

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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jail 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, Krishno 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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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 Rohingyas lived.

Buddhist-majority Myanmar doesn't recognize 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 heartbreaking, 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 dehuman-

ism under which the students would take one test for a place in any of the science and technology universities and another test for a place in any of the engineering universities.

It means admission seekers will be enrolled at those universities based on the merit list prepared from one single test, relieving them of the hassle of taking separate exams for different institutions.

"We have been advocating for this system. The president also talked about the issue several times and the education ministry twice took initiatives to this end. But nothing happened," said UGC Chairman Mannan.

The commission recommended that all the universities in the country introduce two mandatory courses on Bangla Language and Culture and History of Birth of Independent Bangladesh, said the officials.

It also suggested that the senior teachers of different universities take classes on contractual or part-time basis at the newly established universities, which lack such senior teachers.

It further proposed making a database of retired teachers who will take classes at the universities that have a shortage of teachers. A policy will have to be formulated in this regard, said the officials of UGC.

The commission laid emphasis on engaging students in extra-curricular activities so that they cannot get side-tracked and get involved in militancy or criminal activities.

It suggested transmitting lectures of noted teachers and educationists through the use of different multimedia in the universities.

EVM, CCTV

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As many as 13 candidates have submitted their nomination papers to vie for the mayoral post in Rangpur city polls scheduled for December 21. Around 3.88 lakh voters are expected to cast their votes in the polls.

During the talks between the EC and the political parties, a number of political parties, including the BNP, opposed the use of EVM in the polls.

Some of them also demanded installation of CCTV cameras in the polling stations.

City corporation polls in Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet and Gazipur are likely to be held before the national elections scheduled for early 2019.

In yesterday's meeting, the commission decided in principle to install CCTV cameras in three polling stations so that voting could be monitored locally as well as centrally, and use EVMs in one polling centre.

The election officials and voters of the area would be given necessary training to that end.

The commission is also planning to set up a central control room to monitor all TV news channels. The control room would have videoconference arrangements so that election commissioners and the returning officer could communicate. There will also be a complaint management system.

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

The commissioner added that the decisions would be placed before the commission for final approval.

Start Rohingya

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The PM also urged all, including the Armed Forces members, to work with utmost sincerity to ensure Bangladesh's welfare and development to take it to a dignified position at the global stage.

She also hoped that Bangladesh Army would play an important role in public welfare activities alongside promoting democracy and constitutional rule in the country.

Hasina said Bangladesh Army has emerged as a disciplined and modern force in the world. Modernisation and training for enhancing the army's professional excellence would continue in future, she added.

She said two new Military Police (MP) units were set up. The units were being equipped with modern technologies and transport, she told the programme.

The PM said it is a matter of great pride that Bangladesh is now a brand name in the UN peacekeeping missions. "Members of the Bangladesh Armed Forces are bringing honour and dignity for the nation through their immense sacrifice, dutifulness and professionalism during discharging their duties in the peacekeeping missions."

The premier inspected the parade and took salute.

Later, Hasina inaugurated the newly-constructed CMP Centre and School Complex at the cantonment.

Addressing a luncheon in honour of her on the premises of CMP Centre and School, the PM asked the institution to uphold the dignity of the national flag.

She said her government has a plan to recruit female army personnel into the Corps of Military Police.

On her arrival at the venue, she was received by Army Chief General Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiful Huq, GOC of Army Training and Doctrine Command Lt Gen Aziz Ahmed, and CMP Centre and School Commandant Brig Gen Md Mahfuzur Rahman.

Ministers, lawmakers, PM's Security Adviser Maj Gen (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, the navy chief, and top civil and military officials were present.

ACC to quiz

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implicate Bacchu, believed to be at the centre of the scam, in any of the cases.

The commission in the summons notices asked the 11 to appear before it on December 4.

Asked why the graft watchdog sent the notices so late, ACC Public Relations Officer Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya yesterday told The Daily Star that it took time to investigate most of the cases as many departments and officials of the bank were involved in the loan disbursement process.

According to a Bangladesh Bank enquiry, about Tk 4,500 crore was siphoned out of BASIC Bank when Bacchu chaired the board of the bank.

On July 14, 2014, the central bank sent a report on the scam to the ACC, detailing how people embezzled money from the bank through shell companies and dubious accounts.

The BB found that Bacchu illegally influenced all the activities of the state-owned lender, leaving the once-sound bank in a grave state.

The report, which contained the findings of the observer deployed at the BASIC Bank, outlined how the former chairman abused his power to play an active role in the loan scam.

The BB first inspected the bank's Gulshan, Shantinagar and Dilkusha branches in 2012 and found evidence of serious anomalies in approving loans.

One of the best-run banks until 2009, BASIC Bank was mired in financial irregularities following Bacchu's appointment as its chairman that year.

The lender incurred a loss of around Tk 43.2 crore in 2013, the first such incident in its 25 years of operation then.

On August 18 this year, a three-member Supreme Court bench while holding hearing in two loan scam cases expressed discontent at the ACC for not naming Bacchu and the bank's ex-board members.

"We don't want the Anti-Corruption Commission to maintain any 'pick and choose' policy in implicating accused in such cases, as nobody is above the law. All the allegations must be investigated with importance," said the court.

Speaking at a programme in the capital on August 26, Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the finance ministry, accused the ACC of "miserably failing" to bring to book the perpetrators of the scam.

The ACC failed to take action even though the House committee sent "specific evidence" to it in this regard, he said.

Razzaque termed the loan scam "pure robbery in broad daylight".

Finance Minister AMA Muhiith at an ACC programme in March said Bacchu was involved in the loan scam.

The BB's investigation report has already been submitted to the ACC, he said, adding, "Now let's see what the next course of action would be."

It takes place

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every incident of forced disappearance. Why is it happening and where is it taking place? Are these happening in Bangladesh only?" she said.

Referring to stats of 2009, she said some 2.75 lakh Britons were subjected to forced disappearances while some 20,000 were still missing.

"When it comes to America, the situation is dreadful," she said.

Hasina said her government is trying to serve the 16 crore people and is working on improving their socio-economic condition.

"How many people live in those countries? Those countries also have modern technologies. Yet, many people disappear. Why?" she said.

The PM said her government was trying to keep the situation under control. "Whenever such an incident takes place, we look into the matter to trace them."

Without mentioning the name of Farhad Mazhar, who went missing a few months ago, Hasina said the intellectual went into "self-disappearance" and later he was found loitering at the New Market in Khulna.

Experts not optimistic

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own agenda, despite efforts from Bangladesh.

"Bangladesh may have fallen into the trap of Myanmar's tactic by signing the deal," said Prof CRAbrar, who teaches international relations at Dhaka University.

Myanmar's early signing of the deal is meant to defuse the international pressure mounted on it stemming from atrocities committed by Myanmar's security forces which forced over 620,000 Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh since August 25.

UN and US have both termed the actions "ethnic cleansing", while rights bodies defined them "crimes against humanity" and "genocide."

UN also adopted a resolution urging Myanmar to grant citizenship to the Rohingyas, accept their return and stop atrocities in Rakhine. Rohingyas have been denied citizenship and other basic services though they have been living in Myanmar for generations.

"It is very likely that Myanmar would arbitrarily decide on determining who is to be repatriated and who is not if UN is not involved," said Abrar, also executive director at the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU).

Myanmar will take back a token number of refugees as happened before, he said.

Around 2.5 lakh Rohingya fled persecution in Myanmar in 1978. Almost all of them were sent back through mutual understanding but in another wave in 1991-92, some 2.5 lakh Rohingyas re-entered Bangladesh.

Between 1992 and 2005, a total of 2.36 lakh Rohingyas were repatriated under an open-ended 1992 Myanmar-Bangladesh bilateral agreement. Since 2005, not a single Rohingya has been repatriated despite numerous efforts by Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, 3 lakh additional Rohingyas entered Bangladesh at different times, especially in 2012 and 2016. With the new arrivals, nearly

"Are we responsible for such incidents? Such things happen often," she said.

She said people would not vote for those who had been involved in arson attacks and burning people to death.

"I have full confidence in the people that they will not cast votes to pave the way for recurring incidents of violence and burning people to death," she said.

"As long as my party is in power, we shall continue to work for the betterment of the people," she said.

Pointing to coal-based power plant at Rampal near the Sundarbans, the PM said it would not damage the environment as would be based on modern technology.

She said less modern coal-based power plant in Dinajpur did not harm the environment, and crops and vegetables were being grown there.

"There are some people who always speak against any good initiative due to their business interest ...," she said.

9 lakh Rohingyas are now living in Bangladesh, putting the country under tremendous pressure.

CR Abrar said if Myanmar had been sincere in taking back the Rohingyas, they should have prepared detailed terms of reference by this time.

Humayun Kabir, former ambassador to the United States, said, "When the deal is open-ended, we become concerned over the fate of repatriation, because our experience in the past is not a happy one."

Moreover, the evidence present in Rakhine on persecution of the Rohingyas is even more concerning as Myanmar authorities have not been able to restore the law and order in the Rakhine State, he said.

Humayun Kabir said no mention of UN involvement in the repatriation process is totally unexpected.

He said the most important thing for repatriation of the Rohingyas is creating a favourable environment in Rakhine, but such effort is yet to be seen.

On verification of the Rohingyas, he said it is clear how they have fled to Bangladesh, and the Myanmar authorities have already acknowledged it. Bangladesh government also biometrically registered them all, and that should be one of the basis of repatriation, Humayun Kabir said.

Dr Imtiaz Ahmed, professor of international relations at Dhaka University, said the major issue in repatriation is whether the Rohingyas are issued citizenship. If that guarantee is not there, repatriation would be a difficult job, he added.

"I don't know the details of the arrangement signed, but Bangladesh must have addressed the citizenship issue," Imtiaz said.

He thinks the bilateral deal between Bangladesh and Myanmar does not mean that international pressure has stopped. After the UN, the US has also termed the violence in Rakhine as ethnic cleansing.

Therefore, Prof Imtiaz said, the issue has to be dealt with legally on an international level.

Earth is lit, and that's

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the stars. What's more, they say, all that wasted light sent out into space is effectively wasted money.

The findings are in a new study in the journal Science Advances that used five years of data from a satellite launched in 2011. This satellite has an instrument that gives scientists a more reliable way to measure nighttime light than they've had in the past.

"The areas that are getting brighter rapidly are developing countries," says Christopher Kyba, a researcher at the German Research Centre for Geosciences in Potsdam. "So a lot of places in South America, Africa and Asia are brightening really, really rapidly, up to 10 percent or more per year, even, in some cases."

Only a few countries — like war-ravaged Yemen and Syria — showed a decrease. Some of the very brightest places on Earth, such as the United States, Spain, and Italy, appeared to remain relatively stable.

With new solid-state lighting technology becoming available, some areas have started making a switch to LEDs. And because this satellite is not able to see all of the light emitted by LEDs, Kyba says the brightening that's actually happening is probably greater than what's been measured.

"For the United States, for example, we don't see much of a change.