

'Drug dealer' killed in Rab 'shootout'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

An alleged drug dealer was killed in a "gunfight" with Rab at Satgiri Jamal village in Sundaganj upazila early yesterday.

The dead was identified as Abdus Salam, 48, alias Thasha Salam, a resident of the village.

Assistant Commander of Gaibandha's Rab-13, Habibur Rahman Habib said that after receiving a tip off, one of their teams was on their way to raid Abdus Salam's house at around 3:00am. When they were close by, criminals sensed their presence and around five to six of them opened fire on the law enforcers.

As Rab officials retaliated, the criminals fled but Abdus Salam, the "ring leader" of the group, was found with bullet wounds. He was taken to Sundarganj Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead.

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Dhaka Union of Journalists forms a human chain near the Jatiya Press Club yesterday, demanding the arrest of those who attacked media persons during the student protest for road safety recently.

Int'l community must persuade Myanmar govt

PM says on Rohingya repatriation as visiting Japanese FM meets her

BSS, Dhaka

Gono Bhaban in the afternoon.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday renewed her call to the international community, including Japan, to persuade Myanmar to take back their Rohingya nationals from Bangladesh.

"The Rohingyas must return and for this, the global community will have to persuade Myanmar to take them back from Bangladesh," she made the call when Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono paid a courtesy call on her at the

Earlier in the day, Taro arrived in Dhaka on a brief visit to further promote the Bangladesh-Japan comprehensive partnership and discuss other issues of mutual interests, including Rohingya crisis.

After the meeting, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed reporters.

A huge number of Rohingyas has fled to Bangladesh since August last year and they have outnumbered the

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JULY 29 ROAD CRASH DB to submit probe report by this month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives are likely to submit the probe report to court within this month as they are about to complete investigation into the road accident that claimed the lives of two college students near Airport Road flyover in Kurmitola on July 29.

Mashiur Rahman, deputy commissioner (north division) of DB of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said they had already received the BRTA report that said competition between two buses and reckless driving caused the accident.

"We are hopeful of submitting the investigation report based on BRTA and our findings within this month," he said.

Two buses of Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan - Dhaka Metro Ba-11-7657 and Dhaka Metro Ba-11-9297 -- were racing for passengers and the latter ploughed into students waiting for buses to return homes.

Law enforcers have so far arrested three drivers and two helpers of three busses and the owner of Dhaka Metro Ba-11-9297, which hit the students. They are in remand and are being interrogated by detectives.

Masum Billah, driver of the bus that ploughed into the students, blamed problem in the brake for the accident during interrogation. The BRTA investigation, however, found

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Arrest culprits in 72 hours

FROM PAGE 1 formed in front of the capital's Jatiya Press Club at around 11:00am.

Several hundred reporters, photographers, sub-editors, online journalists and freelancers joined the human chain to protest against the attacks on media persons covering the movement.

Later in the day, Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu wrote to Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to immediately bring the attackers under the purview of the law.

"You are well aware that some journalists sustained injuries during the students' movement for safe roads. Such attacks on journalists while performing professional duty are very unfortunate. This government is committed to giving safety to on-duty journalists," he said in a letter.

Inu requested Kamal to seriously consider the issue of on-duty journalists' being injured and sought his personal interference to bring the attackers to justice.

Speaking at the human chain, President of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) Molla Jalal demanded that punishment be given to the attackers.

"I urge the information and home ministers to sit with the journalists and try to identify those who unleashed the attack and ensure their punishment," said BFUJ Secretary General Shaban Mahmud.

President of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) Abu Jafor Shurjo said, "I would like to ask the law enforcers that if you cannot ensure the security of journalists when they are discharging their duties then what is your duty? Journalists are also citizens of the

country."

Criticising Inu for not visiting the injured journalists, he asked, "You are the information minister but you did not enquire about the injured journalists, then what is your duty?"

General Secretary of Jatiya Press Club Farida Yesmin urged law enforcement agencies and the administration to sincerely try and find the reasons behind the attacks and bring the culprits to book.

"It will not be difficult for the police and administration to identify the culprits since they openly targeted and attacked the journalists," President of Dhaka Reporters Unity Saiful Islam said during the human chain.

Vice-President of BFUJ Syed Istiak Reza asked the government to bear the treatment costs of the injured journalists. He also urged the journalists to investigate and find the attackers and publish their names and identities if the state failed to do so.

"The time has come to resist those who attack journalists," said General Secretary of DUJ Sohel Haider Chowdhury.

They later brought out a procession at Topkhana Road.

Prior to this, photojournalists from all news agencies held a separate human chain, organised by Bangladesh Photojournalist Association, at the same place, demanding the arrest and punishment of the attackers.

A group of journalists also formed another human chain at Saarc Fountain yesterday morning and observed work abstention, demanding the arrest of the culprits. They said that journalists were not opponents to anybody, but are still coming under attack.

NHRC

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Chairman Kazi Reazul Hoque yesterday condemned the brutal attacks on journalists and recommended that the home ministry direct the concerned bodies to stop such attacks.

He urged the government to immediately identify the attackers and ensure appropriate punishment, according to a press release.

"Journalists are rights activists. Attack on them is unexpected. Nobody is above the law. NHRC is recommending the authorities concerned to ensure punishment for the attackers," Reazul said in the release.

ARTICLE 19

ARTICLE 19, a British human rights organisation with a specific mandate and focus on the defense and promotion of freedom of expression and freedom of information worldwide, expressed deep concerns about the repeated legislative and violent attacks on media workers and journalists in Bangladesh.

In a statement yesterday, it called for the protection of media workers, journalists, and also citizens peacefully participating in protests.

"Ensure safety, security and the protection of journalists, media workers, human rights defenders and citizens participating peacefully in protests," it urged the government. They also demanded the immediate release of the individuals detained for participating in protests and practicing journalism.

"Ensure that those responsible for attacks and violations on journalists and media workers, regardless of their political affiliations, be brought to account immediately and without delay," the statement said.

4 sued under section 57

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Chittagong University, and Abdullah Al Shahed, 20. They were detained in front of Chittagong Press Club in the morning.

"The four were sued under section 57 of the ICT Act as they were instigating students through social media for movement to destroy the image of the government," said Officer-in-Charge Mohammed Mohsin of Kotwali police.

"Apart from that, five other youths were sent to the court after showing them detained under section 80 of the Metropolitan Act," the OC added.

Earlier, the police foiled a protest rally in front of Chittagong Press Club that was organised by a group of youths through social media demanding safe roads and protesting attacks on students. The nine youths including the two Chhatra Federation leaders were detained on the spot.

Owners excused

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vehicles? Owners are responsible for it," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The law can't be for one party. Drivers are poor people and for this reason, they will be brought to book. This is not fair," said Ilias, who has been campaigning for road safety for 25 years since he lost his wife in a car crash in 1993.

Sadeq Ahmed Khan, acting general secretary of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation, said both drivers and owners were responsible for road safety. "So they [owners] must not be allowed to go unpunished."

If an owner gives an unfit vehicle to a driver and the vehicle hits someone, it is not logical that only the driver is responsible for that, he noted.

Road safety campaigners have long demanded punishment of owners who recruit underage drivers and operate unfit vehicles, two key reasons for road crashes.

Sadeq said they would scrutinise the draft and place their objections before the authorities.

The cabinet approved the previous draft in principle in March last year. It remained stuck at the law ministry for vetting all these months amid opposition from transport owners and workers to some of its provisions.

In the wake of student protests demanding road safety, the government last week decided to place the draft before the cabinet.

STARK DIFFERENCE

According to section 53 (2) of the first draft, the transport owner or company or operator or driver or helper shall be responsible if any causality occurs in road accidents due to over speeding, reckless driving, dangerous overtaking, overloading or any other cases of uncontrolled driving. Punishment for the offence was three years in jail or Tk 25 lakh in fine or both.

But section 103 of the final draft says if anybody causes an accident by reckless and callous driving, and kills or injures someone severely, such person would face a maximum sentence of five years in jail or a fine (not specified in the draft) or both.

Section 46 of the first draft said that the transport owner or company or operator must insure the vehicle, all passengers and any third party and that no vehicle can operate without doing so.

But the recently approved draft makes it optional [section 60 (1)], saying transport owners can insure the

passengers if he "wishes" to do so. Also, the final draft says nothing about the insurance of the drivers and other staff members.

Likewise, the initial draft [section 48 (3)] said the transport owner, company, operator or their representative must bear the treatment cost of the injured victims. But the approved draft makes no mention of that.

However, it said that after an accident, the driver, conductor or their representatives must inform the nearby police station or fire service or hospital and take necessary steps to save the injured people's lives.

The final draft also proposes that the government will raise a fund named "Arthhik Sahayata Tahabil" for the injured or family members of the dead.

The funds will be overseen by a trustee board with representatives from different government agencies, highway police, transport owners and workers' association.

The funds will be raised with taxpayers' money and contribution from transport owners and workers as well as a portion of fines to be realised from traffic offenders.

Khondaker Enayet Ullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said the draft was in no way soft on the owners.

Rather, the punishment for them has been increased, including the fine for illegal parking.

He also dismissed the allegation of underhand dealings with the government.

"They [campaigners] are saying wrong things. And they are doing so for the sake of saying something," Enayet added.

About insurance, he said owners still would have to do it, albeit with the Trust to be formed by the government.

About the treatment cost of the injured, Enayet said that under the previous draft, owners were to pay both the insurance premium and the treatment cost, which is conflicting. This has been settled in the new draft.

Contacted, Nazrul Islam, secretary of the Road Transport and Highway Division, said the changes were made by the law ministry at the vetting stage, in consultation with all the stakeholders.

Further changes can be made before the bill is passed in parliament, the secretary added.

The Daily Star tried to reach Law Minister Anisul Huq, but he did not pick up the call.

Students sued, not attackers

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against several thousand unidentified students and youths for assaulting police, damaging government property and obstructing law enforcers from discharging duties.

Two other cases were filed by an AL leader for attacking the party president's office in Dhanmondi.

Alleged pro-AL men aided by police had pounced on demonstrators, prompting students to turn violent in some places including Jhigatola, Dhanmondi, Science Lab intersection, Uttara and Mirpur.

Many of them were in helmets and some carrying machetes. Some others were firing gunshots during running battles with the students.

Besides, journalists covering the incidents and passersby were also beaten up.

Take the incident at Jhigatola on August 4.

Around 1:30pm, a group of pro-AL activists allegedly attacked some students who were checking papers and licences of vehicles in Jhigatola as part of their road safety campaign.

The students took the injured to nearby hospitals while some others informed it to their peers who were staging protests at Science Lab intersection.

Several hundred students with brick chips picked from an under-construction building marched towards Jhigatola. They came under attack by

armed men but retaliated by throwing stones.

They also threw brickbats at the AL president's office.

As a fierce battle ensued, at least 150 people including journalists and pedestrians were wounded. Rumours of death and sexual harassment had aggravated the situation.

Amid chase and counter chase, a red-shirted young man with helmet was seen brandishing a pistol and firing shots.

During the violence next day, ruling party men, mostly BCL activists, equipped with iron rods, sticks, machetes came out of the AL office. They caught several persons passing by and beat them up, thinking them to be protesters.

The first attack was carried out on August 2. It was on students in Mirpur by alleged ruling party men, many of whom had their faces covered or wore helmets.

The students were stopping vehicles to check licence and registration papers in front of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority office in the afternoon. The attack came after police tried to disperse them, witnessed said.

Over the incidents of violence, 29 cases have been filed under the Penal Code and 41 people, including 22 students of private universities, arrested.

Police also filed five cases under the

ICT Act and arrested six, said Md Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of DMP yesterday.

According to Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, at least 317 vehicles were vandalised and eight others were torched during the student protests that began after the July 29 crash.

Besides, a police official was attacked while brick chips were thrown at Rajarbagh Police Lines, Kafur Police Station and some other police establishments, he told reporters earlier.

After days of violence, normalcy returned in the city yesterday. There was no violence or road blockade in any university or elsewhere. The number of vehicles, particularly passenger buses, was relatively low on the streets.

Police freed 37 students, detained during the protests on Monday, and handed them over to parents yesterday.

Mohammad Rasheduzzaman, inspector (investigation) of Tejgaon Industrial Police Station, said, "We have released the students on bonds after guardians came to the police station for their release."

Besides, Shahbagh police released three Dhaka University students nine hours after a group of BCL activists handed them over to the law enforcers amid demonstrations.

Early yesterday, some BCL men of Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall of DU beat up Tariqul Islam of mathematics depart-

ment, Mashiur Rahman Sadik of ICT and Zobaidul Haque Rony of physics, alleging that the three spread rumours on Facebook.

Rony is an activist of Samajtantrik Chhatra Front while the two others appear to have no political affiliations.

BCL men called them to the dormitory's guestroom, quizzed them over their Facebook posts and beat them up before handing them over to police, students alleged.

22 STUDENTS REMANDED

A Dhaka court yesterday placed 22 private university students on a two-day remand in two separate cases filed over vandalism and attacks on police.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Abdullah Al Masud gave the order after officials of Badda and Bhatara police stations produced the arrestees before the court with seven days' remand prayer.

The arrestees are students of East West University, North South University, South East University and Brac University.

Their lawyers said in the court that the detainees were tortured in police custody. Some of the students were arrested while they were returning home after classes.

Police rejected the allegations.

Stop violence on protesters, journalists

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The Human Rights Watch yesterday said, "Instead of prosecuting those responsible for unlawfully attacking student protesters demanding road safety, Bangladesh authorities are arresting students and targeting activists and journalists who are highlighting the abuses."

According to numerous witnesses, members of the ruling Awami League's student and youth wings, Chhatra League and Juba League, have attacked the protesters with machetes and sticks, read a statement of the rights group.

Eyewitnesses and journalists also reported that in some areas police

stood by while children were beaten up by Awami League supporters, some of whom wore helmets to hide their identity. Some perpetrators were identified when the attacks were caught on camera, it said.

Also yesterday, Japan Foreign Minister Taro Kono, who arrived in Dhaka on a brief visit, said his country expects the current student protests to calm down peacefully.

The diplomatic missions here are also worried over the safety of the children and young people following reports of violence caught up in the protest, said diplomatic sources.

Meanwhile, the UN urgently called

upon all parties to keep everyone -- including children and young people -- safe from any kind of violence.

"...of course, we would encourage the Government of Bangladesh, as well as all Governments, to respect the rights of the media," Farhan Haq, deputy spokesman for the UN secretary-general, said in response to question on current student protests and attacks on the media, at a press briefing in the UN Headquarters, New York, on Monday.

UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth Jayathma Wickramanayake, who is now on a visit to Bangladesh, yesterday tweeted: "My visit to Bangladesh couldn't have been more

timely! Talking about #SafeSpaces4Youth I admired the resilience of young ppl demanding #RoadSafety & called on the government & other actors to end violence immediately & ensure the safety of young ppl expressing their concerns."

Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden Margot Wallstrom in a twitter statement on Monday said, "Concerned about the violent scenes in Dhaka, Bangladesh in recent days. Call on all concerned to remain calm and to respect the right of peaceful protests."

The high commission of Canada to Bangladesh has expressed concern

over the violence against peaceful student demonstration and called for action against the attackers.

"Norway deeply regrets recent outbreaks of targeted violence against peaceful, student-led demonstrations in support of safer roads in Bangladesh," Royal Norwegian Embassy in Dhaka said in a statement shared in its official Facebook page yesterday.

Amnesty International called for Bangladesh to "end the crackdown on the student protesters and people speaking out against it."

Omar Waraich, the group's south Asia director, said, "The students have a right to peaceful assembly and physi-

cal security."

The international media gave wide coverage of peaceful student protests and violent attacks.

Leading media outlets, including The New York Times, CNN, BBC, The Guardian of UK, Global News of Canada, Aljazeera, Deutsche Welle, Gulf News, NDTV, Times of India, The Indian Express in their reports said Bangladesh struggles to contain mass road-safety protests, international concern and how a tragic traffic accident over a week ago has triggered mass protests by students who have taken to the streets to demand that authorities improve road safety.