

SHOLAKIA ATTACK

Charge sheet filed against 5 JMB men

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police yesterday pressed charges against five operatives of outlawed Neo JMB (Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh) in connection with the Sholakia attack in Kishoreganj, more than two years after the militant strike left four including a suspect dead.

The police have found involvement of 24 JMB militants in the attack but made five of them accused as the rest were killed in different raids, Arifur Rahman, inspector (investigation) of Kishoreganj Sadar police, told The Daily Star.

Islamic thinker Maulana Farid Uddin Masoud, also the Imam of the largest Eid congregation, was the target of the attack for his anti-militancy speech and activities. The militants eventually attacked policemen, who stopped them on their way to the target, he added.

Arifur, also the investigation officer of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the Court of Chief Judicial Magistrate, Kishoreganj yesterday afternoon.

The accused are Jahangir Alam alias Rajib Gandhi, 32, Mizanur Rahman alias Boro Mizan, 60, Abdus Sabur Khan alias Sohel Mahfuz, 33,

Jahidul Haque Tanim 24, and Anwar Hossain, 45.

All five are now behind bars, said Toufiqul Islam, court inspector of Kishoreganj.

Rajib and Sohel had earlier given confessional statements under section 164 before the court.

The duo and Mizanur were also accused in a Gulshan café attack that left 20 hostages, mostly foreigners, and two police officials killed on July 1, 2016.

Rajib was a fund collector and Mizanur and Sohel were grenade suppliers of "Neo JMB" that carried out both the café and Sholakia attacks within a span of one week.

In the Sholakia attack, 40-year-old Jharna Rani Bhowmik and two policemen were killed as a group of six to seven militants attacked the law enforcers, who were frisking people at the entry to the Eidgah ground on July 7, 2016.

A suspected militant was also killed in police retaliation.

Soon after the incident, police arrested suspects Shafiul Islam alias Shariful Islam alias Saiful Islam, 22, and Jahidul Haque Tanim.

Shafiul and an unidentified youth

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

Shots fired from AL nomination aspirant's convoy in Pirojpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

At least nine blank shots were fired from the convoy of Sheikh Anny Rahman, who wants to contest the upcoming national polls with Awami League nomination, in Pirojpur town on Tuesday night.

Anny claimed that her supporters fired the shots in self-defence after a group of criminals, carrying arms, attacked them in Damodar Bridge area around 8:00pm.

The incident happened when Anny, wife of Sheikh Hafizur Rahman, a cousin of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, along with her supporters was on way to her home in Pirojpur town from Hafizur's house in Gopalganj's Tungipara.

"To save us from the attack, our security men and even my husband fired blank shots with their licensed arms," she told The Daily Star yesterday. "No one was injured and no vehicle was damaged."

Witnesses, however, said when some motorcycles and cars in Anny's convoy were crossing the area, some youths hurled "abusive slogans" at her supporters. At this, the vehicles hurriedly left the place. After a while,

Anny's men fired blank shots.

At least nine shots were fired in the air in several places of the town, including near Pirojpur Police Station and the house of the additional superintendent of police, said witnesses and police.

It spread panic among the locals. Many closed the shutters of their shops.

SM Ziaul Haque, officer-in-charge of the police station, said they were investigating the matter.

"We haven't yet found any evidence that Anny's convoy was attacked," he said.

Meanwhile, a chase and a counter chase between the supporters of Anny and her rivals took place in Pirojpur town yesterday evening.

The situation in the town was tense last night. Additional police members were deployed to avert any untoward situation.

Anny, daughter of late Enaet Hossain Khan, former president of Pirojpur AL and lawmaker from the district, wants to contest the parliamentary polls, likely in December, with AL nomination from Pirojpur-1 constituency. She has attended several rallies and brought out processions in the district recently.

Khaleda didn't appear

FROM PAGE 1

Khaleda's lawyers filed a petition yesterday, saying that the makeshift court inside the prison could not continue its proceedings without permission from the Supreme Court.

Previously, the trial used to be at a makeshift court in Bakshibazar area, but the law ministry on September 4 issued a gazette notification, stating that the trial in the graft case would be held at Old Dhaka Central Jail on Nazimuddin Road.

The decision, it said, was made taking Khaleda's security into consideration.

During the first hearing at the makeshift court on September 6, Khaleda was produced before the court where she expressed no confidence in the special court.

Centring the trial, a large number of law enforcers were present in and around the court area yesterday. Around 10:00am, officials entered the court. Public Prosecutor Mosharraf Hossain Kajal went to the court around 10:40am and then Khaleda's lawyer Sanaullah Mia appeared.

During the hearing, Sanaullah said the court was not an "open court" and it was against the constitution. He prayed to extend bail for Khaleda.

Then Aminul Islam, lawyer for another accused Ziaul Islam Munna, told the court that the court was like a cave.

Praying to adjourn the court proceedings for a month, the lawyer said the never saw such a court in his 30-year career in law.

There is no adequate space for lawyers and journalists to sit and no scope for the common people to enter the courtroom to see court proceedings, said Aminul. "It cannot be an open court."

lawyer Mosharraf Hossain said the court had been formed following legal aspects and that it had been shifted for Khaleda's convenience.

"One of Khaleda Zia's lawyers said the court is against the constitution and on the other hand, they seek bail for their client. It is a double standard."

Mosharraf also said Khaleda was not cooperating with the court.

In reply, Sanaullah said Khaleda was sick and four of her senior lawyers met her inside jail. BNP secretary general met the home minister regarding her health condition.

At this stage, prosecutor Mosharraf said it was repeatedly said Khaleda was sick, but what was her illness. "Everyone saw she came to the court and made a statement."

When the prosecutor and defence lawyers were placing arguments, the judge told Khaleda's lawyer that the jail authorities informed the court that she did not want to appear before the court. "Are you seeking her bail?" he asked.

Extending Khaleda's bail for yesterday, the judge asked her lawyer to explain how she would secure bail if she did not appear before the court and how the court proceedings would continue in absence of her.

The ACC filed the Zia Charitable Trust graft case with Tejgaon Police Station in August 2011, accusing Khaleda and three others of abusing power to raise funds for the trust from unknown sources.

On February 8, the same special court awarded Khaleda five years' imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case and sentenced her elder son Tarique Rahman, now acting BNP chairman, and four others to 10 years' imprisonment each.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Bangladesh Water Development Board is dumping sandbags along the bank of the Padma to prevent erosion at Mulfatganj Bazar in Naria. Locals say the sandbags barely have any effect. Inset, locals form a human chain demanding effective steps. The pictures were taken yesterday.

Election as per constitution

Says Obaidul Quader

BSS, Dhaka

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said the upcoming Bangladesh parliamentary polls would be held like the elections in other democratic countries and there was no scope of going beyond the constitution.

Quader, also the general secretary of the Awami League, made the comments while talking to journalists after the 11th board meeting of the Dhaka Road Transport Coordination Authority at Nagar Bhaban.

He said one more parliament session would be held after the current one.

"The ministers will only do their routine work after the announcement of the election schedule," he said.

The minister also said the Awami League, along with the countrymen, would give a befitting reply if the BNP tried to incite violence centring the upcoming national polls.

"We will welcome any non-violent movement of the BNP and will face it politically...If they want to create anarchy in the name of movement, we will prevent it along with the common people."

Quader said an overall movement was not possible by holding a hunger strike programme as the BNP would need strength which it did not have.

About BNP's demands for the resignation of the prime minister

SEE PAGE 10 COL 3

Poor healthcare

FROM PAGE 1

Tahmina also gets an hour-long for her lunch but she isn't allowed to eat any meal in the factory as per the company's rule. This often forces her to leave the factory premises and look for other places to have lunch.

Compounding her problems are the issues of maternity leave and pay, along with healthcare issues.

"We get 112 days of paid maternity leave. Of that, 40 days are reserved for before childbirth."

The labour law in Bangladesh specifies a 16-week maternity leave with full pay.

However, a study by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) in 2018 found that only 28.70 percent of the workers get maternity leave for four months. This is further exacerbated by the fact that 71.30 percent of the workers believe the leave is actually for lesser than four months.

In terms of maternity pay, Tahmina feels a lot more can be done.

She has been told that she would be paid maternity leave dues when she rejoins work. "Obviously, it would have helped if I had the money in hand at the moment as there are growing expenses. But this is how it is."

However, the procedure of payment is to pay eight weeks' salary within three days of submitting proof of pregnancy with the remaining amount provided after the submission of proof of delivery within three working days.

The other option is to pay the entire 16 weeks' salary within 3 days of proof of delivery.

The recently proposed Bangladesh Labour Law entitles workers to eight-week maternity leave and other benefits within three days of submission of necessary documents.

According to the draft, an owner may face a penalty of Tk 25,000 if they do not abide by these rules.

Siddique Rahman, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said as per the practice in factories, the eight weeks' advance salary would be given before going on leave and the remaining salary would be given after rejoining.

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmmed, Executive Director of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS), said in non-compliance factories, during maternity leave, female garment workers go on leave without payment.

In some cases, workers have also been sacked and indirectly requested to come back after giving birth to the child.

State Minister for Labour and Employment Mujibul Haque Chunnun said it was mandatory for every factory to provide paid maternity leave as it was a right.

HEALTH WOES REMAIN

Right after the birth of a child, the new mother has to join the factory within a couple of months, hampering their postnatal care.

Tahmina recently came under the care of Dr Subrina, chief medical officer of Awaj Foundation, an organisation which provides free health care facilities to RMG workers and their children and raises awareness on their rights and responsibilities.

Subrina said that rejoining work two months after childbirth was harmful for both the mother and the child. The mother is compelled to work for long hours, thus being unable to take care of or even breastfeed her child.

A baseline survey by the SNV Netherlands Development Organisation in 2015 reported that 59.7 percent of female RMG workers responded that they were not aware of the need for postnatal care, while 55.6 percent workers reported that they delivered their child at home.

Most expecting female workers go to their hometown for childbirth, after being influenced by their elderly relatives,

Subrina said, adding many women wait too long and choose to not go for C-sections, even if needed.

Another issue is the lack of medical facilities and the long hours workers are expected to work.

Despite the presence of a medical officer in her factory, Tahmina says that this is more convenient for her to visit Awaj Foundation.

"The medical officer sits on a lower floor, and I have to go downstairs to visit her. This takes time and affects my productivity, and in turn will affect my evaluation," she said.

Her story is similar to those of many others.

Ruby, 22, can't visit government hospitals because of her long working hours and she can't afford the visitation fees of a private institute.

Her 10-hour workday means she has to set out for work by 7:00am and work the long shift, with only an hour's break. By the time she is done, she is too tired and the doctors are too far away for her to go for check-ups.

"We need to stay at work for a long period of time, and so it is impossible to see an external healthcare provider after work," she says.

The healthcare centre in her factory is kept open six days a week and for eight hours a day, and mostly provides primary healthcare to the garments workers.

"During weekends, after work or even during any emergency, we go to a pharmacy near our house and seek treatment from the employees there," said Ruby.

Ruby said that she goes to a pharmacy for medical help even when her son falls ill.

"I cannot take my son to hospitals in the morning [because of the working hours], and there are no healthcare centres near our home."

Ahmed from BILS suggested to The Daily Star that the government and factory owners could take up the initiative to establish hospitals or clinics in the areas where garments workers live within the industrial zone and provide facilities.

OF THE MONETARY AND MENTALITY But even if such facilities are provided, there are still some ingrained practices that need changing.

20-year-old Hashi often has to face problems during her menstrual cycle while she is on duty. Her male supervisor does not allow her to go to the toilet frequently.

She said the only toilet in her factory floor was shared by about 200 female workers and was not well-maintained.

Hashi also told The Daily Star that it was difficult for her to even afford one sanitary napkin, a problem all too familiar for many other women in the country.

On this issue, Dr Subrina said that because of lack of proper menstrual hygiene, most of the garments workers complain of vaginal infections or suffer from urinary tract infection (UTI) and other ailments.

In the SNV survey, it was found that 72.6 percent of the respondents reported to having used cloths, rags or other materials during menstruation.

The main driver of the growth, garments exports has become a sector that a nation can be proud of but, they need to also be proud of the people working to develop the industry, Taslima Akhter, president of Bangladesh Garment Workers' Union, said.

She further said to make the workforce productive, garment factory owners, international clients, and the government should increase their wages and provide free hospital facilities so the workers could be healthy as well as productive.

Padma

FROM PAGE 1

The BWDB is currently dumping sandbags along the bank. But the method has hardly any effect on erosion, locals said.

Scores of houses, shops, streets, a healthcare centre and a mosque have disappeared from Bashbari, Kedarpur and Mulfatganj areas.

Around 5,000 residents formed a human chain yesterday at Mulfatganj Bazar demanding prompt government action to protect the century-old marketplace.

"The river is going to devour the marketplace entirely. We hear that the authorities are moving a branch of a government bank from the area. It will be a blow for us," Mihir Chakrabarty, a local businessman, said.

A large portion of the market is already gone. If local banks and other offices leave the area, residents would be hit doubly, protesters said.

They should protect the river banks rather than moving offices, they added.

Trial of cases

FROM PAGE 16

on an Awami League rally in the capital's Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004. Sheikh Hasina, the then opposition leader in parliament, narrowly escaped the attack with an ear injury.

Following the incident, two cases were filed against 49 people with Motijheel Police Station, one for murder and another under the Explosive Substances Act.

Trial of the cases had begun at the same tribunal in 2012. The court is conducting the trial of both the cases simultaneously.

Yesterday, prosecutor Akram Uddin Shyamal presented several rulings including two of Indian courts, before the tribunal. He said the rulings would help the court make a judgment on the criminal conspiracy charges.

Syed Rezaur Rahman, chief prosecutor of the cases, placed his argument on the legality of carrying out a further investigation into the cases and recording a second confessional statement of an accused, Mufti Abdul Hannan.

Refuting defence arguments, Rezaur said a further investigation by the Criminal Investigation Department and recording of the second confessional statement were done legally and there was no bar to doing so.

As the chief prosecutor could not complete placing his arguments, the tribunal set September 17-18 for completing the closing arguments by the prosecution and defence.

Of the 49 accused in the two cases, 23 people, including former BNP ministers Lutfozzaman Babar and Abdus Salam Pintu, are in jail; eight, including three former inspectors general of police, are on bail; and 18, including Tarique Rahman, on the run.

Hannan, a leader of banned militant outfit Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami Bangladesh (Huji), was executed last year in the case filed over the grenade attack on the then British high commissioner Anwar Choudhury in Sylhet on May 21, 2004.

Assam quake

FROM PAGE 16

Earthquakes of magnitudes 5 to 5.9 on Richter scale are considered moderate earthquake which can cause slight damage to buildings.

In Nilphamari, at least 25 people were injured while getting down from several buildings in Uttar EPZ area yesterday morning.