

Mine mishap kills miner in Madhyapara

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A miner was killed in an underground accident at a granite mining field in Dinajpur's Parbatipur upazila on Saturday night.

The dead is Mostafizar Rahman, 30, employee of Germania-Trest Consortium (GTC). GTC is a company responsible for maintenance and production of Madhyapara Granite Mining Company Limited (MGMCL).

According to witnesses, a large piece of granite collapsed on Mostafizar around 7:00pm when he and his coworkers were working in MGMCL's mining field.

The workers of the mining field rescued Mostafizar in a critical state and brought him to the surface.

Later, he was sent to Rangpur Medical College Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries, said Javed Siddiqui, general manager of GTC.

A four-member probe committee -- headed by Abdullah Al Mamun, deputy general manager of MGMCL's underground mining operations -- was formed to investigate the accident.

Since April last year, at least three miners have been killed in the mining field.

Beaten

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"After taking him to his flat, Zahid suddenly fell sick. Later, when taken to the health complex, doctors declared him dead. He may have died of heart attack due to excessive drug addiction," the OC said.

He further said that Zahid previously had multiple drug related cases against him.

Six pieces of yaba tablets, four bottles of Phensedyl and two bottles of wine were seized from Zahid's house, he claimed.

Zahid's autopsy was conducted in Kulaura Upazila Health Complex.

Feast for cops

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headquarters.

Police stations under Rangpur and Chattogram ranges arranged the recreation programmes on January 1, said senior officials of the respective ranges.

Meanwhile, Deputy Inspector General (Admin) of Police Habibur Rahman has issued letters to all the superintendents of police in the country appreciating their roles during the election.

"I strongly believe that you have been able to perform the major responsibilities laid on you by applying your leadership skills, farsightedness and professional strategy," he wrote.

SM Ruhul Amin, DIG at the PHQ, said such programmes were arranged to reinvigorate the spirits of the policemen every time after a big event as they had to go through a tiring job during the whole period.

Huda starts

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former BNP minister, surrendered before it around 11:30am.

Huda was defeated in the December 30 election. He was a BNA candidate from Dhaka-17.

Huda's lawyer Anwarul Islam Chowdhury submitted three petitions -- one for accepting his surrender, one for giving him a first-class division and the other for providing him proper treatment in prison as per the Jail Code.

After the hearing, the judge directed the jail authorities to give Huda a first-class division and proper treatment in prison.

On November 8, 2017, the HC delivered a verdict commuting the jail term of Huda to four years from seven years in the bribery case involving Tk 2.4 crore.

In the judgment, the HC said the sentence of Huda's wife Sigma Huda will be considered served because she had earlier served jail term in the case.

The court also ordered Huda to surrender to the lower court in 45 days after the lower court receives the HC verdict.

On January 8 last year, the Supreme Court rejected Huda's petition seeking permission to file an appeal against a HC judgment without surrendering to the lower court.

On March 21, 2007, the Anti-Corruption Commission filed the case with Dhanmondi Police Station, saying that Huda, when he was the communications minister in the BNP-led government, took Tk 2.40 crore as bribe from businessman Mir Zahir Hossain at different times in exchange for awarding him five government contracts for construction work, including road renovation, worth about Tk 30 crore.

A special court on August 27, 2007, sentenced Huda to seven years' rigorous imprisonment and his wife Sigma to three years' simple imprisonment.

Sigma was charged in the case for aiding and abetting her husband in taking the bribe.

Following their appeal, the HC on March 20, 2011, acquitted the couple of the corruption charges.

On December 1, 2014, the SC's Appellate Division scrapped the acquittal and asked the HC to hold a fresh hearing on their appeal.

Ershad wants

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government to formulate a law to upgrade the post of the opposition leader to deputy prime minister. I will place the proposal in parliament. I will also speak to the Speaker [of parliament] in this regard," he said, while talking to reporters after taking oath as an MP at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury administered the oath at her office in parliament yesterday.

Ershad has been elected MP from Rangpur-3.

Twenty-two JP MPs-elect, except Ershad, took the oath as lawmakers of the 11th parliament on January 3. The JP chief could not take the oath due to illness.

After taking the oath yesterday, Ershad went to the room designated for the leader of the opposition at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

Sitting on the chair of the opposition leader, he told reporters that he was proud of taking oath as the opposition leader.

The former military ruler said he would request the government to elect the deputy speaker from the opposition MPs.

Ershad, who grabbed the state power in March 1982 by ousting the elected government of President Justice Abdus Sattar, said he would also request the government to upgrade the post of the opposition whip.

He said he would also urge the government to appoint more opposition MPs as chiefs of different parliamentary standing committees.

"We want to play the role of a strong opposition party in parliament. We will play our role following the rules of procedure in parliament. We will not boycott the parliament like the previous opposition parties," he said.

JP Secretary General Moshir Rahman Ranga told reporters that Ershad would be the first male in the last 27 to act as the leader of the opposition.

Just a day after the JP Parliamentary Party decided to join the Awami League-led grand alliance government, Ershad on January 4 came up with a

completely opposite decision.

The JP chairman in a statement announced that his party would be the main opposition in parliament with no representation in the new cabinet.

Ershad, who was forced to step down from the president post following a mass movement in December 1990, also announced that he would act as the leader of the opposition and his younger brother and JP co-chairman GM Quader would be the deputy leader of the opposition.

Talking to this newspaper, several JP lawmakers termed Ershad's decision funny and arbitrary.

Earlier on January 3, JP Parliamentary Party unanimously decided that since JP contested the election under the banner of the AL-led grand alliance, they would join the government.

Sources at the Parliament Secretariat said Speaker Shirin Sharmin has yet to take measures to recognise Ershad as the opposition leader.

Ershad's wife, Raushan Ershad, was the leader of the opposition in the 10th parliament.

In the December 30 polls, the AL-led grand alliance secured 288 seats, JP, a key component of the alliance, bagged 22.

The BNP-led Jatiya Oikyafront managed to win only seven seats, while independent candidates got three.

The election in Gaibandha-3 was rescheduled for January 27 following the death of a candidate, and repolling will take place at three centres in Brahmanbaria-2 on January 9.

The JP became the main opposition in the 10th parliament formed after the 2014 election, which was boycotted by the BNP-led alliance.

The JP in that election won 34 seats and its senior leader Raushan Ershad was recognised as the leader of the opposition. Three JP MPs were also made ministers.

Their dual role has been criticised. The party could not play its due role as the main opposition in parliament in the last five years.

RMG workers

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Sherpur, Gazipur, Manikganj, Tangail, Kishoreganj and Jamalpur districts also suffered because of the roadblock.

Motiur Rahman, who returned to Dhaka after performing Umrah, said he and 27 of his friends were stuck in Uttara for four hours. They were going to their ancestral home at Bhaluka from the airport.

The workers said the monthly wage in the seventh grade increased to Tk 8,000 from Tk 5,300 as per the latest gazette published by the government last year. But, the salary of the workers in other grades did not increase at the same rate.

The salary hike for the entry-level workers was more than that of their senior operators, who have been working for more than seven to eight years. The new wage has been effective from December 1. Major disparity in the salary hike was noticed in the third and fourth grades as their salaries were not raised like that of entry-level workers.

In most of the grades, other than the seventh, only Tk 500 was raised in the new salary structure, whereas an entry-level worker's salary had increased by Tk 2,700 at one go.

"The management of my factory did not increase my basic. They only increased house rent and medical allowance. They also did not increase the five percent annual increment either," said Mohammad Joynal, a sewing operator at a garment factory in Uttara.

As per the new wage structure, his salary is now Tk 9,200, up from more than Tk 7,000. According to Joynal's calculation, his salary should have been Tk 10,500.

Monowara Begum, Rozina Khatun and many other workers echoed the same views.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Siddiqui Rahman, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said factory owners had been implementing the new salary structure as per the government gazette.

"The salary has been hiked following the same formula that was previously followed," he said.

"Still, if any worker feels their salary has not been hiked following the gazette, they can discuss it with the factory management for a solution," Rahman said, adding that after the publication of the gazette, BGMEA leaders held several meetings with factory owners and labour leaders apprehending labour unrest.

Last month, a tripartite committee of government representatives, BGMEA leaders and workers' leaders decided to resolve any crisis through discussion, he said.

The factory owners, during a meet-

ing on Thursday, decided to implement the new salary structure following the gazette, Rahman said.

Earlier in January last year, the government formed the wage board for 4.4 million garment workers. It recommended the minimum wage for the garment workers at Tk 8,000 from Tk 5,300 in September last year.

The board also recommended the salaries of other six grades including transport, meal, house rent and other allowances.

The minimum wage was chronologically fixed at Tk 5,300 in 2013, up from Tk 3,000 in 2010, Tk 1,662.5 in 2006, Tk 940 in 1994 and Tk 627 in 1985.

AL infighting

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the three factions led by Abdalpur union unit AL General Secretary Golam Mostafa, the local union parishad Chairman Ali Haider Shwapan and local AL activist Mainuddin.

Recently, Mainuddin and Shwapan, who were relatives, joined hands in a bid to strengthen their power and weaken the influence of Golam, intensifying tension in the area.

Amid such a situation, Golam, with hundreds of his followers, attempted to launch an attack on his opponents around 7:30am. This resulted in chases and counter-chases between the two rival groups as the opposition men had also taken position being informed about the plot in advance.

At one point, Golam's men caught Mainuddin, who fell behind during a chase, and stabbed him indiscriminately, said Nasir Uddin, officer-in-charge of Kushtia Model Police Station.

Mainuddin was taken to Kushtia General Hospital where the duty doctors declared him dead around 9:30am, the OC added.

Contacted, SM Tanvir Arafat, superintendent of police in Kushtia, said no further clash occurred and additional police forces were deployed in the areas.

No case was filed in this connection until filing of this report around 8:00pm.

In Nature, members of a rival faction chopped and cut off a leg of an AL man at Bamihal area of Singra upazila around noon.

The victim, Morshedul Islam, 35, was the acting president of Bamihal Union AL.

A feud was going on between local AL activist Afzal Hossain and Morshedul over establishing supremacy in the area, said Monirul Islam, OC of Singra Police Station.

Some seven to eight supporters of Afzal attacked on Morshedul with sharp weapons, stabbed him and cut off his left leg while he was taking tea at a tea stall.

Morshedul was taken to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital where he is undergoing treatment, said Monirul.

Additional policemen were deployed in the area to avoid further violence.

No case was filed in this connection.

Parliament

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It further showed that 61 percent of the next parliament is made up of businessmen and their number in the Jatiya Sangsad was increasing.

Additionally, 13 percent are lawyers, five percent servicemen, four percent farmers and the rest belonged to different professions.

It is a dangerous sign that the county's politics is going into the hands of businessmen and wealthy people, Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar said at the programme.

Political analysts have said the major political parties' dependency on businessmen had effectively turned the politics into a business.

Lawyers, businessmen and farmers were the three most common occupations of the lawmakers elected to the country's first parliament in 1973.

Of the MPs in that parliament, 31 percent were lawyers and only 18 percent were businessmen.

However, in the fifth parliament, constituted through the election of 1991, businessmen outnumbered lawyers, with 38 percent being businessmen and 15 percent lawyers.

After the 2008 polls, 57 percent of the lawmakers elected were businessmen, which rose to 59 percent by 2014.

On a more positive note, Badiul Alam said it was a good sign that educated and taxpaying citizens were being elected as MPs.

The Shujan report shows that 43 percent of the new MPs hold post graduate degrees, 38 percent hold graduate degrees, 12 percent have passed the HSC exams and three percent were SSC graduates.

Only four percent did not pass the SSC exam.

It also said that seven percent of the lawmakers were now facing at least one case, while 45 percent had cases filed against them in the past.

Gruesome

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The Flayed Lord, or Xipe Tótec, was linked with fertility, agricultural cycles and war, according to a statement from Mexican authorities.

A dig at Popoloca Indian ruins known as Ndachjian--Tehuacán in Puebla state, central Mexico, revealed two skulls and a torso from ancient statues of the deity.

A team from the National Institute of Anthropology and History also found two sacrificial altars, which would have been used as part of ceremonies in which priests skinned their victims before covering themselves in it as a sign of regeneration.

These occasions were an important part of ancient Mexican culture and were known as Tlacaxipehualiztli, which means "put on the skin of the flayed" in the Náhuatl language.

The layout of the site and the discovery of the sculptures matches with the description of the ceremonies in documentary sources, which suggest that victims were killed on one altar and skinned on the other.

On one sculpture, an extra right hand hanging backwards from the left arm of the torso symbolizes the skin of the victim that was left hanging after the ritual flaying, say the archaeologists.

30 Assam

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who had migrated to India from the three countries until December 31, 2014, allegedly due to religious persecution.

Most indigenous groups in North Eastern India believe that the bill, if passed, would reduce them to minorities.

"This bill is unacceptable, and the call for shutdown is to let the central government know that they cannot come out with a law that threatens the existence of the Assamese and other indigenous people in the North East," said Dipankar Kumar Nath, president of All Assam Students' Union.

Earlier on December 31, the BJP-dominated joint parliamentary committee on the bill rejected all amendments to its draft that were suggested by the opposition congress and other parties.

The committee is expected to table its recommendations for the bill in parliament tomorrow.

On Saturday, the Citizens' Forum against Citizenship (Amendment) Bill launched a campaign to mobilise support against the bill's passage.

Its members appealed to editors of all dailies in Assam to leave their editorial columns blank and asked television channels to run the upper or lower ticker black tomorrow to protest against the bill.

Harekrishna Deka, the forum's spokesperson and Assam's former director general of police, said today would be observed as "dhikkar diwas" (condemnation day) across the state.

Addressing a rally in Silchar of Assam's Barak Valley region, which has a majority Bangla-speaking population, Modi said his government would try its best to have the proposed law passed in the winter session of parliament, which is due to end on January 8.

A last journey

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part in the prayers for his departed soul.

The body of Ashraf, adorned with the national flag and flowers, was given the "Guard of Honour" after the namaz-e-janaza, reports BSS.

"Syed Ashraf is a life without death. Syed Ashraf is the name of emotion and feelings of millions of people," said Mahbubul Alam Hanif, AL joint secretary general, while reading out a memorandum.

At the namaz-e-janaza held at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday morning, Hanif further said that he had no apt words to bid farewell to Syed Ashraf.

"All around us are only sorrow, speechlessness and void."

Ashraf's younger brother Syed Manzurul Islam requested all to forgive Ashraf if he made any mistakes in his lifetime and pledged repaying any loan, if he was indebted to anybody.

Ashraf's body was then taken to the historic Sholakia Eidgah Maidan of Kishoreganj by helicopter, from where he was elected an MP. There, his second namaz-e-janaza was held as the field was thronged with people numbering in lakhs.

Abdul Halim, 65, said he attended many funerals, but has never seen a crowd this big -- something that proves the peoples' love for the leader. Many were seen praying for the departed soul by the roadside, some were on rooftops and even on the bridges -- a rare scene observed by locals.

"He was a very powerful man. He could make a lot of money, but he did not. People highly respected him because of his honesty. We all should take lessons from him," said Maulana Anwar Shah, khatib of Shaheedi Mosque at Sholakia Eidgah Maidan.

"I could not get close to his coffin, but I am glad to have attended the janaza of this so powerful yet honest person," said Naimul Islam, a well-wisher who traveled from Sunamganj to Sholakia maidan in Kishoreganj.

Ashraf's body was then taken to Mymensingh Anjuman Eidgah Maidan which also saw thousands of people for his third janaza. He was given a Guard of Honour there as well.

Born and educated in Mymensingh, Ashraf was the general secretary of Bangladesh Chhatra League's greater Mymensingh unit from 1968 to 1972. He also served as the assistant publicity secretary of the BCL central committee.

On November 3, 1975, his father Syed Nazrul Islam and three other national leaders were brutally killed inside Dhaka Central Jail. After the

incident, Syed Ashraf went to London and organised the Bangladesh Awami League in the UK.

He came back home in 1996 and was elected a member of parliament. He served as the state minister for civil aviation and tourism from 1996-2001. He was also elected a parliament member in 2001 and became a member of the parliamentary standing committee on foreign affairs.

In 2008, Syed Ashraf was again elected a lawmaker and appointed the minister for local government, rural development and cooperatives. He took over the charge as minister for public administration on July 16, 2015.

In the 11th parliamentary election on December 30 last, he was again elected but this time in absentia on account of his illness.

Ashraf was also engaged in various social welfare activities.

Prof Shafiqul Islam, president of the BNP's Mymensingh unit, said, "As a senior, I knew Ashraf since his boyhood. He was a boy of good manners and was a great soul."

"His amicable and soft behaviour charmed us. We never found any dishonest thoughts in him," said Fazlur Rahman, former president of Mymensingh BCL after the third namaz-e-janaza.

Here lies a man not scared to die; may his soul rest in peace.

Correspondents from Mymensingh, Kishoreganj contributed to this report.

2 British soldiers injured in Syria by IS missile

AFP, Beirut

Two British soldiers were wounded Saturday in eastern Syria by a missile fired by the Islamic State group, an NGO said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the pair were part of the international anti-jihadist coalition, led by the United States.

"The two British soldiers were transported by helicopter to receive medical care," the Observatory's director Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP.

A Kurdish fighter from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) died in the attack in the village of Al-Shaafa in Deir Ezzor province, one of the last pockets of territory still controlled by IS in the Euphrates River valley.

Hurrah for hilsa

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Bangladesh in 2017 after Jamdani sari.

Bangladeshi scientists working in three continents joined hands and decoded the genome of Padma hilsa, paving the way for knowing the unknown aspects of its life, including the ability to survive in sea and fresh water.

They now consider it as a matter of pride to have their research published in a world renowned journal as Bangladesh is the first among the countries working on hilsa genome to have this recognition.

Led by Prof Haseena Khan of Dhaka University, the research team also includes Prof M Niamul Naser of DU zoology department, and Prof Mohammad Riazul Islam and young researchers Avizit Das, Oly Ahmed, Tasnim Ehsan and Rifath Nehleen of biochemistry and molecular biology department at DU.

Dr Peter Ianakiev, a polish national, also the neighbour of Dr Mong in the US, facilitated the genome sequencing at his research organisation for free.

The bioinformatics analysis of the huge data was done by AKM Abdul Baten, a Bangladesh-origin bioinformatician who used to work at the Southern Cross University in Australia at the time.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Prof Haseena said Bangladesh got this recognition through different phases and process.

They first submitted their research data to the website of GenBank sequence database and the GenBank verified all the information.

"After their verification, we submitted the paper to BMC in October last year and they also took time to check and re-check the information. On December 22, they contacted us and informed that they have published our research," Prof Haseena said.

BioMed Central published the article titled "Genome of *Tenualosa ilisha* from the river Padma, Bangladesh".

As the journal has open access, anyone can now read or know about this research of Bangladesh, the professor said, adding that it will also help the researchers who will work on hilsa in future.

Prof M Niamul, who has long researched hilsa, said it is a proud recognition for Bangladesh.

"Different countries like India, Myanmar, China, and Malaysia are working on the genome sequence of hilsa but the Bangladesh's research got the first recognition. Thus Bangladesh moved a step forward in hilsa

research," he added.

The researchers believe this genome sequencing will help unlock the mysteries of Padma hilsa -- what makes it taste better than sea hilsa, why does this silvery fish come to the river from the sea for spawning and then go back to the sea and how do they survive in both conditions.

The genome contains all the hereditary information of any living being encoded in the molecules of deoxyribonucleic acid or DNA. Genome sequencing, therefore, means reading all the secrets of the life of a particular species written in its DNA.

The project began on September 10, 2017 and the samples were collected by September 22.

The researchers collected hilsa samples from seven different habitats - deep sea, Meghna estuary, Padma-Meghna estuary, Jamuna, Brahmaputra, upper Padma and Hakaluki Haor.

Dr Mong, a Bangladesh-origin biotechnologist based in the US, wrote in Facebook page that they have decoded the genome sequence of hilsa -- both from sweet water and sea water -- profiling their gene expression so that it may unearth how hilsa can survive in both the conditions.

Prof Haseena said their initial data analysis revealed that there are 31,295 genes in Padma hilsa's genome.

After a year-long communications, detailed planning and coordination among the scientists and weeks of work using powerful computers to interpret a