

# Popularity cost Swapna her life

## Alleges family of the slain Nabinagar AL leader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Swapna Akhter, woman affairs secretary of Nabinagar Awami League, was killed by her political rivals because of her popularity, her family has claimed.

Amir Hossain, her younger brother, said the 38-year-old woman had "issues" with a number of "locals over AL politics".

A group of unidentified assailants shot Swapna in the left eye near Bangara Government Primary School around 9:30pm on Wednesday. Doctors of Nabinagar Upazila Health Complex declared her dead after she was rushed there.

Amir filed a murder case against unidentified people with Nabinagar Police Station in Brahmanbaria later that night.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Swapna's husband Gias Uddin said some Chhatra League and Jubo League men were involved in her wife's murder.

He said Swapna had been having some conflicts with local "political activists" since the last union parishad elections on March 31, last year.

"She was very popular among locals because of her voluntary works. It seems she was killed as they thought her popularity could turn costly for them."

Mizanur Rahman, superintendent of police in Brahmanbaria, said they were investigating the case taking into consideration various "clues" that included local politics and feud over a committee of a local market.

Police yesterday detained a CNG-run auto rickshaw driver for interrogation. Nabinagar Police Station OC Aslam Sikdar, however, said they didn't get any important information from him.

Swapna was buried at her village graveyard in Charpara yesterday.

Her autopsy was conducted at Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital. A bullet was found in her left eye. There was no other injury mark in the body, said hospital sources.

Nabinagar AL announced a three-day mourning programme from yesterday over Swapna's death.

## Talking about

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returns of Rohingya to Myanmar while a system of apartheid remains in the country, and thousands are held there in conditions that amount to concentration camps. Returns in the current climate are simply unthinkable," he said.

"Myanmar and Bangladesh have clear obligations under international law not to return individuals to a situation in which they are at risk of persecution or other serious human rights violations," Charmain Mohamed added.

On Tuesday, an Amnesty study accused Myanmar of running a years-long "state-sponsored" campaign which restricted virtually all aspects of Rohingya life, confining the Muslim minority to a "ghetto-like" existence in the mainly Buddhist country.

The 100-page report, based on two years of research, says the web of controls meet the legal standard of the "crime against humanity of apartheid".

"Rakhine State is a crime scene. This was the case long before the vicious campaign of military violence of the last three months," said Anna Neistat, Amnesty's senior director for research.

## 5 years on

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jailed in February 2014 on charges of causing deaths by negligence. He was released on bail six months later.

Nasima Akter, 27, a mother of two, said she was a sewing machine operator on the third floor of the factory. She also jumped off the second floor of the building and got injured.

"I still am not fit to work. We have gone broke by going to different hospitals and clinics in the past few years."

She added that she had been able to get some assistance from the "Injured Workers Medical Care Trust" formed last year.

Coordinator of the trust, Krishna Sen, said about 20 survivors were still struggling with severe injuries and needed specialised treatments.

He added that at least 172 workers were seriously injured in the fire.

Khairul Mamun Mintu, organising secretary of Garment Worker Trade Union Centre, said more than two thousand workers were in the factory when the fire broke out. The actual number of injured workers is well over 172.

Anju Ara, 50, another survivor, who has back pain and headaches, said she has to spend over Tk 1,000 on medication every month.

"Many of the injured workers did not get any medical support from the trust as they did not have their Tazreen ID cards. Their ID cards were taken away by the Tazreen administration when they were given arrears soon after the fire."

# 'ETHNIC CLEANSING' IN MYANMAR

## Russia terms US remarks unhelpful

REUTERS, Yangon

The US labelling of a Myanmar army crackdown on Rohingya Muslims as "ethnic cleansing" is unhelpful and could aggravate the situation, Russia's ambassador to the southeast Asian nation said yesterday, criticising "excessive external intervention".

Rights groups have accused the military in mostly Buddhist Myanmar of carrying out mass rape and other atrocities during a ferocious military sweep launched in late August in retaliation for attacks by Rohingya Muslim militants in Rakhine State.

That drove 620,000 Rohingya refugees, many traumatised with gunshot wounds and burns, to flee to Bangladesh, joining hundreds of thousands who have sheltered there for years after previous spasms of violence in the former Burma.

The military operation amounted to "ethnic cleansing", the United States said on Wednesday, echoing an accusation first made by top UN officials in the early days of the humanitarian crisis.

"I don't think that it will help to solve this problem," Russian ambassador Nikolay Listopadov told Reuters in an interview in Yangon, when asked about the US move.

"On the contrary, it can aggravate the situation, throw more fuel," he said in English, citing concern over how the Buddhist community in Rakhine would react to such a designation.

This month, Russia and China agreed to a UN Security Council statement urging Myanmar to "ensure no further excessive use of mili-

tary force" and expressing "grave concern over reports of human rights violations", but they have opposed tougher steps and further pressure on Myanmar.

"We are against excessive external intervention, because it won't lead to any constructive results," Listopadov said. "Just pressure and blaming and accusing - it simply won't work."

On a visit to Myanmar last week, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson urged the government of Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi to lead a credible and impartial inquiry, saying those who committed abuses should be held responsible.

But prospects for such an inquiry remain dim and Suu Kyi's government refused to cooperate with a mission launched by the United Nations Human Rights Council in March after a less intense bout of violence in Rakhine.

The so-called independent investigation" demanded by Tillerson was "absolutely" out of the question for Myanmar, Listopadov said.

"It's absolutely not acceptable for the Myanmar side - it will never accept it... it won't work - it's counterproductive," said Listopadov. "Independent investigation means international (investigation) - no, it's not acceptable."

Moscow's approach was for the Rakhine issue to be solved by "political means, political dialogue," he added, without elaborating.

He welcomed talks being held in Myanmar's capital of Naypyitaw between Myanmar and Bangladesh on the repatriation of Rohingya refugees, stressing it was "important to start this process."

## Written test

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universities and creating a teachers' database, to President and also Chancellor of universities, Abdul Hamid, said UGC officials.

Many universities used to follow the written test system to admit freshers in the late 80s.

According to the education ministry, there are 40 public universities in Bangladesh. Of them, 37 are fully operational, with a capacity of allocating seats for around 60,000 freshers.

The proposal for written tests comes amid widespread allegations of leak of question papers of the entrance tests of public universities in recent times. Some arrests have also been made in this connection.

The allegation of leak surfaced before the first-year honours admission test under "Gha" unit of Dhaka University on October 20.

A number of candidates had alleged that the questions of the English part were leaked eight hours before the test began and some admission seekers received e-mails containing the questions. Two Chhatra League leaders and an admission seeker at DU were arrested over the leaks.

### RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

UGC made a set of new recommendations in its annual report which will be submitted soon.

In the report, the UGC has suggested establishing a research university in the country immediately, with a view to producing world class faculties. This university will only offer PhD degrees and the researchers will focus on important socio-economic issues that are significant in national life.

The country's universities are not able to produce adequate human resources with higher degrees against the demand for them. The university, if set up, will also help solve the problem of lack of teachers with PhD degrees at public and private universities, said officials of the commission.

Like in previous years, the commission strongly recommended initiating uniform admission tests or cluster admission tests at public universities to ease the hassle of admission seekers and reduce the financial burden on the candidates.

The education ministry in 2010 decided in principle to introduce the

### UN envoy

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request from Patten to visit northern Rakhine state where many Rohingya live.

Buddhist-majority Myanmar doesn't recognise the Rohingya as an ethnic group, insisting they are Bengali migrants from Bangladesh living illegally in the country. It has denied them citizenship, leaving them stateless.

Patten said that during her visit to camps for the displaced, she heard "the most heart-breaking, most shocking, and horrific accounts of abuses committed cold bloodedly with unparalleled hatred against the Rohingya community."

Patten, a former member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, said sexual violence including gang rape by soldiers, forced public nudity and sexual slavery and it was clearly being used "as a tool of dehumanisation."

"We have primarily decided to take these initiatives in Rangpur City Corporation polls for better management and monitoring of the election," Shahadat said.

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