



Groom Ashkur Rahman Shukur walks on the street to board a car around one and a half kilometres away from his Purba Borohat home in Moulvibazar to join his wedding ceremony in Kagabola yesterday. Ashkur and his relatives had to walk the distance as the district administration imposed Section 144 in the area during a raid on a militant hideout, some 200 yards off the groom's house.

PHOTO: STAR

Finnish PM

FROM PAGE 16

(3,000 miles) from Finland to the Mongolian capital Ulan Bator for an Asia-Europe meeting, and some 1,400 kilometres (900 miles) to meet fellow EU leaders in Bratislava.

The softly-spoken engineer earned millions as an IT entrepreneur before entering politics to become Finland's prime minister in 2015.

He has vowed to "fix Finland" and put the eurozone member's economy back on track -- and he appears to practise what he preaches.

He doesn't own the planes he flies, but rather rents them at his own expense. For the Ulan Bator trip he was at the controls of a Cessna 525 business jet, which seats between six and seven passengers.

His office told AFP it did not know the cost of the flights paid for privately by Sipilä, but the Finnish weekly Suomen Kuvalehti estimated the expense at "hundreds of thousands of euros".

There is a related health issue: before taking office Sipilä suffered from two sudden pulmonary embolisms, in 2013 and 2014.

This led Finnish media to speculate about the safety concerns raised by having the prime minister pilot a plane on official visits, often with his aides onboard.

Sipilä has reportedly fully recovered, and officials say they are not worried.

The prime minister, known for his modesty, doesn't always take to the cockpit himself.

When thorny coalition negotiations dragged on late one night in November 2015, Sipilä missed the last commercial flight to his hometown Oulu in northern Finland.

After a deal was finally forged in the early hours, Sipilä didn't order a private flight to be organised for him.

Instead, he boarded an ambulance flight about to take off and gave the last available passenger seat to his wife Minna-Maaria.

The prime minister himself sat on the small plane's toilet seat for the duration of the one-hour flight.

'Shootouts'

FROM PAGE 16

and one was found dead later. The law enforcers, however, denied the allegation, said ASK in a press statement.

Of the 12 who died in jail custody, seven were under-trial prisoners.

The government, however, claimed there were no extrajudicial killings in the country.

Speaking in parliament on February 28, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said, "Our government does not support or encourage extrajudicial killing anyway."

The report also pointed out that 13 people were killed and 914 injured in 63 incidents of political violence. Besides, 12 were killed in mass beatings.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The rights organisation found that 94 women were killed and eight committed suicide in incidents of domestic violence and torture for dowry.

Ninety-three women were raped and at least five were killed after being violated. Besides, a rape victim committed suicide and 21 incidents of attempted rape were recorded.

Twenty-two women were harassed sexually and 91 others became victims of abuses.

In the last three months, seven Hindu households were attacked and 53 Hindu idols damaged.

Three Bangladeshis were killed in firing and torture by Indian Border Security Forces. As many as 15 others were kidnapped by the BSF, added the report.

At least 22 journalists were tortured, harassed and threatened while carrying out their professional duties.

The report mentioned about the death of journalist Abdul Hakim Shimul, 40, Shahzadpur correspondent of the Daily Samakal, during a clash over an internal feud in the ruling Awami League in Sirajganj's Shahzadpur upazila.

Parents don't think

FROM PAGE 1

physician, told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon.

Earlier in the day, doctors performed an autopsy on the body of the 21-year-old girl at the Rajshahi Medical College (RMC) morgue.

"We examined the body thoroughly and collected samples for some laboratory tests," Prof Mansur Rahman, one of the doctors, told this correspondent.

He declined to comment about the autopsy. "We will analyse the test reports before coming to any conclusion."

Anwar Habib, principal of RMC, had formed a three-member medical board headed by Prof Mansur for performing the post-mortem.

The body was at the mortuary till 11:30pm last night. Raudha's parents could not decide whether to take it to the Maldives or bury it in Rajshahi, said a police official, seeking anonymity.

Raudha, a second-year student of Islami Bank Medical College, was found dead in her room at the women's hostel of the college in Nawdapara area of Rajshahi city. Her body was hanging from the ceiling fan with a scarf tied to the neck.

Following primary investigation, police said it appeared to be a suicide case. They, however, said they would not come to any conclusion until they get the autopsy report.

The law enforcers collected the mobile phone and other belongings of Raudha for investigation.

Talking to The Daily Star, her parents, who flew in from the Maldives, said they saw their daughter's body at the RMC morgue yesterday morning. This correspondent had a brief conversation with them near the Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP) headquarters in the afternoon.

Without giving any reason for the suspicion that Raudha was murdered, her father Mohamed Athif said, "She was not a person who would commit suicide. Suicides are committed by those who suffer from depression... She was a very happy person. She was neither depressed nor frustrated."

Raudha was working hard for her second year final exam and she wanted to become a doctor. Her mother Aminath Muharrimath last talked to her around 11:00pm on Tuesday, hours before she was found dead.

During their conversation, Raudha told her mother that everything was alright, he said.

"There is no reason why she would take her life. She had no issues with anyone," said Muharrimath.

After this correspondent asked Mohamed Athif why his daughter chose to study in the medical college in Rajshahi, he said they would talk to the journalists later.

Several high officials of the RMP were present there. After Raudha's parents left the place, one of them, wishing not to be named, said, "It doesn't look like a murder as claimed by the parents."

The circumstantial evidence at the scene also suggested that it was a case of suicide, he said.

Contacted, Amir Zafar, a deputy commissioner of the RMP, said it was quite normal that Raudha's parents were making such a claim.

"They are her parents. It's normal that they would think something like that. But, we are waiting for the autopsy report."

Muharrimath flew in to Rajshahi on Thursday afternoon along with Maldivian Ambassador Aishath Shann Shakir while Mohamed Athif reached the city early yesterday. Shakir visited the RMC mortuary along with Raudha's parents yesterday morning.

With her aqua blue eyes, Raudha became an internet sensation in her country in 2014.

After experimenting with her pictures on social media sites two years ago, Raudha hit gold with her "Maldivian Girl With Aqua Blue Eyes" shoot. Shot by Maldivian photographer Sotti for a project, the stunning image of her emerging from a gorgeous blue sea went viral, eventually helping her land on the cover of Vogue India in October last year.

Following her death, former president of the Maldives Maumoon Abdul Gayoom tweeted, "Deeply shocked by the sudden death of young Maldivian female student in Bangladesh."

Some of her friends wrote on Facebook that they were praying for her departed soul.

On Thursday, the authorities of Islami Bank Medical College mourned Raudha's death at a meeting. They termed the incident "suicide" committed out of "a wrong decision made from depression".

Many of the students and staff of the college are supporters of Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir, according to police and locals.

There are 500 students, including 45 foreigners, at the college. Of the foreign students, 15 are female students. The foreign students include four Maldivians.

QUESTION RAISED OVER AUTOPSY TEAM

The medical board that conducted the autopsy on Raudha's body included a doctor who works at the private medical college where the girl used to study.

Talking to this correspondent, a physician at the RMC said the inclusion of the doctor in the board might raise questions as the parents of the girl were claiming that she was murdered.

The board led by Prof Mansur Rahman of Barind Medical College includes former teacher of RMC Prof Emdadur Rahman, who is currently working at the Islami Bank Medical College, and Enamul Haque, a lecturer at the RMC.

Contacted, RMC Principal Anwar Habib, who formed the board, said, "Apart from the three doctors, there are no other forensic experts in the city. We chose them only to know the cause of the death of the girl."

"There is no scope for anyone to do anything wrong," he added.

Gujarat passes

FROM PAGE 16

spare the cow, the government will not spare him."

The amendment still needs the approval of the state governor -- a formality all but assured -- before becoming law.

Millions from India's huge minority populations -- including Muslims, Christians and lower-caste Hindus -- eat beef, although it is not widely available.

But Modi's ruling right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party, which recently won India's largest state Uttar Pradesh in a landslide, has long campaigned for the protection of cows.

The BJP's new chief minister in Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, has launched a crackdown on abattoirs since taking office in March that has ground the state's meat industry to a halt.

Hindu activists have long accused the Muslim-dominated meat industry of covering up the slaughter of cows and passing off the meat as buffalo, which are not revered as holy.

Cow slaughter is a hot-button issue in India, where even rumours of cows being transported can spark murderous reprisals and religious riots.

Squads of "cow protection" vigilantes are known to roam highways inspecting livestock trucks for any trace of the animal.

In 2015 a 50-year-old Muslim man accused of eating beef was dragged from his home in 2015 and beaten to death by a mob. Police later said it was mutton.

Maldives opposition face crackdown after failed bid

AFP, Colombo

Opposition parties in the Maldives accused the government yesterday of waging a revenge campaign against their leaders after they narrowly failed to seize control of parliament.

Mohamed Nasheed, the leader of the main opposition party, was slapped with fresh terrorism charges this week just days after he remotely led an effort to wrestle control of parliament.

The bid failed after President Abdulla Yameen ordered troops to remove the dissenting MPs from the floor of parliament, causing chaotic scenes.

Nasheed, the head of the Maldivian Democratic Party, was sentenced to 13 years prison in 2015 and has been living in self-imposed exile in London since last year.

"President (Abdulla) Yameen has instigated new charges of terrorism against Nasheed," the joint opposition statement said.

The charges stemmed from when Yameen was briefly detained in 2010 allegedly under orders from Nasheed, who was president at the time.

The opposition said several others who support Nasheed's bid to oust the speaker had been intimidated by police in the days since.

The Maldivian government warned the international community against being swayed by opposition forces.

"I urge the wider international community to clearly observe the intricacies of the laws of the Maldives before rushing to judgement," the government quoted fisheries minister Mohamed Shaheen as saying.

The United States urged Male to "restore faith in democratic processes" after the unruly scenes of soldiers dragging away opposition MPs was circulating widely on social media.

Death toll

FROM PAGE 16

the capital's Rampura area.

Members of Fire Service and Civil Defence, Bangladesh Coast Guard and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority recovered the bodies found floating in different areas in the river during their search, said Shahinur Islam, Sonargaon upazila nirbahi officer.

The sunken trawler was also salvaged around 5:00pm yesterday, he said.

The Narayanganj district administration gave Tk 20,000 to each of the victims' families.

The trawler capsized in the river with 15 to 16 passengers on Thursday afternoon at Char Kishoreganj. Some of the passengers managed to swim ashore from the river.

Convicted

FROM PAGE 1

Ekram Ali Mia, OC of Naria Police Station, said they received an arrest warrant from the Narayanganj court on March 14.

Yesterday, they with the help of Hizla police picked up Habib after getting information about his whereabouts.

The arrestee would be sent to jail through a court, Ekram added.

According to a police official, the arrestee was the gunman of then company commander of Rab-11 Lt Commander Masud Rana (sacked). Rana was handed down death penalty.

Seven people, including then Narayanganj City Corporation panel mayor Nazrul Islam and senior lawyer Chandan Sarker, were abducted from Dhaka-Narayanganj Link Road on April 27, 2014. Later, their bodies were found floating in the Shitalakkhya river.

On July 8, 2015, the Narayanganj court issued arrest warrants for 13 fugitives, including eight Rab men. The court on February 8 last year framed charges against the 35 accused.

On January 16 this year, the Narayanganj District and Sessions Judge's Court handed down death sentences to 26 accused and jailed nine others for various terms ranging from seven to 17 years. Habib was tried in absentia.

Of the 12 fugitive convicts, three surrendered or were arrested by law enforcers after the pronouncement of the verdict.

Sakhawat Hossain, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, was stunned to know that Habib was in his job even after being convicted.

He said as per the legal procedure, advertisements were published in national dailies asking all the fugitives to appear before the court after it took the charges brought against them into cognisance.

The court later decided to hold the trial of the fugitives in absentia.

"How could the man continue his job? He was supposed to be suspended right away after his indictment," the lawyer said.

A departmental probe must be launched against Habib to find out how he could continue his job, Sakhawat added.

Global impact of Trump climate rollback 'unclear'

Says UN's top climate official

AFP, Paris

The global impact of President Donald Trump's plan to unwind US climate change policies is "unclear" and will only emerge over time, the United Nations' top climate official said yesterday.

In an executive order and a budget proposal, Trump has moved to peel back national policies designed to lower US carbon emissions and meet greenhouse gas reduction pledges under the 196-nation UN Paris climate treaty.

"The precise impact on the secretariat and on global climate action linked with these various announcements remains unclear at this juncture," said Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the UN body that shepherded the Paris deal into existence.

The approval of US federal budgets, which must be voted by Congress, "involves long and complex negotiations," she said in a statement.

"I, like many people and organisations around the globe, are watching these developments with interest."

Trump's plan to ease emissions limits for coal-fired power plants and scrap more stringent vehicle pollution standards almost guarantees that the United States will fail to meet its commitments under the UN pact, according to experts.

The president has also said he does not intend to honour promises made by the administration of his predecessor, Barack Obama, to give billions of dollars in aid to poor, climate-vulnerable nations.

But whether the United States will take the additional step of withdrawing from the Paris pact altogether remains open.

White House press secretary Sean Spicer said Thursday that a decision

would be made ahead of the G7 summit in Italy in late May.

Espinosa did not react directly to Spicer's statement. But she did noted that the United States "is, and remains, a party to the landmark Paris Climate Change Agreement."

The 196 nations parties to the pact and its underlying convention, will convene in Bonn, Germany in mid-May for technical talks on the agreement's implementation.

"We look forward to welcoming and working with [the agreement's] delegations," Espinosa said.

Should the US withdraw from the Paris accord, it would be a four-year process.

US embassy in Kabul fires six over drugs

AFP, Kabul

Six employees of the US embassy in Kabul have been dismissed for using or possessing drugs, an official said, in an embarrassment to Washington which has splurged billions on Afghan counter-narcotics efforts.

The sacking followed an embassy investigation after staff noticed a person wandering around the premises "in a state of confusion and appearing to be intoxicated", the Wall Street Journal reported earlier this week.

"We can confirm that six individuals were involved and that all of them were contract employees," the US State Department told AFP late Thursday.

"No State Department employees were involved in the incident."

It was not immediately clear what kind of drugs the employees were using.

Some militants

FROM PAGE 1

some 250 metres from the scene in the evening.

The operation will resume this morning and may take some time to complete, he said.

Meanwhile, police found no one inside a suspected terror den in Comilla that they cordoned off Wednesday afternoon.

Police claimed the militants fled the house sensing their presence. They also claimed to have found two bombs, four grenades and two suicide vests.

Earlier on Thursday, police ended another operation at Moulvibazar's Nasirpur, some 20km from Borohat. They found body parts of seven to eight people, including those of four children. Police claimed they were "Neo JMB" militants who blew themselves up to avoid arrests.

OPERATION MAXIMUS

The offensive led by the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) began around 8:00am yesterday.

Throughout the day sounds of sporadic gunshots and explosions were heard around the building in Moulvibazar Sadar.

There is no eyewitness account as residents of nearby areas were evacuated over the last two days. Restriction on gatherings and public movement -- Section 144 -- was clamped on Wednesday.

Journalists were not allowed within some 250 metres of the building.

An official of Moulvibazar Police Station said the glass windows of the under-construction building didn't shatter even after heavy gunfire. The bullets did penetrate the "highly protected" and non-transparent glass windows but lost force and direction once inside.

A constable named Kawsar was injured after being hit by a bullet shell. He was seen being taken in an ambulance for treatment.

"As you may have heard, there were some blasts. They [militants] exploded the bombs. Whenever our SWAT members tried to get in, they exploded bombs. It seems they have a huge stash," Monirul said.

He added Kawsar's injury was minor. "Other than him, all members of the law enforcement agencies are safe and sound."

Earlier in the afternoon, the SWAT team unhinged the building's gate by tying ropes to it and pulling it with a vehicle, said a counterterrorism official who took part in the operation.

An armoured vehicle and a team of SWAT men on foot then approached the opening. One officer saw someone inside the building and opened fire. But the SWAT men aren't sure if the bullets hit the target.

Police said the militants exploded most of the bombs inside the building.

The operation was postponed around 7:00pm, but explosions and gunshots were heard even hours later.

Earlier on Wednesday, when police

cordoned off the building, a woman opened a window and threw a grenade at police but the grenade did not explode.

About the "expert bomb maker," one counterterrorism official told The Daily Star that they learnt about him from Sitakunda of Chittagong where police busted two hideouts earlier this month.

Another official said the militants had plenty of time to prepare while the SWAT men were busy with "Operation Hit Back" in Nasirpur.

Monirul had earlier said a small team of the counterterrorism unit with the help of Moulvibazar police started working in the area on Tuesday night, tracing links to the two explosions during the army-led raid at Atia Mahal in Sylhet last Saturday.

Islamic State took credit for the twin bombings that killed seven people -- four civilians, two police officers and a top Rab official. Police have yet to name any suspect for the attack.

OPERATION STRIKE OUT IN COMILLA

The SWAT-led operation codenamed "Operation Strike Out" started at 9:00am and was suspended in the afternoon after it emerged there was no one inside.

Addressing a press briefing in the afternoon, Shafiqul Islam, deputy inspector general of Chittagong range police, said, "We were late to locate the house. When we located it and contacted the owner, he said one of the two boys living there was outside the house. When he [owner] left the house he saw the other one sleeping."

"Based on this information, we locked the room, where he was supposed to be sleeping, from outside."

The militant must have fled before police reached there, said Comilla Police Superintendent Abid Hasan.

Police had been looking for the den since morning and was able to find it around 2:00pm on Wednesday, he added.

"We went to the roof of the three-storey building with the help of fire service. And then came down to the first floor. After a search there, we came to the ground floor.... We didn't find the militant we were looking for," said Shafiqul.

The two police believed were hiding there are Anas alias Anis, 20, of Noakhali and Rony, 23, he added.

AUTOPSIES

Doctors yesterday confirmed that four of the seven who died during an operation at Nasirpur are children.

The rest three were adults, said sources at Moulvibazar General Hospital, where the autopsies were done.

They all may have been killed in suicide explosions.

There were pieces of wires on the bodies of the three grownups, two of whom were women, Partha Sharathi Data, superintendent of the hospital, said yesterday.