

BCL chief flies to Ishwardi on helicopter

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Bangladesh Chhatra League President Saifur Rahman Sohag's visit on a chopper to attend a programme in Ishwardi has sparked widespread criticism.

Sohag flew to Ishwardi from Dhaka on Friday and attended an anti-drug rally. However, he did not pay the Tk 1.05 lakh chopper fare. Shafiqur Rahman Konak, son of Land Minister Shamsur Rahman Sherif, arranged the chopper trip by Partex Group and brought the BCL president for the programme. Sohag landed at the Ishwardi Pulses Research Institute premises where local BCL leaders warmly received him.

It became a talk of the town where cross-section of people denounced the luxury in the name of attending a simple programme. Many termed it an unethical practice that would not bring any good to student politics.

The local Awami League is embarrassed by the incident and we cannot accept such an example as Chhatra League is a political student organisation that voluntarily serves the society. So, when a top leader of the organisation uses a chopper to visit a place, it loses all quality of voluntary services," Advocate Abdul Ahad, joint secretary of Pabna district unit Awami League, said.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 6



The rental helicopter that carried Bangladesh Chhatra League President Saifur Rahman Sohag to Pabna after it landed in Ishwardi upazila Friday afternoon. Inset, Sohag, holding a mobile phone, among others. PHOTO: COLLECTED

550 migrants rescued in Mediterranean, two dead

AFP, Rome

Around 550 migrants making the perilous crossing to Europe were rescued from the Mediterranean on Friday, with two bodies also recovered, the Italian coastguard said.

The migrants were picked up from four inflatable dinghies by coastguard vessels as well as an Italian naval ship, an NGO boat and a merchant vessel.

"Around 550 migrants have been rescued so far from the central Mediterranean in four rescue operations," the coastguard said in a statement.

It was an SOS Mediterranean boat which recovered the two bodies on one of the dinghies, while rescuing 193 other people, the NGO said in a tweet.

The Italian coastguard said that rescue efforts were ongoing "despite difficult weather and sea conditions."

In recent years Italy has been on the front line of migrants arriving across the Mediterranean and has been pushing for agreements with governments in North Africa to facilitate returns.

People-smugglers have exploited the chaos in Libya since the 2011 uprising that overthrew dictator Moamer Kadhafi to traffic migrants in boats to Italy 300 kilometres (185 miles) away.

Resolute Kiwis still 303 runs adrift

FROM PAGE 1
lessened the chances of any result other than a draw unless something extraordinary happens over the next two days.

The cornerstone of the hosts' response was a fine unbeaten 119 from left-handed opener Tom Latham and an aggressive 53 from skipper Kane Williamson. There was no record-equalling century from Ross Taylor, who was dismissed for 40.

As for Bangladesh, they got one wicket each in each session. It was a tough day for the rookie Bangladesh bowling attack as the five bowlers, save Shakib Al Hasan, had only the experience of four Tests between them.

Kamrul Islam Rabbi, who made his debut against England a couple of months ago, picked up two wickets, while debutant Taskin Ahmed claimed the prized scalp of Williamson. Another debutant pace bowler Shubhashis Roy toiled hard without success on a wicket with little movement off the seam.

Young off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz, who had a dream debut against England as he picked up an

amazing 16 wickets in two Tests, made some sort of record in New Zealand when he bowled the first over from the scoreboard end. Although he bowled without success, he had the heaviest workload with the ball on a pace-dominated wicket. He bowled 26 overs in three different spells and of course against the wind, conceding 80 runs but more importantly showing his uncanny ability of bowling a consistent line and length in conditions where the ball hardly takes grip or turn.

Bangladesh's champion all-rounder Shakib bowled three overs in his first spell and conceded 18 runs. Maybe he was a bit of a target of the home batsmen who certainly did not like his imperious 217 the previous day. He bowled another four overs in the final session with the wind but it was more like business as usual without any threat.

Among the three pace bowlers Rabbi got a wicket off the very first ball he bowled. Taskin was unlucky to not get a wicket in his first over. Meanwhile, Shubhashis had a more serious thing to sort out rather than bowling with decent pace.

Taskin bowled with pace and he

dismissed Williamson with a top delivery that shaped in before leaving late and took the edge of the New Zealand's skipper's extended bat to stand-in wicketkeeper Imrul Kayes, who stood behind the stumps in place of injured skipper Mushfiqur Rahim.

Rabbi struck the first blow when he had Jeet Ravel caught behind with a good rising delivery that the right-hander could only fend off to Imrul after scoring 27 off 39 balls. He was given a lifeline by Sabbir Rahman who, while standing at third slip, dropped him on 22.

Earlier, Bangladesh declared their first innings at 595 for eight, their second highest innings total behind 638 against Sri Lanka at Galle in 2013.

The highlight of the morning was Sabbir Ahmed's fifty. Resuming the day on 10, the dashing right-hander completed his half century with an exquisite cover drive off Neil Wagner. He was unbeaten on an 86-ball 54 which contained seven boundaries. He got good support at the other end from Rabbi, who also remained not out on 6. The declaration came after 18 overs of the day's play.

Forced to help son's 'killers'

FROM PAGE 1
knowledge of the incident and lawyers said.

Contacted, Halim, a CNG-run auto-rickshaw driver, refused to comment.

His relatives and neighbours believe that he is mum due to threats by the suspects.

A relative preferring anonymity told The Daily Star, "Halim accepted the conditions and signed the agreement as they [the accused and their accomplices] were threatening other members of his family."

"He had no choice," another relative said, adding, "In exchange, he was given Tk 7 lakh." Witnesses have backed off due to the threats from the accused, the relative said.

The relative also said Halim was forced to take the money and that he would gladly give it back. "All he wants is for the threats to stop and justice to be delivered."

CID Inspector Shamim Hasan Talukder, investigation officer of the case, told The Daily Star recently, "We came to know that Halim Kazi and his family members were forced to sign the agreement."

"There is no legal scope for such a deal. Rather, the deal hinted that the accused were involved in the murder. We will

produce a copy of the deal before the court as evidence."

The CID official said their investigation was being delayed as the plaintiff's family was unwilling to cooperate with the investigators.

"We are doing our investigation in our own way and will submit the charge sheet after completing investigation," he added.

The accused are: Rana Molla, Md Razon, Zakir, Selim, Bahadur, Sentu, Badsha, Manu, Raihan, Shamim, Humayun and Mokles.

Selim, Humayun and one Ripon were arrested but were later released on bail.

On January 9 this year, a Dhaka court sent Razon and Zakir to jail after they surrendered before it. Sources said the two had even taken Halim to court that day so that Halim could support their bail petitions.

Police sources said all the accused were criminals and that law enforcers were trying to arrest them. But locals and the victim's relatives said the accused were roaming around freely in the neighbourhood.

Nur Khan, acting executive director of rights body Ain o Salish Kendra told The Daily Star yesterday that like this case, many cases had been weakened by influential accused issuing threats

to plaintiffs and witnesses or by providing them with money.

In many cases, police get involved in the process too, he claimed. Sometimes police do not find witnesses due to such "illegal negotiations" between the plaintiffs and the accused.

Nur termed the incident of Halim "a burning example" of the culture of impunity and fear. He said the government, as soon as it comes to know, should ensure security of the victim's family and witnesses and that trial proceedings continue without any hindrance.

THE HARROWING INCIDENT
On March 31, 2016, the union parishad election day, Shuvo accompanied by his uncle Salal Kazi, went to his school, Madhurchar Government Primary School, to see the election festivities.

"Around 9:20am, a group of 30 to 40 Awami League men led by local leader Rana Mollah went there and were locked in an altercation with voters," Salal had told The Daily Star earlier.

The altercation turned into a clash and the AL men and voters threw brick chunks at each other. The ruling party men at one stage started firing shots indiscriminately.

Shuvo was hit, said police and Ansar members. He was declared dead when taken to a hospital.

Beggar? Not anymore

FROM PAGE 1
Landless Zakir Hossain of Jharbari village had hardly made a living just by pulling a rickshaw van.

After he began growing winter vegetables on the riverbed alongside pulling rickshaw van, his financial condition improved. He can now provide for his family.

"The gray, glassy riverbed turns green in winter as we plant crops," Zakir said, while gazing proudly at the vast plain covered with green plants.

Elhaz Mia, a farmer of Kashimnagar village, has been growing vegetables on the riverbed for the last five years.

"Harvests here are bountiful without even applying chemical fertilizer, thanks to the layer of fertile silt," he said. Farmers don't even have to spend much to pay labourers, as the land doesn't need

much preparation.

Since pest attack is not severe, many farmers save more by not using any pesticide, Elhaz said.

Apart from the most profitable onion and garlic, varieties of green leaves, cucumber, pumpkin, corn and rice are grown there.

Farmers start preparing the land in October-November when the water in the Atrai starts receding.

Many of them grow multiple vegetables and usually harvest their last produce by the month of May when the riverbed starts becoming inundated again.

A landless farmer makes an average monthly income of nearly Tk 11,000 by farming and pulling rickshaws.

Azizur Rahman, of Kashimnagar village, has spent Tk 10,000 for planting

onions on 50 decimals of land on the Atrai, and he expects to earn Tk 20,000 this year.

More and more landless people are being drawn to farming on the riverbed as the income is high and costless, he said.

Shahid Miah is another successful landless farmer in the area. He turned things around for his family through farming and now he can even afford educational expenses of his children.

"Last year, I reaped a bountiful harvest of garlic and Aman rice," he said.

Following in the footsteps of others, Mosaful Islam stopped begging this year and planted onion on the dried-up Atrai.

The landless people are doing amazing things by producing crops on an otherwise useless piece of land, said Mostafizur Rahman, of the Department of Agriculture Extension, Birganj.

Akheri Munajat of first phase today

FROM PAGE 1
Ignoring cold weather yesterday (the second day of the first phase), religious scholars from home and abroad delivered sermons on Islamic philosophy in the light of the holy Quran and Hadith.

Saleh Uddin Ahmed, assistant superintendent of police of traffic division of Gazipur, said vehicular movement would remain suspended between Bhoga Bypass and Tongi Bridge on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway, Majukhan bridge and Station Road on Kaliganj-Tongi Road, and Kamarpara bridge and Munnu Textile Mill on Kamarpara road from early mornings of the days when the Akheri Munajat of the two phases would be held.

There will be special transports of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police to carry the air travellers to and from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

No water transport will be allowed to ply between Kamarpara bridge to Tongi bridge in the Turag from January 10-22.

Meanwhile, security has been beefed up ahead of today's Akheri Munajat. Around 6,000 uniformed and plainclothes police and members of Rab and intelligence agencies have been deployed in and around the Ijtima ground to ensure security of the devotees.

A devotee Tara Mia, 60, of Brahmanbaria, died of old-age complications early yesterday. With Tara, seven devotees have so far died at the Ijtima venue.

SM Rahat Hasnat, information officer of Gazipur City Corporation, said they were expecting that around 40 lakh local and foreign devotees would join the Akheri Munajat.

A high official of Bangladesh Railway said they would operate special trains to cope with the rush of devotees during the Akheri Munajat of the first and second phases of Ijtima.

Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) is also running special buses.

Tablighi Jamaat has been organising Biswa Ijtima, also called the World Muslims' Congregation, every year since 1946. In 2011, the organisers had split the congregation into two phases to deal with overcrowding, ensure better management and security.

From cook to a planner

FROM PAGE 1
"operational house" in Bashundhara Residential Area where the Gulshan café attack was planned. He used to "guide" the attackers there.

However, the militant along with his family left the house for another den in Shewrapara area soon after the attack.

The CTTC unit arrested Rajib, also known inside his organisation "Neo JMB" as Shuvash, Shanto, Tiger, Adil and Jahid, at Elenga Bus Stand in Tangail on late Friday night.

Hailing from Bhutmara village in Gaibandha's Gobindaganj upazila, Rajib was trying to go somewhere in the northern part of the country following a short visit to the capital.

He was a cook for Abdul Awal, son-in-law of the executed chief of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) Shaikh Abdul Rahman, in 2004 or 2005, said Monirul.

Rajib "witnessed" the execution of the countrywide serial blasts on August 17, 2005 as Awal was the coordinator of the attacks.

Awal's informant, delivering letters to different JMB dens in nearby districts riding bikes, he said.

However, following the execution of Awal and six other militants, including Abdur Rahman and his second-in-command Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai on March 30, 2007, Rajib became a close accomplice of old JMB Shura member Dr Nazrul Islam. He also received militant training from Nazrul, said the CTTC unit chief.

According to another police official, Rajib later killed Nazrul over a conflict within the outfit.

In early 2013, JMB split into two factions, and Rajib became an organiser and also a close accomplice of "Neo JMB" chief coordinator Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury, who was killed along with two of his aides in a raid in Narayanganj on August 27 last year.

Apart from his involvement in the Gulshan and Sholakia attacks, Rajib also either directly took part or played important roles in 22 militant attacks in the northern regions of the country over the last couple of years, killing

many.

Those who were killed include Japanese citizen Kunio Hoshi, Tangail tailor Nikhil Joarder, Pabna priest Nityaranjan Pandey, Rangpur Khadem Rahmat Ali, Rajshahi University Professor Rezaul Karim and Panchagarh priest Jogeshwar Dasa Dhikari.

Investigations in some of those 22 murder or attempted-murder cases have been completed while the others are being probed, Monirul said.

Meanwhile, after talking to several people in Gaibandha's Bhutmara village, our correspondent in the district KM Rezaul Haque reported that Rajib and his wife was a couple who hardly mixed with the locals.

The couple has two sons aged seven and four.

Rajib's father, a carpenter, died three years ago and his mother works as a domestic help.

Rajib, who studied only up to class-V, had disappeared from the area along with his family two years ago, saying they were shifting to Bogra for their children's better education.

Asked about the "Neo JMB" plans at yesterday's press briefing, Monirul said just after the café attack on July 1, the militant outfit's next move was to create panic in the police force by killing its officials.

The outfit, however, dropped the idea after the CTTC unit conducted the Kalyanpur raid, also prompting Rajib to go into hiding somewhere in the northern part of the country.

Mahamudul Hasan Rigan, who was arrested during the raid, later confessed his involvement in the Holey Artisan attack, he said.

Replying to a query, the police official said it might take some time to prepare the charge sheet in the Gulshan attack case as "it was a big incident with too many victims, clues and witnesses".

He also said Rajib would be of great help in solving the case.

Meanwhile, A Dhaka court yesterday placed Rajib on an eight-day remand after CTTC Inspector Humayun Kabir, also the investigation officer of the case, produced him before the court.

PM leaves

FROM PAGE 1
schedule, the PM and her entourage members will depart by an Etihad Airways flight instead of Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight at 9:45pm and are scheduled to reach Zurich International Airport at 6:45am (local time) tomorrow.

In November last year, a Biman flight carrying the PM to Budapest in Hungary was compelled to make an emergency landing at Ashgabat International Airport in Turkmenistan because of "technical glitch". Hasina was going to attend the Budapest Water Summit 2016.

According to the foreign ministry officials, Hasina will attend a number of events of the WEF and hold talks with WEF Executive Chairman Klaus Schwab and other head of states and governments.

On January 17, the PM will attend the opening plenary of the World Economic Forum at the Congress Centre in Davos. Before this programme, Schwab will call on Hasina.

Hasina will also join a workshop titled "Shaping a New Water Economy" at the same venue on that day. In the afternoon, she will attend an interactive session on "Harnessing Regional Cooperation in South Asia" at the Congress Centre.

On January 18, Hasina will take part in an event titled "Worlds Underwater" as well as the plenary session on "Leading the Fight against Climate Change".

The next day, she will participate in an interactive session titled "Informal Gathering of the World Economic Leaders: Responsive and Responsible Leadership in a Multipolar World".

The PM will also attend another programme titled "Women Leaders Dinner: New Frontiers of Leadership" at Schatzalp of Davos-Klosters in the evening of the day.

Concluding her tour, Hasina will leave Zurich International Airport for Dhaka at 2:35pm on January 20 and is expected to arrive in Dhaka at 10:15am on January 21.