

PM has no Facebook account

Says AL press release

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her sister Sheikh Rehana and the prime minister's daughter Saima Wazed have no personal or official IDs on social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter.

A press release from the Awami League, signed by its Office Secretary Abdus Sobhan Golap, came up with the information yesterday. Hasina is also the president of the party.

The release said there is only one verified Facebook account (www.facebook.com/sajeeb.a.wazed) and a verified Twitter account (www.twitter.com/sajeebwazed) of Bangabandhu's grandson and Prime Minister's Information and Communication Technology Affairs Adviser Sajeeb Wazed. These two accounts are handled by Sajeeb Wazed.

There is also another Facebook ID (www.facebook.com/radwan.siddiq) which is used by Bangabandhu's

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PHOTO: SAIKAT DEWAN

Family members of the victims of the gun attacks cry as police tell them to calm down in Swanirvar Market area of Khagrachhari, where seven people were killed and six injured in two incidents yesterday. Inset, two men with gunshot wounds being treated at Khagrachhari Sadar Hospital.

He was almost home to his Ma

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhiraj had it all figured out: how to surprise his mother with a new smart phone.

He travelled more than 250km from Dhaka to his home district Khagrachhari to hand it over to her in person during the Eid holidays. Yesterday morning, he was almost home, just about 15km to go.

Dhiraj Chakma did not make it home. He died after getting caught up in a gun attack in Swanirvar Market area in the town around 8:30am whilst waiting for a three-wheeler to take him to Panchari.

The new phone was found in his bag.

"Look, how good it is! It is for mother," Mammon Chakma quoted his brother as saying in Dhaka, just a day before Dhiraj's death.

"My brother even got me to install some messaging apps in the phone so that our mother could make video calls to us," said Mammon, a student of Barisal University.

Mammon arrived at his brother's house in Mirpur, Dhaka, from Barisal on Wednesday so that they could go home together.

As they could not get tickets on the

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16-year-old

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who were at the spot at the time, offered to drop her off at her desired destination.

The girl, however, rejected the offer and began walking. The two men then started following her, after which they picked her up and forcefully took her near a brick kiln in Shialkhol area, where they raped her, police said.

Hearing her screams, locals went to rescue her and were able to catch Hitlar red-handed, while Jahid managed to escape. Hitlar and the victim were both handed over to police.

While the girl was taken in custody, Hitlar was arrested and interrogated. Based on his information, police later arrested Jahid from his village later that same night.

During interrogation, both admitted to raping the girl, police added.

The victim's father filed a case in this regard yesterday, Md Abdus Chalm, officer-in-charge of Bhuapur Police Station, said.

The victim was sent to Tangail General Hospital for medical tests yesterday afternoon, and the rapists were produced before a court which sent them to jail, police said.

Seven killed in the hills

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procession around 12:30pm in Perachhari area about 2km away, the second attack left another dead.

The UPDF, demanding exemplary punishment of the killers, alleged that it was a joint attack by activists of PCJSS (MN Larma) and UPDF (democratic) faction.

PCJSS (MN Larma) in a statement claimed that they were not involved, rather the incident was a result of UPDF's internal conflict.

Parimal Chakma, of Narangkhiya village, told The Daily Star that he saw two groups in black and olive-green attire storm Swanirvar market area and start shooting.

"I was talking to some people in front of a tea stall. Hearing gunshots, we ran inside the stall," he said.

"They were all carrying guns. They shot Tapan Chakma [acting president of UPDF-backed Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP) Khagrachhari] and Elton Chakma [joint secretary of PCP Khagrachhari] in front of the UPDF office there. Both died on the spot."

UPDF activists were gathering in front of their office as they had a programme scheduled yesterday morning to accord a reception to its leaders

who allegedly had been freed after being abducted. Only a few activists of PCP were there, he said.

Another witness wishing anonymity said the masked gunmen attacked from two ends and stayed in the area for around 45 minutes.

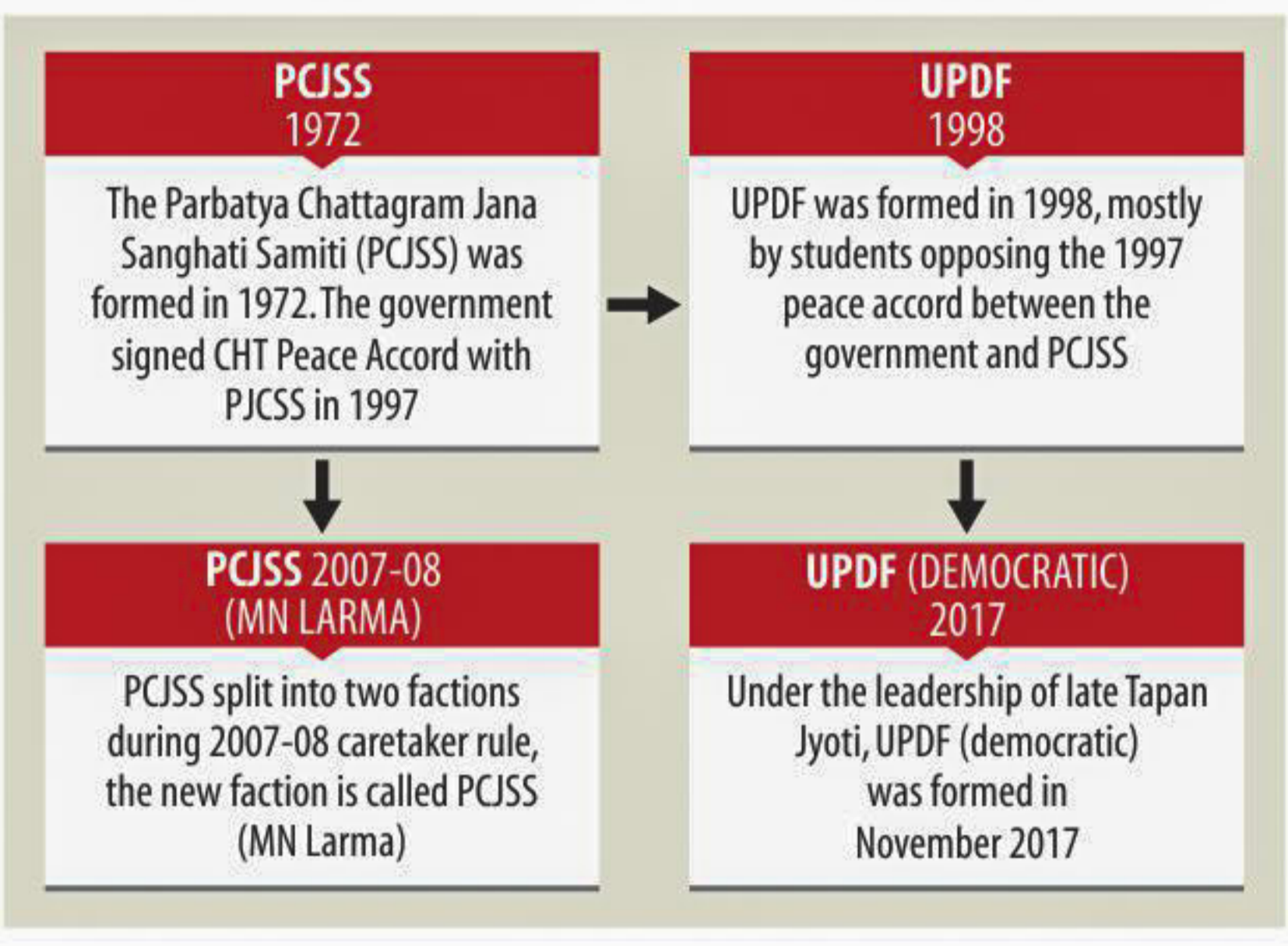
Apart from Tapan and Elton, Palash Chakma, vice-president of Democratic Youth Forum, youth wing of the UPDF; and bystanders Jitayan Chakma, a health worker of Khagrachhari Upazila Health Complex; Dhiraj Chakma, a textile engineer who arrived from Dhaka to go to his village home on Eid holidays; and Rupam Chakma, an Open University student, were killed.

Four of the victims died on the spot and two on their way to hospital.

Injured Somor Bikash Chakma, Sukiron Chakma, and Soheli Chakma were sent to Chittagong Medical College Hospital for better treatment from Khagrachhari Sadar Hospital.

In the afternoon, Sono Kumar Chakma, Urmi Chakma, Minu Chakma, and Sona Ranjan Chakma were injured when the procession was attacked in Perachhari.

Sono, a farmer by profession, died at 3:00pm in Khagrachhari Sadar Hospital. He was not shot but it could not be



known how he had been injured.

Swanirvar market area was almost deserted after the attack as panicked locals closed shops and most of them chose to stay indoors despite police and Border Guard Bangladesh beefing up security.

Sono, a farmer by profession, died at 3:00pm in Khagrachhari Sadar Hospital. He was not shot but it could not be

he first heard gunshots from Swanirvar Market area. "Suddenly, we saw a group of seven to eight gunmen. One of them pointed a gun at me but did not shoot. They shot my son in the chest."

Sukiron, a farmer, told this paper at CMCH that he was not involved in politics and that he was a victim of political conflict.

Somor Bikash Chakma, regional

director of Golden Environment Development Foundation, who was having tea at a stall in the market, said, "A man aged around 35 started shooting. We ran for our lives and took cover beside a school's wall."

"When the man showed up there and asked who I was, I pleaded that I had done nothing and that I was innocent. No sooner had he heard the word 'innocent', he shot me twice in the left leg with his rifle."

Somor said he managed to hire an auto-rickshaw to get to the hospital.

Abdul Awal, assistant superintendent of Khagrachhari police, claimed that it was a result of a turf war between UPDF men and other goons.

MM Salauddin, additional superintendent of Khagrachhari police, said the probe was on and that they had beefed up security measures in the town.

The district administration has formed a five-member probe committee led by an additional magistrate and asked it to submit a report within seven working days.

On May 4, just a day after the killing of Shaktiman Chakma, chairman of Naniarchar Upazila Parishad in Rangamati, five people were shot dead in Khagrachhari.

Our Khagrachhari correspondent and staff reporter at Chittagong bureau office contributed to the report.

It will curtail free speech

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The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Post, Telecom and ICT was later given time to scrutinise the bill and place its report before the House.

On May 22, the Editors' Council, a platform of editors of the country's national dailies, the Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) in their maiden meeting with the parliamentary standing committee voiced concerns about sections 8, 21, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, and 43 of the proposed law.

They also unanimously said several sections in the proposed law had ambi-

guity and loopholes, which should be addressed. Otherwise, there will be ample scope for its misuse.

On July 4, the parliamentary committee at a meeting with journalist leaders submitted an 11-point change in the bill for their consideration.

At yesterday's discussion, BFUJ President Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul said they learned that amendments would be brought to 11 clauses of the act, including changing its title and reducing "excessive punishments" for offences under some sections.

He said they voiced concerns over the proposed act mostly to protect journalists until now because they were the "most affected" group by the

controversial section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act.

One major concern of journalists is about section 32 of the proposed digital security act because it retains "elements of section 57 of the ICT act," he added.

However, the parliamentary committee has given assurances that the clause will not remain as it is now, said Bulbul, also chief executive officer of Ekushey Television.

Once passed, the proposed act can be a great threat to creative writers, especially poets, because when they write something they care little about laws, said Mohammad Nurul Huda, an

eminent poet.

"Poets are 'licensed' to tell lies. A poet is a person who, through his or her imagination, brings to the fore an issue that may seem non-existent in the society."

"[English poet] ST Coleridge termed it as 'creative imagination' which can be established as lie sometimes. This aspect [of poets] has to be well-protected," said Huda, also chief adviser of PEN International Bangladesh.

He also stressed the need for maintaining self-discipline while writing something on social media and other digital platforms.

Editors' Council General Secretary and Editor and Publisher of The Daily

Star Mahfuz Anam said thanks to information technology a new medium called social media has emerged where one can express opinions easily.

However, there is a risk of expressing instantaneous opinions riddled with faults on Facebook or Twitter, whereas one has the scope to scrutinise or rethink before saying something, say, in a demonstration.

"In such circumstances, we have the choice to be responsible. The state or the individual can be responsible in this regard."

"But when the state tries to stop it through formulating laws, basic rights to freedom [of expression] is ham-

pered," he added.

Mahfuz Anam also said the possibility of spreading rumors was higher in a society where freedom of expression is being shrunk.

Presenting the keynote paper, SI Siddiqui, a legal economist, said the proposed law was apparently drafted to protect the national interest "from possible acts of citizens".

However, it has mixed up the security of individual and the nation, he said.

Jatiya Press Club President Shafiqur Rahman said a law was necessary amid growing concerns over the misuse of digital platforms, but the law should not be misused to gag the media.

Lot of actions, but no result!

FROM PAGE 1

About seven people die in road crash in the country every day, according to official counts, which is much lower than the 20 a day estimated by various NGOs. Road safety campaigners say such mismatch of the death tally happens because many accidents go unreported.

Latest credible data is not available, but road crash stands out as one of the highest killers in Bangladesh. Released in 2015, a WHO report estimated road deaths between 17,349 and 25,283 in 2013.

Plans to contain such deaths by multiple government committees have also been aplenty. The only problem is those decisions delivered no result.

The Motor Vehicle Ordinance of 1983, the first legal document regarding road safety, made formation of a committee with all stakeholders mandatory. Accordingly, the Road Transport Advisory Council (RTAC) was formed in 1985 with the then communications minister at the helm.

It is now headed by Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader. Other members of the Council are labour leader-cum-Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan, secretaries of several ministries, top police officials, including the IGP and divisional commissioners, officials of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), experts, civil society members, transport owners and workers' union leaders.

COMMITTEES/STRATEGIC PLAN ON ROAD SAFETY
Road Transport Advisory Council, formed in 1985, held 41 meetings
National Road Safety Council, formed in 1995, held 25 meetings
Cabinet Committee on Road Safety, formed in 2013, met only twice
Road Safety Unit, formed in 2000, of no use
National Road Safety Strategic Action Plan made in 1997

MAJOR DECISIONS IN LAST 10 YEARS BUT NOT IMPLEMENTED
Stop reckless driving, remove unfit vehicles
Stop issuance of fake licence, driving without licence
Prevent modification of vehicle body
No risky overtaking, wrong-side driving
Impose speed limit on roads
Evict slow-moving vehicles from highways
Monthly salary, instead of trip-based pay
Check overloading
Launch company-based bus service

various transport-related issues but could do little to make roads safe.

Another body, National Road Safety Council (NRSC), was constituted in 1995 to ensure road safety. Also headed by Quader, this Council has units even at the upazila level. The upazila nirbahi officer heads the upazila unit while the district unit is headed by the deputy commissioner.

Shahjahan Khan, State Minister for LGRD Moshirur Rahman Ranga (also president of transport owners' association), Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, a number of secretaries, the police boss, transport owners, divisional commissioners, deputy commissioners, superintendents of

police, NGO representatives, officials of city corporations and Rajuk, UNOs and experts are members of the NRSC.

Records show both the councils have been discussing almost similar issues and making identical decisions. Time and again, they decided to remove unfit vehicles, bar drivers with fake licence, pull out slow-moving vehicles off highways, prevent modification of vehicles, control overloading, stop reckless or wrong-side driving, introduce monthly salary for drivers and workers and so on.

But none of those decisions has been implemented either for a lack of political will or due to opposition from beneficiaries of road irregulari-

ties within the government's power circle.

"Holding meetings and making decisions have become a mere eye-wash," observed Prof Moazzem Hossain, who teaches civil engineering at BUET and researches road safety.

Sincerity and will to implement are missing, he said, adding that transport owners and their people became more powerful than government agencies. This is why those decisions could not be implemented.

As both the councils turned dysfunctional and fatal road crashes continued claiming lives, a special cabinet committee was formed in 2013 with 10 ministers on it to coordinate implementation of the decisions made by the two councils. Again, Quader was made head of it while both Shahjahan Khan and Moshirur Rahman Ranga became members.

After holding two meetings, the ministers ran out of gas and delegated the responsibilities to their secretaries, who did not hold a single meeting as yet.

As the committee of heavyweight ministers failed to deliver, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stepped in. On June 25, amid a flurry of deaths on roads, she issued a five-point directive for road safety, and assigned Quader, Shahjahan and Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to implement those.

The five directives are: drive-time limitations on drivers of long-route vehicles, keeping reserved drivers on long-route vehicles, restricting them to

a maximum of five hours drive time at a stretch, training drivers and their assistants, installing service centres or restrooms for drivers at regular intervals on highways, preventing jaywalking, making sure everyone follows traffic signals and fastens seatbelts.

None of these instructions has been carried out yet.

"There are many players in the road transport sector, but he [Quader] is the person to be held accountable," Prof Shamsul Haque, one of the country's leading road experts and former director of the Accident Research Institute at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, told The Daily Star recently.

A far bigger commitment, conviction and devotion of time are required to ensure road safety in a complex transport system that Bangladesh has, he insisted.

Quader indeed has too many things on his plate. Requesting anonymity, officials at the ministry confirmed that the minister mostly remained busy off the office, with some other things. Being the general secretary of the Awami League, he needs to handle many issues other than people's safety.

But his initial enthusiasm for road safety eventually got diverted to mega infrastructure projects, road repair, political talks and occasional theatrics to camera.

His "seriousness" about road safety that the country saw through media quite often in the last few years was when the minister showed up unexpectedly with hordes of television cameras on some roads to do the job of a traffic official, checking driving licences, fitness certificate of vehicles or expressing unhappiness about dilapidated highways. The great showmanship of Quader made headlines, but roads across the country remain unsafe.

Prof Shamsul, who is involved in a dozen infrastructure development projects, firmly believes things would not have come to its present state, it would rather improve, had the minister played his part in implementing the decisions he took while in office.

Ilias Kanchan, the film star who has been campaigning for safe road since the death of his wife in a road crash in 1993, is tired of rhetorical responses from people who can actually make roads safe.

"We want the government to take real initiatives to check road crashes," he told The Daily Star.

Last night, The Daily Star called Obaidul Quader and also the ministry Secretary Nazrul Islam, but they did not pick up the calls. They also did not respond to the text messages, requesting their comments.