

Confession leads to recovery of body parts

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A Mymensingh man whose torso was discovered in a hole used for dumping poultry excrement one week after "going missing" last November was killed by his wife and her paramour, daughter and brother, claimed police yesterday.

The remaining body parts of Abul Hashem, 55, were found further inside the hole in Aangergara village of Bhaluka upazila on Sunday.

The body parts were found after the paramour, Mahmudul Islam Maha, 32, and brother, Saiful Islam, 40, confessed to being involved in the murder, said Superintendent of Police (SP) Syed Nurul Islam.

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A man lifting sand from Kuakata beach in Patuakhali and loading it onto a tractor-trailer. A gang has been illegally lifting sand from this spot, about half a kilometre from Kuakata Zero Point, for at least a week, spoiling the beauty of the beach and making it vulnerable to erosion. The sand is being sold to locals who use it to fill up ponds, lowlands and ditches. The photo was taken on Saturday.

PHOTO: STAR

RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY Facebook takes down 112 pages

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Social networking site Facebook took down 112 accounts, pages, web links and news portals operated from Bangladesh in the last one and a half years on charges of inciting religious extremism and militancy, State Minister for Telecommunications Tarana Halim told parliament yesterday.

Replying to lawmakers' queries, she said as per the list prepared by the home ministry, the government during this period requested the Facebook authorities to terminate 196 accounts, pages, web links and news portals.

The Facebook authorities now respond to a complaint in 48 hours, the state minister told the House.

Tarana said whenever any online post incites religious extremism and militancy, the home ministry sends the web link to Bangladesh

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Jahangir being quizzed about 2 terror cases

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

As Jahangir Alam alias Rajib Gandhi, a mastermind of the Gulshan café attack, confessed to his involvement in it, Bogra police began quizzing him to find out his links to two other militant attacks in the district.

Before his arrest by the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit in Tangail on January 13, Jahangir worked as the north Bengal military commander of "Neo JMB".

Apart from the country's worst ever terror attack case, he is an accused in 22 other cases including those filed in connection with the killings of Japanese citizen Kunio Hoshi, Tangail tailor Nikhil Joardar, Pabna priest Nityaranjan Pandey, Rangpur's Khadem Rahmat Ali and Panchagarh priest Jogeshwar Dasa Dikari.

He made a confessional statement before a Dhaka metropolitan magistrate on January 23, acknowledging that he was involved in the Gulshan attack that killed 20 hostages including 17 foreigners.

Since Jahangir joined "Neo JMB" as the commander severing his ties with mainstream Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh, "we are suspecting he had a role in other militant attacks in the district," said Arifur Rahman Mondal, additional police super of Bogra.

Besides, Jahangir's name had come up during interrogations of some militants, he added.

Meanwhile, a Bogra court yesterday granted 15-day remand for Jahangir, also known as Shuvash, after police showed him arrested in a grenade blast and explosive recovery cases filed with Sherpur and Shibganj police.

Police told the court that they were suspecting Rajib had involvement in those incidents and so they wanted to grill him to get information about others responsible.

Senior judicial magistrates Md Kamruzzaman and Abdullah-Al-Mamun passed the order.

On April 03 last year, two were killed as a grenade went off at a house in Juanpur Kuthibari of Sherpur upazila, Bogra. Later Sherpur police filed a case under the explosives act.

On June 13 of the same year, police arrested one suspected militant named Awal and recovered huge explosives and weapons during a drive at Vaiyerpukur in Shibganj.

Wheat blast surveillance begins today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Aiming to strengthen research on wheat, a deadly fungal disease in wheat, scientists from home and abroad will start weeklong field surveillance from today.

Split in three groups, they will cover Jessore region, Rajbari, Faridpur, Barisal and Bhola region and Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra and Rajshahi region, said officials at Wheat Research Center (WRC) yesterday.

Once the surveillance and monitoring is done, intensity and severity of wheat blast throughout the country in this season will be reported. Moreover, the team will also extract DNA from the collected samples for molecular analysis, WRC Director Naresh C Deb Barma told The Daily Star.

The Wheat Blast disease emerged in Bangladesh for the first time last year, causing significant loss in production in seven south-western and southern districts (Kushtia, Meherpur, Chuadanga, Jessore, Jhenidah, Barisal and Bhola). Average yield loss in an affected field was 25 to 30 percent, but in severely infected fields it reached up to 100 percent.

It re-emerged this season, but on a much smaller scale so far.

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Ex-secy Nurul Huda new CEC

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The Daily Star that he would devise a work strategy for the commission after consulting his colleagues.

"We will sit with the political parties because they are the most important stakeholders," he said, seeking cooperation from all political parties, civil society members as well as other stakeholders in performing his duties.

Earlier, Cabinet Secretary Shafiqul Alam said Nurul Huda's name was not there in the proposals of the ruling Awami League and the BNP, submitted to the six-member search committee for constituting the next EC.

Of the commissioners, Mahub's name was suggested by the BNP while Kabita's name was proposed by the AL, he told reporters at the Cabinet Division.

In the evening, the search panel met the president at the Bangabhaban, and proposed the names of Nurul Huda and ex-cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumder for the CEC post.

Majumder was also recommended for the job in 2012 but the then president didn't pick him.

Born in 1948 in Patuakhali's Baulfal, Nurul Huda completed his schooling in Patuakhali. He obtained his graduation and master's in Statistics from Dhaka University.

He also studied Public Administration and Advanced Studies at the University of Manchester, and pursued further studies in the then Soviet Union, he said.

Nurul Huda joined the 1971 Liberation War in Sector-9.

In July 1973, he joined the civil service in the administration cadre after passing the Public Service Commission examination, according to sources in the civil service.

In his service career, he was deputy commissioner of Comilla and Faridpur. Soon after the BNP-led alliance came to power in 2001, he was sent into forced retirement.

Nurul Huda said he was a joint secretary at that time.

He fought a legal battle against the then government's move. But by the time he got a verdict in his favour in 2008, he had already retired in 2006.

He was made secretary with retrospective effect after the AL came to power in 2009.

According to his LinkedIn profile, Nurul Huda served as director (administration and human resources) at Gemcon Ltd, a multisectoral private company. He also worked as chairman of North West Zone Power Distribution Company Ltd.

Lastly, he served as managing director of Bangladesh Municipal Development Fund and retired from the job in 2015, it shows.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, several BNP leaders said the party is "aggrieved" and "frustrated" over the newly formed EC.

The party would hold a press conference today to give its formal reaction to this.

Last night, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia had discussions with the new EC with the party's standing

committee members at her Gulshan office. The leaders expressed their frustration over the new EC, according to sources present at the meeting.

PROFILE OF ELECTION COMMISSIONERS

Brig Gen (ret) Shahadat was project director of "Preparation of Electoral Roll with Photographs and Facilitating the Issuance of National Identity Cards" during the tenure of the last caretaker government.

Another Election Commissioner, Rafiqul Islam, had worked in the EC Secretariat for a long time.

Talking to this newspaper, he said, "I am happy that the honourable president has given me an important task. I will try my best to carry out the responsibility properly. I want cooperation from all."

The first-ever woman Election Commissioner, Begum Kabita Khanam, is a retired district and sessions judge. She began her career at the Munsef Court in Rajshahi in 1984 and retired in June last year.

REACTIONS

AL Joint General Secretary Mahbul Alam Hanif said, "There is no question about the impartiality of those picked by the president."

He hoped all political parties would welcome the new EC and assist it in discharging its responsibilities.

"I hope this commission will hold free and fair elections," he said.

Contacted, BNP Vice Chairman Abdullah Al Noman said, "BNP will give its formal reaction tomorrow after

discussing the issue in the party forum."

Congratulating the new EC, former election commissioner Brig Gen (ret) M Shakhawat Hussain said, "It seems to me that the commission is good."

He said the commission would have to prove its efficiency through work.

THE APPOINTMENT PROCESS

On January 25, the president formed the search panel, headed by Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, after holding talks with 31 political parties on EC formation.

According to a gazette notification issued that day, the panel would recommend two names each for the posts of CEC and four election commissioners. And it would present its recommendations to the president in 10 working days.

Yesterday, the panel finalised 10 names at its last meeting at the Supreme Court Judges' Lounge.

After the meeting, Additional Cabinet Secretary Abdul Wadud told journalists that the names were finalised on the basis of the civil society members' suggestions and the criteria they had given to the committee in two phases, he said.

The panel recommended eight names for the four posts of election commissioner. They included ex-additional secretary Mahub Talukder, Dhaka University professor Zarina Rahman Khan, ex-secretary Md Rafiqul Islam, local government expert Tofail Ahmed, former district and sessions judge Begum Kabita Khanam, ex-

planning commission member Md Abdul Mannan, Brig Gen (ret) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury and Janipor Chairman Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah.

Of them, Tofail's name was proposed by the BNP, said the cabinet secretary.

The tenure of the incumbent commission headed by Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed expires tomorrow, while one of the four commissioners would retire on February 14.

In its first meeting on January 28, the panel asked 31 political parties to propose five names each for the posts of CEC and commissioners by January 31.

The panel then shortlisted 20 names from 128 suggested by 26 political parties. It, however, didn't disclose the names.

Most of the political parties proposed names of former bureaucrats for the CEC post.

Unlike the previous search committee, this panel held meetings with civil society members to get their views on EC formation.

Headed by Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, the search panel includes Justice Obaidul Hassan, a High Court judge; Muhammed Sadique, chairman of Bangladesh Public Service Commission; Masud Ahmed, comptroller and auditor general of Bangladesh; Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam, trustee board member of Transparency International Bangladesh; and Shireen Akhter, provice chancellor of Chittagong University.

Trump slams judge

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and a 120-day bar on all refugees.

A US appeals court later on Saturday denied the government's request for an immediate stay of the ruling.

Vice President Mike Pence defended Trump earlier on Sunday, even as some Republicans encouraged the businessman-turned-politician to tone down his broadsides against the judicial branch of government.

"The president of the United States has every right to criticize the other two branches of government," Pence said on NBC's "Meet the Press" program.

It is unusual for a sitting president to attack a member of the judiciary, which the US Constitution designates as a check on the power of the executive branch and Congress.

US Senator Patrick Leahy, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, said Trump seems intent on precipitating a constitutional crisis.

Some Republicans also expressed discomfort with the situation.

"I think it is best not to single out

judges for criticism," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said on CNN's "State of the Union" program. "We all get disappointed from time to time at the outcome in courts on things that we care about. But I think it is best to avoid criticizing judges individually."

Republican Senator Ben Sasse, a vocal critic of Trump, was less restrained.

"We don't have so-called judges ... we don't have so-called presidents, we have people from three different branches of government who take an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution," he said on the ABC News program "This Week."

LEGAL LIMBO

The ruling by Robart, appointed by former Republican President George W Bush, coupled with the decision by the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco to deny the government's request for an immediate stay of the ruling dealt a blow to Trump barely two weeks into his presidency.

It could also be the precursor to months of legal challenges to his push to clamp down on immigration,

including through the construction of a wall on the US-Mexican border, and complicate the confirmation battle of his US Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch.

The Senate's top Democrat, Chuck Schumer, said on Saturday that Gorsuch, a conservative federal appeals court judge from Colorado, must meet a higher bar to show his independence from the president.

Trump, who during his presidential campaign called for a temporary ban on Muslims entering the United States, has vowed to reinstate his controversial travel ban. He says the measures are needed to protect the United States from Islamist militants. Critics say they are unjustified and discriminatory.

The legal limbo will prevail at least until the federal appeals court rules on the government's application for an emergency stay of Robart's ruling. The court was awaiting further submissions from the states of Washington and Minnesota on Sunday, and from the federal government yesterday. The final filing was due at 0100 GMT

HRW asks for int'l probe

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Survivors and witnesses, who identified army and border police units by their uniforms, kerchiefs, arm-bands and patches, described security forces carrying out attacks in groups, some holding women down or threatening them at gunpoint while others raped them.

Many survivors reported being insulted and threatened on an ethnic or religious basis during the assaults.

"These horrific attacks on Rohingya women and girls by security forces add a new and brutal chapter to the Myanmar military's long and sickening history of sexual violence against women," said Priyanka Motaparthi, senior emergencies researcher of HRW.

"Military and police commanders should be held responsible for these crimes if they did not do everything in their power to stop them or punish those involved."

Between December 2016 and January 2017, HRW researchers in Bangladesh interviewed 18 women, of whom 11 had survived sexual assault, as well as 10 men.

Seventeen men and women, including some women who survived assaults, witnessed sexual violence, including against their wives, sisters or daughters. The HRW documented 28 incidents of rape and other sexual assault.

A report released by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on February 3 found that more than half of the 101 women UN investigators interviewed said they were raped or suffered other forms of sexual violence.

The report, based on a total of 204 interviews, concluded that attacks including rape and other sexual violence "seem[ed] to have been widespread as well as systematic, indicating the very likely commission of crimes against humanity."

After attacks by Rohingya militants on border police posts on October 9, 2016, the Myanmar military undertook a series of "clearance operations" in Rakhine State.

Security forces summarily executed men, women, and children; looted property; and burned down at least 1,500 homes and other buildings, HRW said.

More than 69,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh, while another 23,000 have become internally displaced in Maungdaw district, it added.

Several women described how soldiers surrounded their villages or homes, then gathered the villagers in an outdoor area, separating men from women, and detained them for up to several hours. Soldiers often shot villagers, and raped and gang raped women and girls.

"Ayesha," pseudonym of a Rohingya woman in her 20s, told HRW: "They gathered all the women and started beating us with bamboo sticks and kicking us with their boots. After beating us, the military took [me and] 15 women about my age and separated us... [The soldiers] raped me one by one, tearing my clothes."

The sexual violence did not appear to be random or opportunistic, but part of a coordinated and systematic attack against Rohingya, in part because of their ethnicity and religion, HRW said.

Rohingya victims of sexual assault face limited access to emergency healthcare including to prevent unwanted pregnancy from rape and infection with HIV, and to treat other sexually transmitted infections, it said.

Myanmar authorities have taken no evident steps to seriously investigate allegations of sexual violence or other abuses reported by nongovernmental organisations, including HRW.

"The government's failure to investigate rape and other crimes against the Rohingya should make it clear to Burma's friends and donors that an independent, international inquiry is desperately needed to get to the bottom of these appalling abuses," Motaparthi said.