Ansar Al Islam

FROM PAGE 1

Also yesterday, the twitter handle @Ansar_Islam_BD posted a statement, one in Bangla and the other in English.

"Alhamdulillah, By the grace of Almighty Allah, the Mujahidin of Ansar Al-Islam (AQIS, Bangladesh branch) were able to assassin Xulhaz Mannan and his associate Samir Mahbub Tonoy," read the statement.

"They were the pioneers of practising and promoting homosexuality in Bangladesh," it added.

"They were working day and night to promote homosexuality among the people of this land since 1998 with the help of their masters, the US crusaders and its Indian allies."

Five machete-wielding youths, also carrying firearms, hacked Xulhaz and his friend to death inside his Kalabagan apartment on Monday.

Xulhaz, a political process analyst at the USAID, was an editor of "Roopbaan," the country's only known magazine for the cause of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community.

The killers also stabbed the security guard of the building while entering the apartment and hacked an assistant sub-inspector of police who had got hold of one of them.

All of them managed to avoid arrest.

"The symptoms of the machete attack on Xulhaz and his friend suggest that it is the act of Ansar Al Islam or Ansarullah Bangla Team," said an investigator of the Detective Branch of police.

Police suspect a five-member sleeper cell carried out the double murder and the nature of the attack has similarity to the one which left publisher Ahmedur Rashid Tutul and two of his friends injured at his office in October last year.

Those who hacked Tutul and the other two had entered his Lalmatia office, saying they want to publish their books.

Monday's attackers introduced themselves as couriers.

The official, however, said they have collected important evidence which made them hopeful about arresting the attackers.

Thirteen days after the murder of blogger Niloy on August 7, a message purportedly from militant group Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) said Ansar al Islam is a separate entity.

Uploaded on a website called Jihadology, the statement was published by the Global Islamic Media Front on August 19. It claimed Ansarullah and Ansar al Islam are separate organisations working in Bangladesh.

Following the murder of blogger Neel, newspaper outlets received emails in which Ansar al Islam claimed the responsibility for the attack.

The sender identified himself as Mufti Abdullah Ashraf and claimed to be the spokesperson of "Ansar al Islam (al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent, Bangladesh Chapter)".

OWN SECURITY BLANKET!

Talking to reporters at the crime scene yesterday, Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque said the killers carried out the mission after recce for days.

While replying to a query, he said there might have been similarities between the Kalabagan murders and the killing of RU Professor Rezaul Karim Siddiquee.

Prof Rezaul was brutally murdered in the northern city's Shalbagan area on Saturday in an attack that police then said bears the hallmark of the previous blogger killings.

The police boss also said citizens need to be conscious about their security.

"It is not possible for the law enforcement agencies to guard them door-to-door. They need to establish their own security blanket and police will assist them," he said.

Talking about the recent killings, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said such incidents are the manifestation of an international conspiracy, UNB reports.

Shibir men sometimes turn to JMB, sometimes they work for al-Qaeda, Ansarullah Bangla Team and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami and sometimes they work under the BNP-led 20-party alliance in exchange for money, he said while talking to reporters at the Secretariat.

PROTESTS, CONDOLENCES

With #XulhazMannan trending yesterday, people continued to protest and offer condolences on social media following the brutal killings.

In a tweet at 7:49pm, USAID Bangladesh posted, "Xulhaz Mannan, you will be missed dearly. Rest in peace dear friend!"

"My prayers and condolences to the family of Xulhaz. I could not believe the tragic news when I read it, his light will shine brightly in Heaven," Seth Silvernail from California posted on Xulhaz's timeline.

Another user, Abul Azad, wrote, "We will remember you always ... your sacrifice will increase our strength to express our voice of freedom."

CASES

Two cases were filed -- one over the murder and the other for assault on a cop -- with Kalabagan Police Station late on Monday night.

Minhaj Mannan Emon, elder brother of Xulhaz, sued unknown people while Sub-Inspector Shamim Ahmed of the police station sued five to six unknown assailants over the machete assault on ASI Momtaz.

Though police later on Monday had said they found a mobile phone, but it was missing in the seizure list.

Locals alleged police did not act promptly while chasing the criminals when they were fleeing.

Some said they did not see any cop chasing the criminals.

A grocer said he saw a thin youth fleeing with a firearm in his hand. "I did not see any cop chasing him," he said, whishing not to be named.

However, Sub-inspector Shamim in the case statement said he shot one round from his pistol while a constable shot one round from a shotgun as one of the fleeing youths hacked ASI Momtaz.

AUTOPSY

Sohel Mahmud, assistant professor of forensic medicine at Dhaka Medical College, told reporters that indiscriminate chopping in the heads led to the death of the two victims.

Each of the two suffered more than 10 stabs, mostly in their heads.

More than one killer took part in the hacking. There were some cuts in both hands.

Meanwhile, the bodies were handed over to the family members.

Xulhaz was buried at Banani graveyard after namaz-e-janaza at Tetultola playground near his residence.

Tonoy was laid to rest at a Mirpur graveyard after namaz-e-janaza in his residential area of Shewrapara.

Xulhaz's brother Minhaz Mannan Emon said, "Everybody has the right and liberty to express his/her opinion. It is not accepted that you have to kill people for their opinions."

He demanded immediate arrest of the killers.

Minhaz said they were not aware of any threat to him as he did not share it with them.

Talking to this correspondent at DMC morgue, Tonoy's uncle Mahfuzur Rahman said he was a theatre activist and dreamt of becoming a director.

Yemeni forces seize main oil terminal from al Qaeda

REUTERS, *Aden*

Yemeni government forces and their Emirati allies took back control of the country's largest oil export terminal from al Qaeda on Monday, security officials said, a day after routing the militants from their nearby stronghold.

The lightning advance is a shift in strategy for the Saudi-led coalition forces, which for over a year have focused their firepower on the Iran-allied Houthis who had seized the capital Sanaa and driven the government into exile.

JSTU closed after police charge truncheons on students

20 hurt, 28 detained

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Authorities of Jessore Science and Technology University (JSTU) yesterday closed the university for 16 days after police charged truncheons on students at a sit-in programme on the campus that left 20 students injured.

The students had been demonstrating for the last 21 days, demanding the withdrawal of an expulsion order for a student and suspension orders for four other students.

Police also detained 28 students.

The agitated students said police asked them to withdraw the sit-in programme in front of the university administrative building and attacked them when they were leaving the spot.

JSTU Vice-Chancellor Prof Abdus Sattar said they went for the summer holidays early to avoid any untoward incidents and asked the students to vacate their dormitories.

He said following an allegation of harassment of a female student, students beat up fourth-class staff Badal in December 2015.

After investigation into the incident, the Regent Board of the university on May 4 decided to fire Badal and expel a student and suspend four other students for different periods for their involvement in the incident, the VC added.

Students started agitation for the withdrawal of the decision, he said.

When the students went berserk yesterday, they called police and the law enforcers brought the situation under control, the VC said.

Some students instigated the general students and started throwing brick chunks at the police when they entered the campus to rescue the VC and other officials, who were besieged by the students, Vaskar Saha, assistant commissioner of Jessore police, told The Daily Star.

Police charged truncheons to disperse the students and removed the barricade from Jessore-Chaugachha Road, Vaskar said.

Workers' clash leave 1 dead in Satkhira

A CORRESPONDENT, *Satkhira*

A clash between two groups transport workers over capturing their union office left one dead and two injured in Kaliganj Bus Terminal of Satkhira yesterday evening.

Deceased Raju Ahmed Babu, 35, was the general secretary of a faction of the Bus-Minibus Workers' Union.

Two transport workers said the union was under the control of the group of Mostafizur Rahman and Razu Ahmed for a long time. Mostafizur is the president of the union.

A faction of the union led by Kamrul and Abu Taher took control of the office yesterday morning, they said.

The clash ensued when Mostafizur's group attempted to recapture the office in the evening.

Raju Ahmed was killed on the spot.

Mostafizur and Abdur Rahim, joint secretary of the union, were injured and admitted to Satkhira Sadar Hospital.

Mir Manir Hossain, assistant police commissioner of Kaliganj circle, said the situation was under control.

Bumper yield of Boro likely

FROM PAGE 1

the national output much.

In a major policy shift, the government this year has decided to procure seven lakh tonnes of Boro paddy directly from farmers, in addition to six lakh tonnes of rice, from May 5 through August 31. The prices have been fixed at Tk 23 a kilogram of paddy and Tk 32 a kg of rice.

According to government estimates, farmers' production costs for each kg of paddy and rice have been Tk 20.70 and Tk 29 respectively.

In the previous years, the government used to buy mostly rice (9/10 lakh tonnes) and barely one lakh tonne of paddy, which would benefit mainly the rice millers and middlemen with the price incentives.

It's a challenging task to break free from the clutches of middlemen, said Abdul Wadud, MP, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the food ministry.

"[But] we have advised the food ministry to develop a mechanism so that farmers can directly go to the government's food procurement centres and get the price benefits," he told this correspondent yesterday.

Officials at the food ministry and the food directorate say that they will make public announcements in all rice-growing regions from May 2, encouraging farmers to sell their paddy to government granaries.

Thanks to the government announcement of the paddy procurement package, markets have already started showing an early sign of rise in the otherwise dampened rice prices, farmers in some of the rice-rich districts said yesterday.

Abdul Jalil grew Boro on 20 bighas (little over 8 acres) of land in Naogaon's Niamatpur.

As he has just started harvesting the crop, he is delighted to have 22 to 24 maunds of paddy per bigha.

Contacted over the phone yesterday, Jalil said, "The prices are gradually picking up. The price of a maund of paddy was Tk 700 last week. Today, it has risen to 730."

While he welcomed the government move of buying paddy directly from farmers, he was a little sceptic about it as well, noting that there exists a long nexus of dishonest middlemen and some unscrupulous food officials.

However, that the government will buy 13 lakh tonnes of rice and paddy at good prices would definitely have positive impacts on the rice market, Jalil added.

Discouraged by the low price last year, Tajamul Haque from Chapainawabganj's Nachol cultivated Boro on half the land he did last year.

"Farmers like me will definitely feel encouraged to grow more rice again if the government really purchases paddy directly from the growers," he said.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, an official of the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit (FPMU) of the food ministry said the government officials concerned have to deliver this time and try to implement the "direct-purchase-from-farmers policy".

Otherwise, the farmers will lose interest in farming the economically less lucrative rice, they noted.

Sudden water crisis

FROM PAGE 16

Residents of Dhanmondi, Indira Road, Senpara Parbata and in some parts of Old Dhaka have been going through untold sufferings due to the crisis.

Besides, residents of Bashabo, Madartek, Mugda, Tantibazar and West Rajabazar areas are complaining of getting dirty and stinky water.

"You know how difficult it is to live without water. We are not getting water properly for the last two weeks. We just get water once a day and that too for a brief time. It is almost impossible to meet the demand with this meagre supply," said Anowar Haldar, a resident of Senpara Parbata.

"We are buying water jars for our basic needs," he said.

Anowar said the situation in some houses in the area was really bad. Some residents, he said, have no choice but to wait for Wasa water lorries to collect water, and some go to relatives' houses to take showers.

Mohammad Khorshed, a resident of Indira Road, said, "We have been getting water once a day, but the quantity is very poor."

"Our house owner got new Wasa pipeline connection a few months ago and we thought there would be no crisis of water this summer. But we were wrong."

Reaz Ahmed, a resident of Road-7/A of Dhanmondi, said they had been facing water crisis since April 13. "We have been facing problems for the couple of days. Though there was a regular supply for a brief time, we are facing it again," he said.

He contacted Wasa engineer who said the problem occurred due to the ongoing pipe replacement work, which would end soon.

A Wasa official also said water crisis in Dhanmondi, Indira Road and Rayerbazar areas were happening due to the installation of new water pipes there.

On the other hand, technical issues at some water pumps in Mirhazirbagh, Senpara Parbata and Pargendaria were causing water crisis.

Serajuddin, one of the deputy managing directors of Wasa, said due to the current heat wave, people who live towards the end of a water supply pipeline might face some problems. He said they were doing their best to solve the problem.

He said this happened as the groundwater level drops in the dry season.

Each year, the groundwater level in the central area of the capital drops by 1 to 3 metres due to excessive extraction of groundwater, said another official of Wasa.

"As the water level drops during dry season and one or two percent of Wasa's tube-wells require rework. There is a crisis in some pockets of the capital," said Taqsem A Khan, managing director of Wasa.

To solve the problem, it was necessary to go for surface water, and Wasa plans to provide 70 to 75 percent of its supplies from it by 2020, he said.

Currently, Wasa can produce 245 crore litres of water daily, 78 percent of which comes from groundwater through 713 deep tube-wells and 22 percent from surface water through five water treatment plants.

New treatment plants would be set up at Gandhabpur of Rupganj, Jasaldi in Mawa and Sayedabad, he said, adding that those plants would produce 140 crore litres of water daily.

Meanwhile, a mild to moderate heat wave is sweeping over Dhaka, Rajshahi, Rangpur and Khulna regions since April 6 and it may continue for the next few days, according to the Met office.

There is no sign of rain in the regions and it may extend for some more days, said Bazlur Rashid, an official of Dhaka Met Office.

He, however, said there are chances of rain in Chittagong, Sylhet and Barisal divisions.

The highest temperature 40.2 degree Celsius was recorded at Saidpur while it was 40.1 in Dinajpur and 37 degree Celsius in Dhaka.

UNDP suggests

FROM PAGE 16

Success would depend strongly on a national legal foundation, capable institutions, and adequate financial instruments to manage decentralisation and coordinate among different levels of government, said Palanivel, chief economist of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and Pacific.

The report further said poor education, declining agricultural productivity, low incomes from farming and environmental factors drive the rural people to the cities, which however often do not provide better conditions in the regional countries.

Many towns and cities suffer from relatively poor standards in terms of public water supply, sanitation, drainage and waste management services, it added.

Citing an example, the report says about 55 percent of urban residents in Bangladesh and Nepal struggle to survive in slums.

Shares of slum dwellers have dropped in some cases, but the numbers had gone up. In Bangladesh, the number climbed from 20 million to 29 million from 1990 to 2014, it said.

According to the World Health Organization, Dhaka was one of the 20 most polluted cities in 2014.

The report said with urban expansion, the problem of huge solid waste would be acute in the coming days. Therefore, the cities would need to develop ways to both manage and decrease waste, including recycling the waste.

It added that urban infrastructure was often ill-equipped to deal with natural disasters, and for the poor the risks were even greater.

"With limited savings or coverage by social safety nets, they may be unable to recover from a disaster, which can perpetuate the cycle of poverty and limit human development across generations," the report observed.

The UNDP report suggested that better city planning, early warning systems and effective urban governance would help reduce the risks.

Economist Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud expressed concern over the unplanned urbanisation of Dhaka, and said it was densely populated without adequate amenities.

"Can we really afford a megacity like Dhaka?" he asked while addressing a panel discussion.

He suggested higher resources allocation on quality education and health.

Mashiur Rahman, economic affairs adviser of the prime minister of Bangladesh, Haoliang Xu, director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and Pacific, Robert Watkins, UN resident coordinator in Bangladesh, Pauline Tamesis, country director of UNDP Bangladesh, also spoke at the programme.

Launch workers

FROM PAGE 16

The workers had been abstaining from work since April 21 to press home their demands, including a minimum monthly wage of Tk 10,000 and increases in overtime pay, festival bonuses and other benefits.

On the night of April 22, the workers exempted passenger vessels from the strike considering the suffering of people, particularly of the HSC examinees.

All types of vessels started operations last night following complete withdrawal of the strike.

State Minister for Power and Energy Nasrul Hamid, senior officials from the labour and employment ministry and leaders of different associations of vessel owners and workers joined the meeting, with Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan in the chair.

Don't get run

FROM PAGE 16

City spokeswoman, Stephanie Lermen, told German site N-TV: "[The embedded lights] create a whole new level of attention."

She added the project is a good use of money and the lights were introduced following the tragic death of a 15-year-old using a phone, by a tram.

A recent survey of European cities including Berlin found one fifth of pedestrians are distracted by their phones, with a study conducted by the University of Washington suggesting it's as high as one in three in the US.

The US Department of Transportation has linked phone use to an increase in pedestrian deaths.

However, commentators in German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung complained the project is a waste of taxpayer's cash, The Washington Post reported.

Augsburg is not the only city introducing measures to make phone users more aware of their surroundings – or at least keeping them safe as well as others around them.

In 2014, the city of Chongqing experimented with a 165ft long pavement divided into lanes – with one for speedy and alert pedestrians and another for 'smombies,' meaning smartphone zombies.

Similarly, last year, Utah Valley University's Student Life and Wellness Centre (UVU) introduced a 'walking and texting' lane to a busy flight of stairs.

Fanatics hated him

FROM PAGE 1

They were held in custody for interrogation as some villagers told police that they opposed the music school and even threatened some of the school students, said Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Commissioner M Shamsuddin.

"We believe the police would be able to extract important information from them," he said.

A key investigator of the murder case said police had also found an eyewitness who told them that the killers left the scene at Shalbagan chanting "Allahu Akbar".

While fleeing, the killers on a motorcycle went towards Gourhanga, but they were not caught in the CCTV camera of the police at Gourhanga.

"We have information that the killers fled through Food Godown Road near Gourhanga," the investigator said.

Of the arrestees, Raihan of Talgharia village of the upazila was employed at the Dargamaria mosque sometime in the middle of 2014. Since then, he started living in Dargamaria and married a girl of the village one year ago.

Raihan's wife Shahara Khatun told this correspondent that her husband had no links with any political party.

Alamgir Hossain, brother-in-law of the other arrestee Monsur Rahman, said Monsur had been picked up from home around 1:30am and that he was also not involved in politics.

Earlier on Sunday, police arrested Hafizur Rahman, 22, a Rajshahi University student and former president of an Islami Chhatra Shibir unit.

Law enforcers are likely to produce him before a court today with a seven-day remand prayer.

Talking to The Daily Star, several villagers said the murderers in no way had any link to the village where most of the inhabitants were highly grateful to Prof Rezaul.

"He [Prof Rezaul] has no enemy in the village. It can't be. He was such a big donor and loved all the villagers," said Zillur Rahman, a councillor of Bhawaniganj municipality, of Dargamaria village.

Meanwhile, teachers of Rajshahi University returned to classes yesterday ending a three-day work abstention in protest at the killing of Prof Rezaul on April 23 near his home at Shalbagan in the city.

RU students, however, did not attend any class and continued demonstration.

As many as 3,000 students marched in procession on the campus around 10:00am.

They also formed a kilometer-long human chain on both sides of Dhaka-Rajshahi highway, blocking the road for nearly an hour.

Some of them had "We want justice" written on their chests while many others were holding placards demanding immediate arrest of the killers. Protesters also urged the government to eliminate militancy.

The agitating students announced that they would barricade the highway for four hours from 9:00am today.

Load shedding again

FROM PAGE 1

Usually the difference between morning and evening electricity consumption is very wide -- about a thousand megawatts. But now the difference has been narrowed down to some 300-400MW. As a result people are experiencing load shedding all the time -- from early morning to midnight.

The government was expected yesterday to resolve through a dialogue the issue of transport workers who were pressing home a 15-point demand including wage hike, a PDB officials said.

According to the PDB, the daily power demand is around 8,000MW now, more than 60 percent of which comes from cheap and clean natural gas.

Oil-based power generation has increased from 2010 as the government set up rental power plants on urgent basis. The country cannot produce adequate gas for the gas-based power plants to generate power at their full capacity.

The power supply situation this year looked great until last week as the supply of gas, oil, hydro and coal-based power and imported power in total were very close to the demand.

The PDB was successfully supplying up to 8,300MW power before the recent disruption to power generation, which was why people saw almost no power cuts despite a heat wave.

4 Bangladeshis

FROM PAGE 16

All of them, including the injured, hail from Kanaighat upazila of Sylhet.

At least eight people were going to work at Dukhan of Qatar in a minibus when the driver lost control and went off the road.

The bodies would be sent home after completion of the official procedures, said embassy officials.