

‘Criminal’ killed in 'gunfight’

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A man was killed in a “gunfight” between two groups of criminals in Bablatola Sangkarpur area of Jashore town early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Billu Parvez, 35, son of Abdur Rashid of Jamaddar Para Sangkarpur area of the town.

On information that a gunfight ensued between two gangs, law enforcers raided the area around 3:30am, said Md Apurbo Hasan, officer-in-charge of Jashore Kotwali police.

Sensing the presence of the police, the criminals left the scene, he added. Later, the police recovered the bullet-hit body of Billu. They also recovered a one-shooter gun along with a bullet from the spot, the OC said.

Billu was wanted in six cases for murder and mugging, he added.

Mukul Hossain, Billu's uncle, said his nephew had gone missing as he was heading home around 11:00pm on Wednesday. Since then he was traceless, he said, adding finally his body was found in the hospital yesterday morning.

AL

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supporters.

In another incident, seven union parishad chairmen and a municipal-ity mayor at a meeting with AL presidium member Mohammed Nasim early this month in Rajshahi raised a series of allegations against lawmaker Kazi Abdul Wadud Dara (Rajshahi-5) and demanded the party nominate another candidate from the constituency in the next election.

On the other hand, at least 28 BNP leaders, including former minister Aminul Haque and ex-Rajshahi mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, have been campaigning for the polls.

In Bogura, around 20 nomination

seekers of AL have been conducting campaigns to get party tickets at seven constituencies in the district, considered as a stronghold of BNP.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia had won almost all the elections --1991, 1996, 2001, and 2008 -- in Bogura-7 (Gabtoli-Shajahanpur) constituency.

This time Khaleda may contest the polls in Boga-6 if she is not barred from taking part in the election over her conviction in a graft case. Her son Tarique Rahman's wife Zubaida Rahman may join the polls race in Bogura-7, said party insiders.

Besides, BNP may support Jatiya Oikyafront leader Mahmudur Rahman Manna to fight the battle of ballots in Boga-2.

In Natore, a least 12 AL men have been campaigning to contest the elections to four seats here. Shafiqul Islam Shafiq, chairman of Singra upazila, has emerged as a strong contender for AL nomination in Natore-3. State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak is the incumbent lawmaker in the constituency.

In Pabna, a lone AL candidate is campaigning for the polls in Pabna-5 while around 10 ruling party men are conducting campaigns in each of Pabna-2, Pabna-3 and Pabna-4 constituencies to secure party nominations.

The BNP is facing almost a similar situation in the district. At least 14 MMP hopefuls are trying to get party nominations against five seats.

Khaleda's personal assistant Shimul Biswas may get priority in Pabna-5.

Out of six constituencies in Naogaon, at least 20 AL candidates are campaigning in five to win party nominations. In the other constituency (Naogaon-1), incumbent lawmaker Sadhan Chandra Majumder is the ruling party's lone candidate.

Former AL general secretary Abdul Jalil's son Nizam Uddin Jalil John may seek nomination from Naogaon-5 constituency.

BNP has at least 26 nomination seekers in the district. However, the party high-ups hinted that “new faces” might get priority here.

In Sirajganj, AL presidium member Mohammed Nasim, also the health minister, is the lone candidate in Sirajganj-1. At least 20 lawmaker aspirants have been trying to get party tickets in the five other constituencies.

In BNP's camp, at least 19 nomination seekers are conducting campaigns to get party tickets in six constituencies.

5 held

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at Rajendrapur Railway Station yesterday noon.

The kidnappers also threatened to kill Jui if they failed to pay the ransom. The family agreed to give them Tk 3 lakh, the police official said.

Locals found the body near the victim's house yesterday morning before police started locating the kidnappers by tracking their phones, the inspector said.

There are 19 families living in Anwar's house as tenants, said the police official, adding that Jui might have been killed over feuds with tenants.

Police detained five tenants, including a woman, for interrogation.

Unnamed accused

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For example, a case was lodged with the capital's New Market Police Station on September 30 naming five people as accused for what police said was throwing brickbats at them and obstructing their work. In that case, around 150 to 200 unidentified people were also made accused.

The BNP believes so many unidentified people -- over three times the named accused -- have been sued recently only to harass and arrest its lower-tier leaders and activists and thwart their election preparation.

In some of the cases, even the number of the unidentified accused was not mentioned.

For example, a case was filed against 40 BNP men with Jatrabari Police Station on September 30 on charges of creating panic among people and vandalising public vehicles. In the case document, police said many unidentified people joined hands with those BNP men to commit the offences.

In another case, filed with Hazaribagh police on the same day, police charged 48 named and many unknown people, mostly BNP men, with attacking the law enforcers and obstructing them from doing their job.

All these cases were filed after the BNP held two rallies -- one on September 1 in front of its central office in Nayapaltan marking its founding anniversary and the other on September 30 at the Suhrawardy Udyan.

The highest number of cases (77) was filed in Barishal, followed by Satkhira (75) and Bhola (72), the data show.

This newspaper has investigated 10 of the cases filed on and after September 30 in the capital. The Daily Star correspondents visited 10 spots which were mentioned as the place of occurrence in the cases. They talked to dozens of locals who said no untoward incident had taken place in those areas on the dates stated in the case documents.

In some cases, police charged dead and elderly people as well as individuals living abroad with the “offences” along with BNP leaders and activists. The law enforcers have drawn huge flak from different quarters over the issue.

The recent cases were labelled as ghostly cases.

Contacted, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said, “I have heard that some cases were filed against BNP men but [I] don't know about the number. I have to check it.

“Usually when there is a riot or a big political chaos, many people remain unknown at that time. So, they were included in the case(s) as unnamed,” he told The Daily Star yesterday as his attention was drawn to the “ghostly cases” and the large number of unidentified accused.

In the last one month, there has been no major violent agitation from the BNP or any other political parties. Still, the cases were filed one after another.

Former inspector general of police Noor Mohammad thinks there are two aspects of the issue -- one legal and the

other political.

On the legal aspect, he said, police file cases against unknown people when they cannot identify all the accused. During the investigation, those unknown people are traced and included in the case.

“The other reason is political. In the culture of Bangladesh politics, when there is a crisis or a political turmoil, we see that thousands are made unnamed accused,” said the former police chief.

“It has become a culture of our politics. The opposition becomes victim of such cases. I don't see any way out. To come out from this culture, we need to wait for some miracle ...”

In a statement on Thursday, Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said the activities by a section of police were a worrying example of a fall in their professional standards.

The new cases, in addition to the cases filed earlier against the BNP leaders and activists, appear as a threat to the party ahead of the general election.

According to another compilation of data by the BNP central office, as many as 90,000 cases were filed against its 25,70,000 leaders and activists across the country till the first week of this month since 2009.

Of them, a large number of cases were, however, filed in between 2012 and 2013 and in January 2014 when the BNP-led alliance took to the street enforcing hartals demanding restoration of the caretaker government system scrapped by the government in 2011. The street agitation turned violent in many areas.

Again, some cases were filed against BNP men in the first three months of 2015 when the party enforced around three months of countrywide blockade which turned violent.

In those cases filed since 2012, many BNP senior and grassroots leaders were arrested and put behind bars. Many are still in jail. Many accused in the cases went into hiding.

Talking about the new cases, BNP standing committee member Moudud Ahmed alleged that the main intention behind the cases was to suppress opposition leaders and activists.

“The more the unnamed accused, the more are the chances of arresting opposition men. Police can arrest whoever it likes,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He further alleged the government was doing that for keeping the BNP away from the election race.

“Before the election, thousands of leaders may be shown arrested in those unnamed cases,” he added.

Talking to this newspaper yesterday, BNP Legal Affairs Secretary Sanaullah Mia said they were spending busy time at the courts seeking bail for the party leaders accused in “false” cases.

He said, “We have asked the district leaders to seek bail in their respective courts [in districts]. If anyone is denied bail in a lower court, we are helping that person secure bail from the High Court.”

provides sentences of up to three years in prison for “going against the spirit” of the Liberation War, or airing “misleading or false” information.

On October 10, a new law governing online speech, the Digital Security Act (DSA), came into force. It replaced the controversial section 57 of the ICT Act with provisions that are in several respects more broadly drawn and carry even harsher sentences, it said.

The DSA grants law enforcement authorities wide-ranging powers to remove or block online information that “harms the unity of the country or any part of it, economic activities, security, defence, religious values or public order or spreads communal hostility and hatred.”

The government rejected journalists' calls for amendments to nine sections of the act.

Journalists do have cause for concern, HRW said, because of the recent history of the use of existing laws covering sedition and criminal defamation to threaten and detain journalists for exercising free expression and peaceful speech.

HRW cited the arrest of Nusrat Jahan Sonia, a 25-year-old primary school teacher in a rural area of Patuakali on August 4, for allegedly “spreading rumours.”

In a similar case, a Chittagong University teacher Maidul Islam has been in custody since September, charged under section 57 with making “defamatory” remarks against the prime minister on social media.

On Aug 5, Shahidul Alam, an internationally renowned photographer, was arrested for Facebook comments.

“There is a chilling atmosphere for journalism and free speech in Bangladesh right now, with even those sharing innocuous social media posts at risk of arrest and harassment. The government should immediately end this assault on fundamental political rights, and instead create an environment conducive to ensuring that Bangladeshis are able to elect their leaders without fear,” Brad said.

Security

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The rally in Sylhet has not been cancelled but postponed,” he told journalists after visiting the construction site of a flyover in Gazipur's Chandra area.

Officials of Sylhet Metropolitan Police too said they denied the Oikyafront permission for holding the rally on October 23 on “security grounds”.

Meanwhile, BNP standing committee member Moudud Ahmed yesterday said the government's denial of permission proved that its popularity has declined.

“We will have to force the government to sit with us for a dialogue through waging a tough movement,” he said at a programme at the Jatiya Press Club.

Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, said the Oikyafront leaders first called on foreigners instead of going to the people of the country.

“An election atmosphere has been prevailing in the country. People want to cast their votes in a festive mood. Those who want to draw the people's attention to a movement are living in a fool's paradise,” he added.

On Thursday, Oikyafront leaders at a city hotel briefed foreign diplomats from around 25 countries on their demands, goals and position on the next general election.

The Jatiya Oikyafront was formed on October 13 to press for holding a national election under a polls-time neutral government after dissolution of parliament and release of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia from jail.

The BNP, Gono Forum, Jatiya Samajantrik Dal and Nagorik Oikya have joined the platform.

Moudud, also a former law minister, yesterday said the government was afraid of the Jatiya Oikyafront and it was misleading people about the unity by making imaginary comments, he added.

The BNP leader said the AL would face a serious electoral debacle because of the formation of the Oikyafront.

The AL would surely be defeated in the next parliamentary polls as people already became united under the banner of Jatiya Oikyafront, Moudud said. Blaming the ruling party for destroying the polls atmosphere across the country, he said the AL was moving ahead with its plan to hold another lopsided national election.

“A UNITY OF NATIONAL ENEMIES” Speaking at another programme, Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan took a swipe at Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain for forging a unity with “anti-liberation forces”.

“That's not jatiya oikya. That's a unity of the national enemies. A conspiracy is underway after being angered by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's development works,” the minister told reporters in Barishal.

A group of people, who had never been in politics, have suddenly started raising their voice against the incumbent government saying that they want to restore democracy, he said.

Shajahan asked Dr Kamal Hossain where he and his supporters had been in 2015 when the “BNP-Jamaat men” went on a killing spree across the country by throwing petrol bombs at buses.

Meet Hyperion

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Redshift is a measure of the changing wavelength of light travelling away from an observer.

“Normally these kinds of structures are known at lower redshifts, which means when the universe has had much more time to evolve and construct such huge things,” Cucciati said.

Located in the constellation of Sextans (The Sextant), Hyperion was identified by analysing the vast amount of data obtained from the VIMOS Ultra-deep Survey, which provides a unique 3-D map of how more than 10,000 galaxies are distributed in the distant universe.

Hyperion is similar in size to nearby superclusters, though it has a very different architecture, the researchers said.

The findings were published in the journal *Astronomy & Astrophysics*.

“Superclusters closer to Earth tend to have a much more concentrated distribution of mass with clear structural features,” explains co-author Brian Lemaux, an astronomer from University of California at Davis.

“But in Hyperion, the mass is distributed much more uniformly in a series of connected blobs populated by loose associations of galaxies.”

This contrast is most likely due to the fact that nearby superclusters have had billions of years for gravity to gather matter together into denser regions -- a process that has been acting for far less time in the much younger Hyperion.

Over time, Hyperion will likely evolve into something like the Virgo Supercluster, which contains our own galaxy, the Milky Way.

B Chy, Mahi

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At the briefing, Badol said the new committee was formed under the leadership of party's presidium member Nurul. “We will constitute the full committee very soon.”

Asked why B Chowdhury was not expelled from the party, Badol said, “He is a respected person and a good soul. But his son Mahi is not a good soul and only for him, Bikalpadhara Bangladesh could not join the Oikyafront.”

Claiming themselves as the main part of Bikalpadhara Bangladesh, they said they would join the newly formed alliance, Jatiya Oikyafront.

In a party forum, Bikalpadhara's vice-president Badol strongly protested as it did not join the Oikyafront. On October 13, Bikalpadhara President Badruddoza expelled Badol and some others for violating party discipline.

Badol claimed that they booked a hall to hold the conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday, but the booking was cancelled. “We don't know who cancelled the booking.”

Bikalpadhara did not join the Jatiya Oikyafront, saying that they would not join the combine if the BNP did not cut its ties with Jamaat.

Asked about the issue of Jamaat, Badol said, “None of us supports

Jamaat. It was an excuse of Mahi for not joining the alliance. Party's Secretary General Major (ret'd) Manna's corruption news was published in a newspaper. A corrupt person should not be with us.”

Contacted, Mahi B Chowdhury said, “Nurul Amin Bepari was inactive in the party for the last three years. He neither resigned from the party nor became active. Shah Alam Badol was expelled from the party. So, how can they relieve us of the party posts as they are not a member of the party? And a member of the party cannot expel or relieve the president and the general secretary of the party.”

After weeks of talks and intense negotiations, the BNP and four other political parties launched the Jatiya Oikyafront on October 13, just months before the national election.

Four other parties are -- Gonoforum led by Dr Kamal Hossain, Jatiya Samajantrik Dal led by ASM Abdur Rab, Nagorik Oikya led by Mahmudur Rahman Manna and Forward Party.

“Bikalpadhara will not engage in any conspiracy to bring back the BNP to power until it [BNP] cuts its ties with the anti-liberation force [Jamaat] and agrees to bring balance of power in Jatiya Sangsad,” B Chowdhury had said that day.

Fire kills six at Rohingya

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The UN Human Rights Council has accused top Myanmar generals of genocide over the bloody campaign, allegations the country strongly denies.

But less visible are the 129,000 Rohingya confined to squalid camps further south near the capital Sittwe following an earlier bout of violence in 2012.

Hundreds were killed that year in riots between Rakhine Buddhists and the stateless minority, who were corralled into destitute camps away from their former neighbours.

The conflagration in Ohndaw Chay camp, which houses some 4,000 Rohingyas and lies 15 miles (24 kilometres) from Sittwe, started just before midnight and lasted several hours, fire department official Han Soe told AFP.

“Six people, one man and five women were killed,” he said, adding that 15 communal longhouses were also destroyed in the blaze thought to have been started in a kitchen accident.

“We were able to bring the fire under control about 1:10 am this morning and had put it out completely by around 3:00 am,” he said.

A total of 822 people were left without shelter, local media reported.

Conditions in the camps are dire and Rohingya trapped there have virtually no access to healthcare, edu-

cation and work, relying on food hand-outs from aid agencies to survive.

Access into the camps is also tightly controlled, effectively cutting their inhabitants off from the outside world and leaving their plight largely forgotten.

Fires in the camps are common because of “severe” overcrowding, according to the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

“Many camp residents have built makeshift extensions to their shelters to create more space for their families. So when a fire breaks out, it is more likely to spread quickly,” said OCHA spokesman Pierre Peron.

Hla Win, a Rohingya man from a nearby camp, told AFP that fire trucks were slow to arrive along the dilapidated roads from Sittwe and the lack of water also hampered efforts to extinguish the blaze.

“We have no ponds near the camps,” he said. “That's why the fire destroyed so much.”

Myanmar has vowed to close nearly 20 of the camps around Sittwe in the coming months.

Rights groups say the move will achieve little without ending movement restrictions or granting Rohingya a pathway to citizenship.

Turkey widens journo search

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now be gravely undermined.

Staff members of the Saudi Arabian consulate in Istanbul testified to prosecutors yesterday in a probe into Khashoggi disappearance, state-run Anadolu news agency said.

Among those who testified at the prosecutors' offices inside Istanbul's main courthouse were the consulate driver, technicians, accountants and receptionists.

FOREST SEARCH

Istanbul's Belgrade forest became a target of the investigation after police focused on the vehicles which had left the consulate on the day Khashoggi disappeared, NTV channel reported. At least one vehicle is suspected to have gone to the forest.

The forest, a vast area and sufficiently remote for even locals to regularly get lost there, is nearly 15 kilometres (over nine miles) away from the Saudi consulate.

Investigators already conducted two searches of the consulate and a nine-hour search of the consul's residence this week. The Saudi consul, Mohammed al-Otaibi, abruptly left Istanbul for Riyadh on Tuesday.

Pro-government daily Sabah yesterday published new CCTV images of some of the Saudi team arriving in Istanbul and reported that two of the men landed in the city on October 1.

Previously, local media said the 15 men arrived in Turkey on the day that Khashoggi went missing via two private planes, which then returned to Riyadh via Egypt and Dubai.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu did not reveal probe details but promised to share information in due course “in a transparent manner”.

Turkish officials suspected within hours of Khashoggi's disappearance that he had likely been killed, CNN has learned.

Intelligence officials raced to the Istanbul airport where a private Saudi plane was waiting to take off -- to try to find out whether he had been abducted or whether his body was being taken out of the country.

‘NO TAPE GIVEN’

The key potential piece of evidence in the investigation is an alleged audio tape whose existence has been reported by pro-government media. They say it proves Khashoggi was tortured and then killed.

ABC News on Thursday quoted an unnamed Turkish official saying US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo heard the

audio tape and was shown a transcript of the recording during his visit to Ankara.

But Pompeo said he had neither “seen” nor “heard” a tape and had not read a transcript during the visit to Ankara where he held talks with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Cavusoglu.

Cavusoglu yesterday also denied the claims and said it was “out of the question for Turkey to give any kind of audio tape to Pompeo or any other US official”.

Earlier Trump said he now believed Khashoggi was dead and warned of “very severe” consequences should Saudi Arabia be proven responsible.

“It certainly looks that way to me. It's very sad,” Trump said when asked if he believed that Khashoggi is no longer alive.

‘PREVENT WHITEWASH’

The New York Times reported that Saudi leaders could blame General Ahmed al-Assiri, a top intelligence official close to the crown prince.

Previously US media said Saudis were preparing a report that Khashoggi's death resulted from a botched interrogation, in a bid to limit the global backlash against Riyadh and damage to the crown prince.

As Washington seeks to avoid a long-term rupture with its ally Riyadh, Pompeo told Trump the Saudis should be given “a few more days to complete” an official probe.

But four prominent human rights and press freedom groups urged Turkey to demand a United Nations investigation to prevent a “whitewash” of the alleged crime.

The furore has also blown a huge hole in next week's Future Investment Initiative conference in Riyadh. It was meant to showcase Prince Mohammed's plans for reform but has now been hit by a stream of big name cancellations including US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

Sixty feared dead

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Rajnath Singh have also promised all possible assistance.

Leader of opposition in Punjab Harpal Singh Cheema tweeted, “My heart goes out to the bereaved family members who lost their loved one in Amritsar train accident. At this unfortunate event we stand with the family and pray for the departed soul.”

Area legislator and Local Bodies Minister Navjot Sidhu's wife Navjot Kaur Sidhu was the Chief Guest at the Dussehra event where the accident occurred, according to IANS.