



Police taking senior journalist Shafik Rehman to a court in the capital yesterday. The court placed him on five-day fresh remand in a case filed over an alleged plot to kidnap and kill the prime minister's son Sajeeb Wazed Joy. PHOTO: STAR

Fresh remand for Shafik

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He alleged that police were forcing his client to give false statements.

“Police claim that they have seized some papers from the house of Shafik Rehman. But we were not given the list [of the papers] or told what was in them,” he said.

Earlier in the day, Mashruque Rahman Khaled, deputy commissioner of the DB (south division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star, “He [Shafik Rehman] needs to be interrogated further as we have already gleaned some important information from him.”

On April 16, plainclothes detectives arrested Shafik at his Eskaton Road house in the capital. The same day, he was

placed on the five-day remand.

Police on Tuesday claimed that Shafik Rehman admitted having more than one meeting with those in the US allegedly involved in the plot to abduct and kill Joy, who lives in the US.

DMP Additional Commissioner Monirul Islam said Shafik admitted meeting four persons, including the three convicted by a US court over bribing an FBI special agent to collect confidential information. They are US-Bangladesh citizen Rizve Ahmed Caesar, former FBI special agent Robert Lustyik and his “contact” Johannes Thaler.

According to the case statement, Caesar's father Mamun and some top leaders of the BNP and its allies met in the UK, the US and various places of

Bangladesh before September 2012 and conspired to abduct and kill the PM's son.

In March last year, Caesar was convicted by a US court for bribing an FBI special agent to collect information regarding a Bangladeshi political figure.

The US Justice Department did not name the figure, but it is believed to be Joy.

In a Facebook post on March 9 last year, Joy, also ICTA affairs adviser to the prime minister, accused BNP leaders of conspiring to abduct and kill him.

Shafik, who also holds British citizenship, worked in various media outlets, including the BBC, but came in the limelight after becoming editor of the weekly Jaijaidin in the 1980s.

Strike for passenger vessels withdrawn

For goods-carrying vessels, the strike remains in force

MAHDI AL MUHTASIM

Bangladesh Water Transport Workers Federation (BWTWF) last night withdrew its strike for only passenger vessels.

However, the strike will remain in force for vessels carrying goods.

Shah Alam Bhuiyan, president of the BWTWF, said they lifted the strike considering the sufferings of the HSC examinees in the country.

“We are observing an indefinite strike to press home our 15-point demands. But at the same time, HSC examination is going on in the country. Considering the sufferings of the HSC applicants, we have withdrawn the strike for passenger vessels plying the Dhaka-Barisal route,” he said.

The strike will remain in force for other vessels until the demands of the water transport workers are met, he added.

Operation of vessels has been suspended across the country since the early hours of Thursday.

The government has meanwhile convened a tripartite meeting today with the representatives of vessel owners and workers to end the deadlock.

The BWTWF called the strike to press home its 15-point demands, including a minimum monthly wage of Tk 10,000 for workers and increase in overtime pay, festival bonuses and other benefits.

During a visit to the capital's Sadarghat terminal yesterday, it was seen that many passengers were waiting for vessels to reach their respective destinations.

Sathi Akhter told The Daily Star at noon yesterday, “I have been waiting

since morning to go to Chandpur. It is uncertain when we can go home.”

Passengers were left in a confused state as no-one could ensure them about launches, which will leave the terminal. Low-income group people suffered the most as they could not afford alternative vehicles. Many were seen lying on the floor of the terminal.

Md Faruk, a mason, said, “I will go to my village home in Barguna. It will cost me Tk 400. If I take alternative transport, it will take at least Tk 1,000. I cannot spend that much.”

However, a number of passenger launches defied the strike and left Dhaka yesterday.

Seventeen launches left the termi-

nal for different destinations as of 9:00 pm, said Mohammad Shahidullah, port officer of Sadarghat.

A launch named Moyur-1 of Dhaka-Barisal was seen leaving the terminal around 1:30pm.

Abdus Salam, supervisor of the launch, said, “Our workers get adequate salary. So they are not in strike.”

Golam Kibria Tipu, a launch owner claimed workers of goods-carrying vessels are mainly observing the strike.

MEETING

The government has convened a meeting with vessel owners and workers at the Department of Labour at 4:30pm today.

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The normally bustling Sadarghat Launch Terminal in the capital wears a deserted look during the second day of an indefinite strike by water transport workers yesterday. However, the strike for passenger vessels was withdrawn last night. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

A life story altered in cop brutality

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with a robbery case filed by a relative following a family feud. But instead of arresting him, the cops broke his legs with iron rods and sticks, locals and family members said.

Rubel, an employee of a cable operator, is taking treatment at Janasheba Nursing Home and Diagnostic Centre at Mohammadpur. Doctors operated on this left leg on Thursday morning, and his right leg is expected to be operated on Monday.

One SI has been suspended over the incident.

The whole house was in a festive mood until the cops came around 1:00am on Thursday, when the two SIs—Ali Akbar and Firoz—knocked at Rubel's door. As soon as he came out, they dragged him towards a rail track, about 100 yards from the home, said his mother Josna Begum.

Rubel's cousins Rahim and Lokman, their father Kamal Hossain and two

brothers-in-law, with whom Rubel had an enmity, were standing there, she added.

The cops then started beating Rubel up. The five and their men also joined the police, said Josna.

“They might have hired the police in exchange for money. Even if my son had done something wrong, there is the law to try him. But under which law have the police broken my son's legs?” she told The Daily Star at the nursing home.

After the beating, police tried to take away the unconscious body of Rubel, but angry locals prevented them and besieged the cops and other attackers.

Later, additional police from Joydevpur Station rescued them.

“Talking to The Daily Star, Rubel said, “I lost my sense after the second strike in my legs. I don't remember anything else.”

His left leg is broken under the knee and the right leg in the thigh, said Dr Noor Mohammad Shamim of the hos-

pital.

“He needs at least four months to make his first attempt to walk,” the doctor added.

Visiting Rubel's house yesterday, our correspondent saw the family had made all the preparations for his marriage. They set up a gate and the stage and decorated the would-be couple's room. For the feast, they bought an ox.

The girl's family had also completed their arrangements to host a couple of hundred people. The girl's father, Ibrahim, said they removed the seats for the bride and the groom after the incident.

Rezaul Karim, officer-in-charge of the police station, said they suspended SI Ali Akbar for his negligence in duties as he went to arrest the accused without investigation. The allegation against SI Firoz was not true, he claimed.

Contacted, Ali Akbar denied that he tortured Rubel. He claimed Rubel broke his legs while trying to flee.

Quest for dawn ends in darkness

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three sisters were married off before marrying himself.

His siblings are well settled now. He worries for his children, two boys and a girl. His sons are in class IV and II.

“We are a joint family. Once my siblings decide to divide whatever little properties we have, I'll be in trouble,” said Babul.

He said many factory owners had announced that they would employ ex-workers of Rana Plaza factories. None of them were keeping their promises.

“I have tried three factories. Two said they have no vacancies and one offered only a Tk 12,000 salary. Most factories want young workers.”

Babul, now 47, received about Tk 2 lakh as financial support from international retailers and other donors. He used the money to fix his home in the village.

Sathi Akhter came to Dhaka alone in 2010 to escape poverty as her parents struggled to support her and four other children.

She started in a garment manufacturing factory and within a year landed a position at New Wave Style, a factory located in the ill-fated Rana Plaza.

The factory collapse left her seriously injured in the head, back and chest.

She was treated at Enam Medical College and Hospital, Apollo Hospitals, Centre for Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) and Gonoshasthya Nagar Hospital for eight months. She went through 18 kidney dialysis.

Her husband, Lutfur Rahman Shahin, who worked at the same factory, also got hurt in his face.

Shahin and Sathi returned to their village home in Bogra two years ago.

There, a daughter, Azrin Akhter, was born to Sathi one and a half years back.

Using a wheel chair only a few days back, Sathi can walk now. But she is not free from her pains. Her head and back still hurts. Sometimes she loses consciousness. She has also become short tempered and does not know why.

When asked whether she would



Babul Sheikh

Pronaly Rani Das

Shamapty Rani

return to a garment factory job, the 20-year-old said she did not think so.

“Nobody will give me job because of my condition. Sometimes I faint. I get angry all of a sudden. I don't know why. I can't remember things.”

Sathi said the disaster had deeply scarred her husband Shahin's mind: he is scared to work inside any building.

“I can't work inside a factory. I'll not go back to work there,” he told The Daily Star over phone.

Shahin, 25, now runs a grocery shop.

Apart from free medical treatment and medicines, Sathi said, they received Tk 50,000 as financial assistance.

Another victim is Pronaly Rani Das. She had joined Phantom Apparels as a helper just three months before the building collapse. She jumped from the fourth floor and injured her back and knees.

The eldest of five sisters and one brother, she came to Dhaka for the job.

The 20-year-old says she has now become a burden for her farmer father. She got a job at a garments manufacturing factory but could not continue because of severe pain in her back.

“I don't see any hope,” she said.

Shamapty Rani, who used to work at New Wave Bottoms, doesn't see any future too. “It would have been better if I had died,” she said.

The 18-year-old, who joined the garment manufacturer 17 days before the collapse, said she did not want to go back to a job that required her to work inside a building; small businesses or shops would be okay with her.

Apu Joarder, an operator of New Wave

Bottoms, said she could not work that needed concentration. She also cannot take loud rebukes for mistakes.

“I get scared if somebody shouts at me. I can still work on a machine but only in a friendly environment.”

Asked how she was doing, the 18-year-old replied in a choked voice: “You have to come and see for yourself. You will not get it from my words only.”

She said relatives and neighbours helped at first. “But they can't help us every day. Nobody has looked after me after that,” said Apu, who now lives with his parents in her home in Gopalganj.

Another survivor, Yeanur Akter, 17, who now studies at class VII and will stay at the CRP until she passes her SSC examination, said her legs, head and back hurts even now. “Sometimes I have to take medicines,” she told The Daily Star.

Her mother Anowara was killed in the building collapse. She had been working for six years at a separate garment factory located in the same building. Yeanur and her mother supported their eight-member family.

The Tk 10,000 assistance Yeanur receives every month from a government-fixed deposit scheme, arranged by the Prime Minister's Fund, is used for the family. She has to take care of the school expenses of her five younger siblings.

She is worried about her and her siblings' future. “I want to be educated and get a job so I can help my siblings.”

Yeanur said she wanted to be a therapist so she can help the injured rebuild their lives.

Govt to make rice import costlier

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Asked whether the government would provide farmers with any price incentives so that they would start cultivating other crops, Matia said, “This year's rice production costs would be considered while announcing the Boro procurement price.”

Boro acreage dropped to 46.60 lakh hectares this year from last year's 48.40 lakh hectares. The Department of Agriculture Extension has set a target of production at 1.90 crore tonnes of rice during the Boro season, which is more than half of the country's annual rice production.

Many attribute the trend in Boro acreage shrinkage to low rice price that acts as disincentive to growers. However, the minister has got some other explanations.

She said her ministry had long been pursuing to promote rain-fed Aman and Aus cultivation so that pressure on highly irrigation-intensive Boro is minimised. Winter rice Boro is highly taxing for fast depleting groundwater, particularly in the country's north.

Import of cheaper rice in Boro harvesting season is a price dampener. Comparing to last financial year (2014/15) -- when private traders imported over 14 lakh tonnes of rice from India, the first eight months of this fiscal year (2015-16) saw hardly 3 lakh tonnes of import, thanks to the 20

percent duty imposed last year on rice import.

But there are complains of informal rice import through porous Indo-Bangla border.

The parliamentary standing committee on agriculture also cautioned the ministries concerned last week against unrestrained import of rice at a time when Indian granaries are trying to get rid of some of their old stocks.

There is criticism of government foot-dragging in announcing Boro procurement price. Last year, it made the announcement a month ahead of crop harvesting but this time it is getting late.

Though the government procures hardly one-twentieth of the total production, the official procurement rate has some impacts on determining the commercial rice price in the wholesale and retail markets.

Tajamul Haque cultivates Boro less than half the areas he did last year. Reached over the phone, the Nachol (Chapainawabganj) farmer said he thought releasing some of his Boro land free for growing mustard, lentil and wheat would be more profitable.

Given the current rice price hovering around Tk 600 to 650 a maund, Tajamul now thanks his business sense.

A report released in late March by the United States Department of

Agriculture stated that growing wheat and corn are more profitable for farmers in Bangladesh than cultivating Boro.

Double murder

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no-303. They paid their bills on Thursday night, as they were scheduled to check out by 12:00pm yesterday.

A hotel employee named Faisal knocked on their door yesterday morning but did not get any response. He informed Azad who contacted the victims over their room phone but did not get any response either, Azad said.

The hotel authorities then informed the police who broke open the door and found their bodies, he added.

Mizanur's body was found hanging from the ceiling. His hands were tied with a scarf. Sumaiya's body was found lying on the bed. There were stab marks on her body and her face was buried under a pillow, said RMP Assistant Commissioner Sushanto.

Their bodies were sent to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsies. Members of various law enforcement agencies, including experts from the CID, visited the scene.

Police, however, said the victims' families claimed that the two were not married.

Third phase of UP elections today

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The AL in last couple of days had suspended its dissidents from the party in different districts, including Chandpur and Mymensingh, for contesting as rebel candidates and violating the party's decision.

On the other hand, the BNP had kept alleging that the ruling party men and law enforcers were harassing and intimidating its party men in different UPs to ensure AL men's victory.

Elections to 725 UPs were held on March 22 in first phase and 639 UPs on March 31 in the second phase. Polls to 743 UPs are slated for May 7 in the fourth phase and 733 on May 28 in the fifth phase. Around 700 more UPs will go to polls in the sixth phase in June, according to EC officials.

At least 40 people were killed, including 18 in voting days, and several hundred others were injured in violence over UP polls.

In the first and second phases, polling was largely marred by electoral irregularities and incidents of clashes between supporters of rival candidates, which prompted the EC to suspend voting at around 100 polling stations.

Shushashoner Jannoy Nagorik (Shujan), a civil society organisation working for establishing good governance, at a press conference on April 19 viewed that the EC chief and other commissioners should quit for their failure to hold fair and peaceful polls.

Workers' Party of Bangladesh

President and Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Rashed Khan Menon yesterday at a programme in the capital said such violence and irregularities had taken place due to lax enforcement of laws by the EC.

Bangladesh Hindu-Bouddha-Christian Oikya Parishad General Secretary Rana Das Gupta yesterday at a press conference said attacks on minorities increased significantly after the UP polls had begun.

Against such a backdrop, the EC on April 13 sat in an emergency meeting with top officials of law enforcement agencies and paramilitary forces to discuss law and order for the next phases of polls.

Finally, the EC at a meeting with some central AL leaders on Thursday asked them to issue directives to the party's grassroots to refrain from committing violence and irregularities in the next phases of polls.

Election experts, however, think that issuing directives alone cannot help stop violence and irregularities.

“The EC is yet to take any visible steps to address the problems and overcome its weakness that led to the violence and irregularities in the first and second phases of polls. So, similar things may happen again in the third phase,” said Abdul Alim, director of the Election Working Group (EWG), a platform of 28 civil society organisations.

“Fear of violence is high in the areas where AL-nominated and AL rebel

candidates are contesting the polls,” he told The Daily Star yesterday evening.

The ongoing UP polls, being held on the party lines for first time, have generated much heat in the political landscape as both the AL and its arch-rival BNP have stepped in the battle of ballots.

The parties have picked their grassroots leaders to compete for chairman posts with their party's electoral symbols -- “boat” and “sheaf of paddy”.

In today's polls, AL-nominated 25 candidates have been elected unopposed, while the BNP has no candidate in 61 UPs, according to EC statistics.

The BNP could not field candidates in many UPs, as its local leaders showed reluctance to contest the polls fearing attack by AL men. In some cases, BNP men were obstructed by the ruling party men to file nominations. Besides, nominations of some BNP candidates were cancelled by returning officers after scrutiny.

Elections to 1,364 UPs were held in the last two phases. In the polls, the AL candidates secured a landslide victory by winning in 991 UPs. Eighty-five of them were elected uncontested.

On the other hand, the BNP-nominated chairman candidates won in 109 UPs, while independent and other political parties' aspirants became successful in rest of the unions, according to the EC and the media.