulate rules of procedures for smooth application of the act, the draft reads.

The commission would prepare a guideline for the broadcasters and regularly monitor whether they are properly following the National Broadcast Policy, the guideline and the code of ethics, it says.

The commission would be empowered to frame a guideline for giving licence to broadcasters.

It would make recommendations to the government for giving licence to television, radio, internet TV or other digital broadcast stations and would issue licence upon the government's approval.

The commission would receive complaints about contents of broadcast. It could issue show cause notices, initiate investigation, recommend to the government further proceedings against broadcasters if they broadcast something in violation of the National Broadcast Policy, says the draft.

On its own, the commission would be able to take action against broadcasters if it believes that they have violated the code of conduct and breached discipline.

It would be given the authority to take measures against a broadcaster if any content of broadcast poses a threat to security, territorial integrity, peace, public order and unity of the country or if it is vulgar, false and malicious.

Prof Rahman, now chief informa-

tion commissioner, said nothing has been finalised yet. The draft is now on the ministry's website for people to give opinion. Public feedback would definitely be taken into consideration.

He, however, declined to say anything on the proposed provision of imprisonment and fine.

"We have prepared the draft through a thorough process, taking the views of stakeholders over the last six months. Let the people give their opinion now."

Barrister Tanjib-ul Alam, another member of the committee, said there should be some provisions of punishment for specific offences. These provisions are not arbitrary and are not meant, in any way, to curb press freedom.

He said the question of punishment would arise only when the commission finds any evidence of violation of the rules.

Tahmina Rahman, another member of the draft committee, said "criminal measures" should be avoided on the issue of freedom of expression.

"Different kinds of measures can be taken like sanctions or cancellation of licence... criminal measures can be taken but only as a last resort," added Tahmina, director of Bangladesh and South Asia region of rights organisation Article 19.

A leader of the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) told this newspaper that they would sit today to discuss the draft act and then give their reaction.

Revoke licences of 20 drug firms

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The medicines manufactured without following the GMP will not meet the standards and might inflict damage on health, according to the report.

"The damage could even be fatal and so such drugs should be avoided for the sake of public health," experts said in the report.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of it.

The 20 companies that might see their licences revoked are Aexim Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Avert Pharma Ltd, Bicolpo Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Dolphin Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Drugland Ltd, Globe Laboratories (pvt) Ltd, Jalpha Laboratories Ltd, Kafma Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Medico Pharmaceuticals Ltd, National Drug Pharma Ltd, North Bengal Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Remo Chemicals Ltd (Pharma Division), Rid Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Skylab Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Spark Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Star Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Sunipun Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Today Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Tropical Pharmaceuticals Ltd and Universal

Pharmaceuticals Ltd.

Many of the inspected factories have upgraded their manufacturing mechanism over the last five to six years while the improvement made by some others was not satisfactory, the experts said.

Many companies had only killed time in the name of improvement, and some factories made no progress at all, rather the quality of their products plummeted.

The expert committee suggested cancelling the licences of 14 companies for manufacturing all types of antibiotics, saying that they had been found incapable of producing quality antibiotics.

It also recommended that the government cancel approvals given to 22 companies for manufacturing antibiotics of penicillin and cephalosporin groups.

These companies have the system in place only to manufacture antibiotics of non-penicillin group, the experts said.

One company was identified as not being capable of producing drugs at all for human body. Therefore, the government should allow it to produce medicines for animals only, according to the report.

It also recommended scrapping the permission that a company had obtained to manufacture antibiotics of penicillin and cephalosporin groups, anti-cancer drugs and hormones in its three factories since they were not following the standard procedure.

Health Minister Mohammed Nasim, State Minister for Health Zahid Malik, and lawmakers AFM Ruhul Haque, Yunus Ali and Selina Begum were present at yesterday's meeting presided over by Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, chairman of the parliamentary committee on the health ministry.

Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (BAPI) President Nazmul Hasan Papon was present there at a special invitation of the parliamentary committee.

The pharmaceutical companies that are not members of the BAPI should not be given licences in the first place, the expert committee suggested in a statement.

If they have already obtained licences, those should not be renewed without approvals of the BAPI, the experts said, adding that stern actions should be taken against the companies manufacturing adulterated drugs.