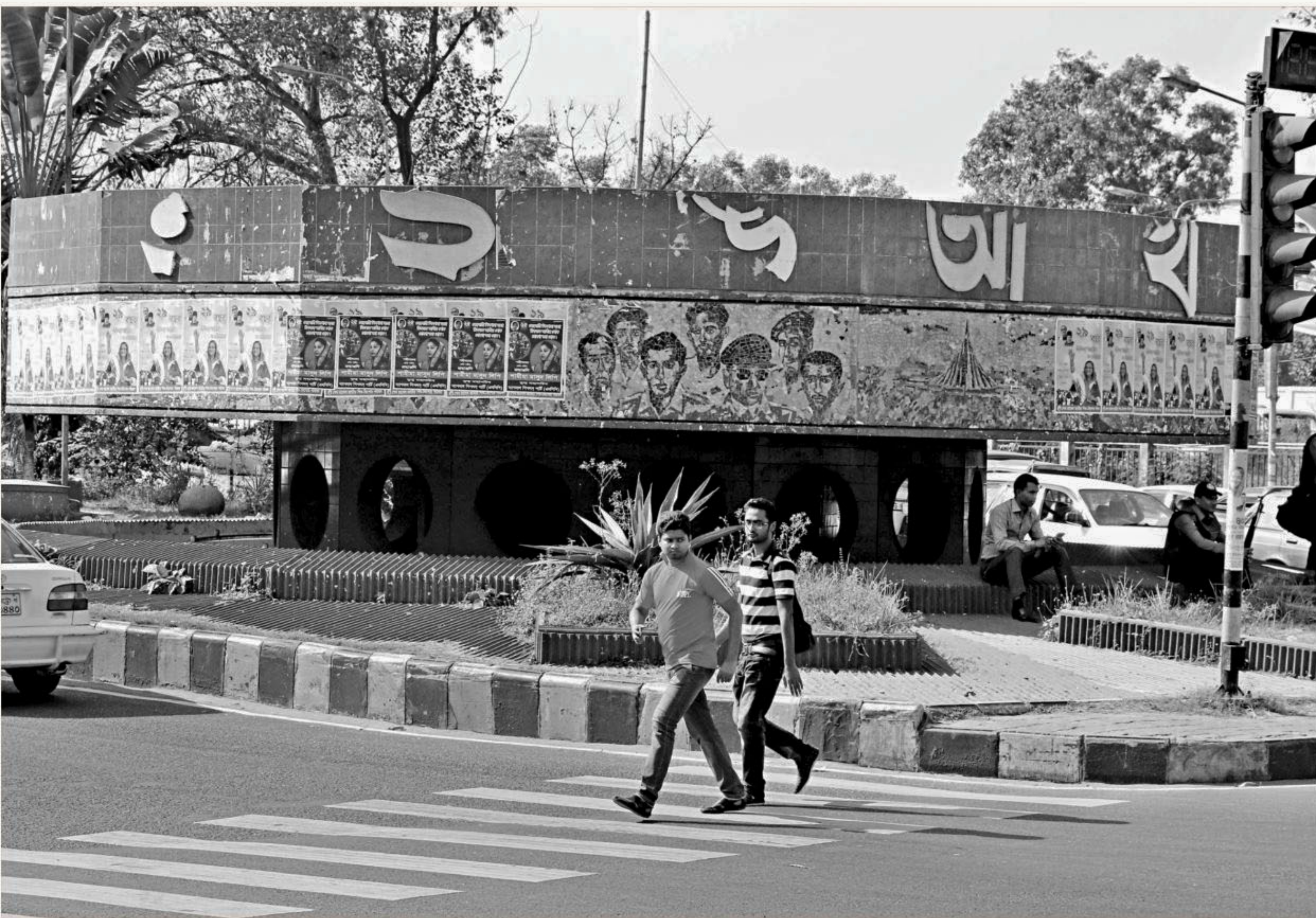




Bangla alphabets are coming off a fountain at the Bijoy Sarani intersection in the capital. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Man arrested over gang rape of Shariatpur girl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Shariatpur

Police in Shariatpur yesterday arrested one man in connection with the gang rape of a student of class-VIII the night before.

A case has been filed with Palong Model Police Station under Women and Children Repression Prevention Act.

The incident occurred at Bogadi village under Chikondi union of Shariatpur Sadar upazila Friday night. Chikondi Outpost police yesterday arrested Shahidul Islam Bepari, 21, in connection with his involvement in the crime.

Three others alleged to have been involved in the crime are on the run. The rape victim has been admitted into Shariatpur Sadar Hospital. She is a student of Chandrapur High School.

The young girl lived with her parents in Bogadi village under Chikondi union. On Friday after dinner she went to sleep in her uncle's house around 9:30pm.

According to the victim's family and local sources, at about 1:00am Shahidul Islam Bepari, son of Monsur Bepari of the area, along with Yasin Khan, Parvez Munshi, and Iqbal Hossain stormed into the house and dragged her out to the yard.

The criminals then gagged her and raped her.

The victim was able to raise alarm when the culprits had fled.

On information, police went to the spot, recovered her and admitted her to the hospital, said officer-in-charge Md Khalilur Rahman of Palong Model Police Station.

RAKHINE BORDER RAIDS 3 senior Myanmar cops jailed

AFP, Yangon

Three senior Myanmar police officers have been jailed for failing to block deadly raids on border posts in October that threw northern Rakhine state into crisis, a police spokesman said yesterday.

The attacks left nine officers dead and unleashed a four-month military crackdown as soldiers swooped in to help police hunt for Rohingya militants blamed for the raids.

More than 70,000 of the Muslim minority have fled the area for neighbouring Bangladesh, bringing with them harrowing accounts of systematic rape, killings and torture at the hands of security officers.

UN investigators who interviewed escapees said the violence was so severe it "very likely" amounted to crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

On Saturday a police spokesman told AFP that three senior officers were handed between two and three years in jail for allowing the raids to happen under their watch.

"Police were informed by villagers in advance before the attack. But police commanders failed to take action and rejected the information, assuming it was impossible," said Police Colonel Myo Thu Soe.

The International Crisis Group think-tank described the October raids as the start of a new Rohingya insurgency in a region rife with tension between the stateless group and Myanmar's Buddhist population.

16 'JCD men' detained in Chittagong

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police last night detained 16 alleged Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists outside Goods Hill, the ancestral house of executed war crimes convict Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, in Chittagong city.

Informed of a "suspicious gathering" inside the Rahmatganj house, police arrived around 8:00pm and detained the 16 from among a group of people "hurriedly exiting the premises", Kotwali Police Station Officer-in-Charge Jashim Uddin told The

Daily Star.

The detainees, aged 18 to 35 years, were being interrogated till filing of this report around 10:00pm.

Salauddin's younger brother and former BNP lawmaker Giasuddin Quader Chowdhury, who was inside, said some JCD activists of Rangunia upazila came to meet him on learning that he had arrived from Dhaka on Thursday.

He identified one of the detainees as Maksudur Rahman Masud, saying he is a former JCD Chittagong north unit joint convener.

Trump's Russia reset on hold

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump came to the White House promising a radical reset of US-Russia relations after years of rising tensions under his predecessor.

But barely one month into office, that plan appears to be on hold, and Trump's White House team has taken on an increasingly Russophobic face.

After he repeatedly pledged to reach "a deal" with Vladimir Putin while hinting at downgraded relations with NATO and the European Union, Trump has yet to set a meeting with the Russian leader.

Meanwhile Vice President Mike Pence and top cabinet security and defense officials have gone to great lengths to reassure European leaders that Washington is not giving up on its allies.

While Trump still holds out the idea of striking up an amicable relationship with Putin, the administration took a distinct turn away from that stance last week with the replacement of pro-

Moscow national security advisor Michael Flynn with Lieutenant General HR McMaster, a hawkish army veteran who sees Russia as the primary threat to US interests and global stability.

And next week the Senate is expected to approve the appointment of Senator Dan Coats as Director of National Intelligence, adding another Putin skeptic to the president's defense and national security team.

"There has been a major shift," said Bruce Jones, vice president and director for foreign policy at the Brookings Institution think tank in Washington.

"My sense is at least we've seen an evolution to an approach that is more sensitive to the threat Russia poses to Europe and the US."

Jake Sullivan, the former national security advisor to vice president Joe Biden, said the White House policy situation is "still unsettled."

However, he said, McMaster's arrival in Flynn's place "could tip the balance."

Trump has long expressed admiration for Putin and other hard-as-nails Russian autocrats.

Living in fear

FROM PAGE 2
Ahmadiyya woman.

According to Ahmadiyyas and locals, a few people converted to Ahmadiyya at the village in 1992.

Trouble flared recently when the Ahmadiyyas wanted to build a mosque on their own land. The fundamentalists obstructed the construction work.

The Ahmadiyyas reported the incident to the local police station and sought help.

A police team, led by Officer-in-

Charge Rafiqul Islam of Mirpur Police Station, visited the village on February 18 and sat in a tripartite meeting.

"We agreed that both the groups would live peacefully there," added the OC.

Mirpur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mahbubur Rahman said the local administration was aware of the issue.

"We ordered the local police and others concerned to take necessary actions to make sure that peace prevails there," the UNO said.

Three killed

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"We thought that the three had also got out. However, firefighters recovered their charred bodies from the staircase after the flames were doused around 8:00pm," he added.

The victims probably tried to rush out but could not, said fire-fighting officials, adding that 12 of their units worked.

The fire affected at least 150 families, said locals.

In another incident, eight people were hurt after apparently a refrigerator compressor exploded in a shop near the Lalbagh intersection in the

capital around 4:45pm, said firefighters and police.

One of the injured was a rickshaw-puller, Abul Bashar, who was passing through the area in his rickshaw. He burnt 80 percent of his body and was being treated at the burn unit of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said DMCH sources.

After the blast, broken pieces of furniture, walls and door laid strewn inside the eatery, named Mithai.

Some of the debris from the explosion flew to the road, halting traffic for a while, said witnesses.

Thengar Char

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to relocate Rohingya refugees, is yet to be considered fit for human habitation.

The report, however, said the char can be readied for habitation within a short time through human efforts.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Noakhali Deputy Commissioner Badre Munir Ferdous said they had sent a report to the Environment and Forest Ministry with some recommendations to make the island liveable.

"It's the decision of the government whether it will relocate Myanmar Rohingya refugees to Thengar Char. But before relocating them, some essential requirements will have to be fulfilled," he said.

Ferdous also said Additional Deputy Commissioner Subrata Kumar Dey and Assistant Forest Conservator Mohammad Ali prepared the report after visiting the char and that he forwarded the report to the ministry with essential photographs.

According to the report, the environment of Thengar Char was similar to other islands and it could be made liveable for human beings if necessary infrastructures were developed, sources said.

The report also stressed the need for strengthening security at the char if Rohingyas were relocated there, as the char is a haven for bandits and robbers.

Thengar Char came to limelight after State Minister of Foreign Affairs M Shahriar Alam recently made an announcement about rehabilitating the Rohingyas to the char. He had said that this was going to be a temporary arrangement as the Rohingyas would be repatriated to Myanmar.

Some 70,000 Rohingyas have sought refuge in Cox's Bazar camps in Bangladesh amid persecution by the Myanmar army since October last year.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, during her meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on February 17, sought support from the international community, including Germany, to temporarily relocate Rohingyas in Bangladesh to Thengar Char for providing them with all sorts of facilities.

After the government unveiled its plan, Human Rights Watch urged Bangladesh to immediately drop its plan to transfer Rohingyas to an "uninhabited, undeveloped" coastal island.

According to a statement of the New York-based rights body, journalists who have visited Thengar Char, which emerged from river silt deposited in the Bay just a decade ago, describe it as empty, featureless and subject to cyclones and flooding.

During monsoon, it said, the island is submerged; anyone living on the island will have to be evacuated, and any infrastructure would be damaged.

Copts flee Sinai after suspected IS attacks

AFP, Ismailiya

Dozens of Coptic Christians have left Egypt's Sinai Peninsula after a string of jihadist attacks killed three Christians in the restive province, church officials said.

On Thursday, suspected Islamic State jihadists killed a member of the minority in the North Sinai city of El-Arish and set his house on fire.

About 250 Christians took refuge in the Evangelical Church in the Suez Canal city of Ismailiya, said church deacon and administrator Nabil Shukrallah.

Khaleda embarks

FROM PAGE 2

against the government's misrule and prepare for the next general election."

The former BNP lawmaker said they apologised for their past activities and the party chief forgave them.

"Brilliant and educated MPs like you should not have made such a mistake. But today I won't tell you anything about that," he quoted Khaleda as saying.

Party insiders said the BNP chairperson in the coming weeks would hold meetings with expelled leaders Ashraf Hossain and Mafidul Hasan Tripty, Major Gen (ret'd) ZA Khan, Shahidul Haq Jamal, former secretary Mofazzal Karim, former lawmakers Najir Hossain, Ziaul Haq Mollah, GM Siraj, SA Sultan Titu, Nurul Islam Moni, Alamgir Kabir, Akhtaruazzaman, Elen Bhutto and Ataur Rahman Angur.

Khaleda would also launch an initiative to take back former BNP leaders, including ex-communications minister Oli Ahmed.

Months after January 11, 2007, popularly known as 1/11 changeover, a good number of BNP leaders sided with then BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan to place a 15-point proposal to reform the party.

The leaders became known as "reformists".

Later, a new BNP central committee was formed, led by late BNP standing committee member M Saifur Rahman and Maj (ret'd) Hafizuddin Ahmed, sans Khaleda.

Some district level leaders of BNP expressed solidarity with the new party leadership. However, most of them became inactive in politics after the 2008 national election when the BNP was in opposition.

Of the "reformist" leaders, Hafizuddin, Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Asadul Habib Dulu, Nasirul Haq Sabu and some others have already become active in BNP politics.

The BNP suffered two major blows in 2004 and 2006. Badruddoza Chowdhury floated "Bikalpadhara Bangladesh" in 2004, about two years after resigning as the country's president.

In late 2006, he along with then senior BNP leader Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmed and several other party leaders formed Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

However, Badruddoza later quit the LDP and reactivated Bikalpadhara Bangladesh.

Why so many murders?

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like him," said Sadakat's aunt Azizunnesa Sarkar.

She added the family wanted quick disposal of the cases in connection with the carnage.

On February 25-26 in 2009, just about two months after a newly elected government took office, 74 people including 57 army officers were killed when a mutiny broke out at the BDR (now BGB) headquarters at Pilkhana in the capital. The mutiny later came to be known as BDR carnage.

More than a hundred family members and colleagues of the victims gathered at the graveyard in the morning and placed wreaths on the graves of their loved ones.

Some of them voiced discontent regarding the trial.

"I believe some of the people behind the murders are still untouched," said Kazi Harunur Rashid, elder brother of slain Col Kazi Emdadul Haq, adding, "We want quick execution of the verdict of the case."

Some other families said they were still in the dark about why the murders took place.

"The planners or participants of the heinous attacks have been brought to book... Those who instigated the crimes or those who gave support from behind have also been brought to justice, wherever we found evidence. We cannot do anything without evidence," Home Minister Asaduzzaman

Khan told journalists while visiting the graveyard.

On November 5, 2013, a special court in Dhaka sentenced 152 people to death and 161 others to life imprisonment for their involvement in murder and carnage during the mutiny.

The case is now pending before the High Court, which may deliver its verdict by June, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told The Daily Star recently.

Chief of Army Staff Gen Abu Bel Muhammad Shafiul Huq, Maj Gen Sarwar Hossain, the president's military secretary, Maj Gen Mia Mohammad Joynul Abedin, the prime minister's military secretary, and top officials of the armed forces paid tributes to the deceased officers at the graveyard.

An elaborate programme was organised by the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), the then Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), marking the eighth anniversary of the carnage.

A daylong programme began with recitation from the holy Quran at all the BGB mosques after Fazr prayers yesterday. Milad and doa mahfils were also organised at Pilkhana, said a press release.

Special prayers and milad mahfil were also held at Bir Uttam Fazlur Rahman Khandker auditorium at Pilkhana in the afternoon.

Kader confesses

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home in Gaibandha's Sundarganj upazila on December 31.

Before Kader's arrest, police arrested three people who allegedly took part in the murder. They are: Kader's driver Abdul Hannan and caretakers of his house Shaheen Mia and Mehedi Hasan.

The arrestees had given confessional statements before a court and Kader was arrested based on their statements, police said.

According to police, Kader had planned to kill Liton in October last year, but failed.

In that plan, Liton's car was supposed to be rear-ended by another vehicle, and when Liton would get out of his car, he was to be shot at.

But Kader could not implement that plan, police said.

Obama for president

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Barack Obama," one of the campaign organizers told CNN.

They've launched a website and they put up 500 posters of Obama around Paris last weekend, said the organizer. He asked to be identified only as Antoine.

They're hoping to get 1 million people to sign a petition urging Obama to run.

Yes, it's a joke, he admits -- but one with a serious purpose.

"We want to show that people are fed up with the politicians here. People are tired about it and they like this joke. It gives people a little fun amid all these scandals," he said.

French voters go to the polls April 23 in the first round of voting for a new president. If no one gets more than 50% of the vote, the top two finishers go to a runoff on May 7.

Polls suggest that Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Front party, will top the field in the first round, but won't get the absolute majority a candidate needs to win outright.

Antoine isn't a fan of the

frontrunner.

"We are so fed up with what Marine Le Pen is doing, and with the fact that we weren't able to find a candidate to vote for, only one to vote against," said Antoine. "We started talking about that and it came up that Obama is free -- so why not hire him?"

Antoine knows there's not much chance Obama will play along with his joke.

But he says people have been getting in touch with serious suggestions -- for example, how to get around the problem that Obama isn't French.

"We've had some funny emails from lawyers telling us how it could be possible. He would have to be naturalised by the president of the French Assembly," Antoine said.

It's not clear whether Obama is aware of the project, but Antoine is hopeful.

"I think if Barack Obama answers this, there will be a huge amount of reaction. I think he might like this kind of thing," said Antoine. "People in France would get crazy, especially young people. But he won't say yes to our proposal."