

Court again seeks probe report on Gulshan attack

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday again asked the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police to submit by December 28 the probe report of the case filed over the Holey Artisan Bakery attack in Gulshan. Metropolitan Magistrate Nurunnahar Yeasmin passed the order after Humayun Kabir, a CTTC inspector and the case's investigation officer, failed to submit it yesterday. With this, the CTTC got 13 time extensions for filing the report.

Earlier, the CTTC unit arrested five people including four suspected militants and a former private university teacher. Of them, four "militants" gave confessional statements before magistrates.

The arrestees are Hasnat Karim, an ex-teacher of

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Rana Plaza owner denied bail in graft case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday rejected the bail petition of Sohel Rana, owner of Rana Plaza, in a corruption case.

In the case, a lower court in August has sentenced Rana to three years' imprisonment for not submitting his wealth statement to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and fined him Tk 50,000.

Yesterday, his plea was rejected by the HC.

The HC, however, accepted Rana's appeal against the lower court verdict for hearing, stayed the lower court fine order and called for the case record from the trial court.

Rana was arrested after Rana Plaza collapsed on April 24, 2013 that left 1,136 people killed and about 2,515 others injured.

On May 2, 2015, the ACC filed the case.



A few of the logs and branches out of over 2,000 trees that Shafiul sawed down at Rajbarihat Dairy and Cattle Development Farm in Rajshahi's Godagari. The photo was taken on November 1.

 PHOTO:
ANWAR ALI

Shafiul the untouchable

Pillaged state-owned trees worth crores of taka

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

He has plundered over 2,000 trees from a 94-acre state-run farm since May. He won a tender bidding, through dubious means, for removing 731 dead and fallen trees from the farm by July 15. But no one stopped him when he chopped down hundreds of live trees illegally for almost six months.

He himself boasted to have manipulated the bidding of the tender by paying Tk 3.10 lakh to make other bidders pull out of the tender process. But instead of taking any action against him, the Department of Livestock Services (DLS), the owning authority of the farm, recently transferred seven of the farm's whistle-blowing employees.

This all-powerful man is Shafiul Karim alias Emon Mondol -- Krishak League general secretary of Godagari upazila unit in Rajshahi and a close aide of local lawmaker Omar Faruk of Rajshahi-1 (Godagari-Tanore) constituency.

The trees he had been destroying are on the land of Rajbarihat Dairy and Cattle Development Farm in the same upazila.

According to an estimation made by locals and farm staffers, his pillaging has so far caused the state exchequer to incur a

loss of not less than Tk 2 crore.

Speaking with this correspondent over phone before, Shafiul had bragged about how he paid Tk 3.10 lakh to manipulate the tender process. "I made other higher offering bidders understand that they are going to lose money making offers so high."

On November 1, when this correspondent asked Shafiul about allegations over his wrongful acts of plundering live trees owned by the state, he confidently said, "Do your best to write about what you saw."

Coming from an affluent family and its members known as BNP loyalists, Shafiul, an ICMA student with a Masters in management, joined Awami League in 2012 after a dispute arose with local AL leaders over his construction project at the Rajbarihat farm. His family members had contributed a large chunk of land to the farm, said locals.

Allegations from the locals of illegal tree felling at the farm by Shafiul began to appear in June. On July 31, a concerned citizen in a complaint filed with Godagari upazila nirbahi officer alleged that the state had lost Tk 50 lakh as Shafiul had already chopped down over 500 trees illegally since May.

The Daily Star on August 8 ran a report on Shafiul's illegal tree felling with the headline "Dead trees on auction: live trees plundered".

Despite all the allegations, the DLS is yet to carry out a proper investigation into the matter.

Instead of looking into the allegations, the DLS allowed Shafiul to plunder state property for nearly six months. Finally, on October 31, the DLS completed its duty by suspending his dead tree removal work as an inspection team of the department found Shafiul's men still chopping down live trees at the farm.

Aynul Haque, director general of DLS, confirmed the suspension order based on the findings by its inspection team.

However, in a perplexing move, the DLS early this month has transferred seven of the farm employees, especially the ones who had been complaining to higher officials of the department about Shafiul's illegal tree felling with the connivance of the farm manager, Tofizul Islam.

The employees, including the ones who were transferred, of the Rajbarihat Dairy and Cattle Development Farm told The Daily Star that the farm does not have any precedent for employee transfers since its inception in 1982 and the ones transferred -- to

Sylhet, Savar, Faridpur and Bagerhat -- had joined the farm between 1984 and 1997.

Farm manager Tofizul, however, claimed that the DLS authorities have been transferring its employees who had been working at the same farm, in different parts of the country, for a long period of time.

The only inquiry that has supposedly been conducted on Shafiul's illegal tree felling at the Rajbarihat farm was by Upazila Forest Officer Shariful Islam. Acting on a complaint, Godagari Upazila Nirbahi Officer Zahid Newaj on August 3 had asked him to conduct the inquiry.

For mysterious reasons, that inquiry report has not seen the light of day although the forest officer said he had completed the inquiry in September.

When asked why he did not turn the report in, Shariful said that from the investigation order he could not get a clear understanding whether he was supposed to file any report or not.

About his findings during the inquiry, he said he collected documented proof of tender manipulation by Shafiul. According to his papers, the farm authorities awarded the dead tree removal work to Shafiul for only Tk 8.52 lakh, although two

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EC not ready for EVM use

Says CEC Nurul Huda; no decision on army deployment yet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda yesterday said the commission was not ready to use electronic voting machines (EVMs) in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

"The commission has no preparation to use EVMs in the national election. It will be used in different local government elections on an experimental basis," he told reporters at Nirbachan Bhaban in Dhaka.

Regarding army deployment during the polls, Huda said they were yet to take a decision in this regard.

"This is the reality that the army was there in other national polls... There is still enough time. Why do you want this decision so soon?"

About Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukdar's remarks that the EC felt the necessity of army deployment, Huda said it was his personal opinion, not the commission's decision.

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Lakehead school reopen order stayed by SC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday stayed until Sunday a High Court verdict that directed the authorities concerned to reopen Lakehead Grammar School in Dhaka within 24 hours.

Dhanmondi and Gulshan branches of the school were shut down by the government on charges of patronising extremism and militancy.

Justice Syed Mahmud Hussain, chamber judge of the Supreme Court Appellate Division passed the stay order yesterday following two separate petitions filed by the government seeking stay on the High Court verdict.

The chamber judge of the apex court also sent the petitions to its full bench for hearing on Sunday.

On Wednesday, following two separate writ petitions, the HC ordered the authorities to reopen Lakehead Grammar

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With chills in the air, the capital witnesses a foggy and drizzly weather yesterday. The aerial view of the Motijheel area was taken around 2:00pm.

 PHOTO:
PALASH KHAN

What's on at Dhaka Lit Fest?

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The three-day Dhaka Literary Festival (DLF), previously known as Hay Festival Dhaka, opens today at Bangla Academy, bringing together famous novelists, writers, journalists and noted personalities from all over the world.

The festival is back again after a year with its seventh edition where Syrian poet Ali Ahmad Said Esber, also known as Adonis, Padma Shri winning poet Nabaneeta Dev Sen and British actress Tilda Swinton will be present.

Besides, luminaries of the country including educationist Syed Manzoorul Islam, writer Imdadul Haq Milon, poet Helal Hafiz and academic Salimullah Khan will join different sessions.

Poet Adonis will cut the ribbon to inaugurate the festival where Cultural Affairs

Minister Asaduzzaman Noor is scheduled to be present.

"The Paris-based Syrian poet, who is 87 now, was delighted to accept our invitation, after he received a warm and heartfelt recommendation about us from his friend Sir VS Naipaul, who opened our festival last year," said Ahsan Akbar, an organiser of the festival.

The festival will host over 200 talents this year from 24 different countries, and they will take part in over 90 sessions, all of which will be free with a pre-requisite registration via online and open to all from 9:00am to 7:45pm.

To highlight the life activities of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the youth, a session named "Mujib: Taking history to the next generation" will take place today at 1:45pm to 2:45pm.

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Khulna-Kolkata train service resumes today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Bandhan Express -- the much-awaited non-stop passenger train service between Khulna and Kolkata commences today.

The train service between the two cities originally started in 1888 and was stopped 52 years ago, during the 1965 India-Pakistan war, according to Bangladesh Railway sources.

On November 9, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi flagged off the Bandhan Express via a videoconference.

Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Harsh Vardhan Shringla is scheduled to board the very first train to Kolkata from Khulna rail station today.

The train will take a maximum of five hours to reach Kolkata after travelling 200 kilometres from Khulna, Station Master Manik Chandra Sarker told The Daily Star.

Ticket price for AC cabin has been set at Tk 2,000,

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AC mechanic arrested over student murder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday arrested a youth in connection with killing of university student Nasim Ahamad in the capital's Badda on November 6.

The arrestee is Asif Shikder, 21, an air conditioning technician, in Comilla, Ashrafur Karim, assistant commissioner (Badda) of Gulshan Division Police, told The Daily Star.

Nasim, 23, a BBA student of Manarat International University, was stabbed near his residence for trying to stop betting on the Bangladesh Premier League, alleged his family.

However, Deputy Commissioner of Gulshan Division police Mostaq Ahmed at a briefing yesterday said Asif made the plan as Nasim drunkenly beat him a day before the murder.

Dhaka Lit Fest

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