

40-50 unnamed people sued

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Police last night filed a case against 40 to 50 unidentified assailants with Rangamati's Baghaichhari Police Station in connection with Monday's killings.

Seven people, including two polling officials and four Ansar men, were shot dead in Baghaichhari on Monday during the second phase of upazila polls.

Akther Hossain, sub-inspector of the police station, filed the case, officers told The Daily Star.

Besides, a seven-member probe committee led by Additional Secretary Dipak Chakrabarty is supposed to visit the scene today.

Meanwhile, Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti yesterday, protested what it said was an "attempt to link them" with the killings by a certain quarter and stated that the organisation had nothing to do with the crimes.

"Such a statement will obstruct proper investigation..." it said in a press release.

The situation in the area still remained tense two days after the killings. A weekly haat (market) in Baghaichhari town saw fewer than usual number of customers yesterday.

Rangamati Awami League held a rally in the district town demanding action against the killers.

Baghaichhari Primary Teachers Association formed a human chain demanding justice for the two primary school teachers killed on Monday.

NO CASE IN BILAICHHARI
Meanwhile, no case was filed over the killing of Bilaichhari AL chief on Tuesday, said Parvez Ali, officer-in-charge of Bilaichhari Police Station.

A two-day long blockade by local AL ended yesterday without any incident.

On Tuesday, Suresh Kanti Tanchangya, AL president in the upazila, was gunned down, less than 24 hours into Monday's killings.

HAPPINESS INDEX

Bangladesh 10 notches down

Ranks 125th

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh has slipped 10 notches in the Happiness Index but it is still ahead of India, Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

According to World Happiness Report 2019 released yesterday coinciding with the United Nations' International Day of Happiness, Bangladesh placed 125 among 156 countries while Sri Lanka and India are at 130th and 140th positions respectively.

Pakistan was ranked 67th while Bhutan 95th and Nepal 100th in the Happiness Index.

In last year's index, Bangladesh was the 115th happiest country.

The report ranks countries on six key variables that support well-being: income, freedom, trust, healthy life expectancy, social support and generosity. The report was published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network for the UN.

Finland is the world's happiest country for the second straight year followed by Denmark, Norway, Iceland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, New Zealand, Canada and Austria. They are followed by Australia, Costa Rica and Israel.

People in South Sudan are the unhappiest with their lives, according to the survey, followed by Central African Republic (155), Afghanistan (154), Tanzania (153) and Rwanda (152).

The rankings of the world's happiest countries came from an analysis of data from surveys in 156 countries taken from 2016 to 2018.

Since 2013, the United Nations has been celebrating the International Day of Happiness on March 20 as a way to recognise the importance of happiness in the lives of people around the world.

Forest land lost

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But now it seems unlikely the government would be able to do that.

Being worried about failing to meet the SDG, the ministry wrote to the Prime Minister's Office and the cabinet secretary last year and urged authorities concerned to stop acquiring forest land.

Citing the constitution, the letter said it was mandatory for the state to conserve the forest, its biodiversity, wildlife and environment for the next generation.

Furthermore, the official data of the total forest area is believed to be heavily inflated as experts said it includes deforested areas, land given to different government agencies and development projects, urbanised land and illegal occupation.

Once forest land has been given to government agencies or for development projects, the ministry does not deduct the area from its total forest area, they said.

The ministry also has a curious definition of what is a forest. According to a conservator of forests in Chattogram, two- to five- metre tall trees covering at least 1.24 acres are called forests. This allows a lot of land to be considered forests.

FORESTATION TO DEFORESTATION
Over the years, the DoF has talked about success in creating coastal forests that act as natural barrier to tidal surges, cyclones, and floods.

But this very achievement is being undermined as the government has started using forests for development projects.

At least 22 projects taken up by the government and deemed important for the nation are on forest land between Mirsharai of Chattogram and Teknaf of Cox's Bazar, according to documents obtained by this paper.

Bangladesh Economic Zone Authority (BEZA), Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), Bangladesh Tourism Board, Bangladesh Railway, Power Development Board, Chattogram Development Authority and Water Development Board have projects on a special economic zone, a tunnel, a power station, an LNG terminal, tourist destinations, an economic zone, a road, a rail line to Cox's Bazar and an embankment, according to the data of the DoF.

For instance, the Mirsharai mangrove forest is three kilometres wide and 20km long and is home to about 5,000 chitals, monitor lizards, crabs, birds and aquatic life.

The dense mangrove forest was created by the coastal division in 1976 and it asked the ministry to recognise 22,500 acres of the forest as reserved forest.

But now, most of the forest has been leased out to BEZA.

The BPC would set up an oil refinery and sought 190 acres of a reserve forest in Moheshkhali -- the nation's sole hilly island.

Moheshkhali has 19,768 acres of hilly forest and 12,355 acres of mangrove forest and is home to 70 species of trees and shrubs, 19 species of mammals, eight types of reptiles, and 27 species of birds.

BEZA also plans to develop a special economic zone in Moheshkhali of Cox's Bazar where they would need another 13,000 acres, most of which is expected to be forest land.

Paban Chowdhury, chairman of BEZA, told The Daily Star that they had plans to plant two millions saplings along the Mirsharai coastal belt in a bid to recover the loss rendered by development work.

He said they would plant more trees than they razed in the area.

"Apart from this, we prepared a green economic zone guideline with a taskforce and technical committee to implement the guideline. Every economic zone will follow the guideline. We can't rule out the concern of environment. Without conservation of nature, the development will not be sustainable," he said.

Al Amin, professor of Institute of Forest and Environmental Science, told The Daily Star that he feared the coastal belt was being exposed to natural calamities.

BEZA should follow the PM's instruction to set up a green belt along the coastal belt, he said.

Al Amin also highlighted new theories like accommodated plan where forest land and development could be merged in a balanced way.

"We need development but that should not come at the cost of our biodiversity and forests. We need coordinated planning comprising of [input from] forest scientists and industrial planners to accelerate the development while simultaneously protecting the forest land as much as we can."

Jahir Uddin Ahmed, deputy chief conservator of forest, told The Daily Star that they were planning a massive forestation along the coastal belt.

"We have already completed a study ranging from Sundarban to Teknaf, discovering the scope for the forestation of 70,000 hectares. A green belt will be created along the coastal area," he added.

He observed that the coastal forest was not only a natural barrier for 30 million coastal people; it also served as sources of livelihood for them.

Less than 15pc votes cast

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Shairakandi, Dhunat and Shahjahanpur of Bogura, Mandha of Pabna, Fatikchhari of Chattogram, Ullipur of Kurigram and Punthia of Rajshahi.

EC data shows voter turnout was less than 30 percent during the second phase of the elections held in 19 upazilas.

It also shows that voter turnout in the first two phases was the lowest since 2009.

The voter turnout in the 2009 upazila polls was 70.57 percent, it fell to 61.23 percent in 2014, and declined further down to 43.31 percent in the first phase of the upazila election and 41.25 percent during the second phase.

EC sources said they calculated the voter turnout excluding the seven upazilas of Rangamati as the results of those were yet to reach the commission.

Election Commissioner Rafiqul Islam attributed the low voter turnout to the absence of some registered political parties in the elections.

"So the election became less competitive and participation of voters became less than in previous elections," he said at a meeting with law enforcement agencies and administration officials in Barishal Circuit House yesterday.

Meanwhile, local government expert Professor Tofail Ahmed and Election watchdog Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar both cast doubt on the EC voter turnout information on the first two phases of upazila elections.

"Turnout percentage is not dependable, somehow it is managed" claimed Tofail Ahmed.

"Voters are totally indifferent to voting. They do not have any expectation from the candidates. Rather they have something to lose in terms of security," Tofail told The Daily Star.

"Only party loyalists cast their votes."

Similarly, Badiul Alam Majumdar termed the EC turnout figures "questionable".

"We have seen evidence of voter-less election, as no voter came to vote," he claimed.

He also called the election "one-sided" as the people already considered its results "certain".

"Voters have become disinterested because they were not sure whether casting of their votes will make any difference," he said, adding that voters feared they would not be able to cast their votes if they did turn up at the centres.

"Most importantly they [voters] lost faith in the EC" he said.

This year election to 480 upazilas will take place in five phases.

The BNP; Left Democratic Alliance, a combine of eight left-leaning parties; Islami Andolan Bangladesh; Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan and Bangladesh Muslim League have boycotted the election.

They said they boycotted the polls as they did not see any prospect of a free and fair election.

The BNP alleged that the EC was controlled by the government and that's why it might stage "another farce" over the polls like it did with the national election won by the ruling Awami League.

As per Article 59 of the Constitution, the Upazila Parishads are designated to perform significant functions relating to administration and the work of public officers, maintenance of public order, the preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development.

For the first time in Bangladesh's history, political parties are nominating aspirants for upazila council, which includes a chairman, a vice-chairman and a female vice-chairman.

"There is a desire to show support for the Muslim community as they return to mosques on Friday," she said.

The bullet-ridden Al Noor mosque, where more than 40 people died, was being cleaned and repaired for Friday prayers.

Near the mosque, members of rival gangs did a Maori haka, a powerful indigenous ceremonial performance, and a crowd of people sung New Zealand's national anthem as the sun set.

The Australian National Imams Council has called on Imams to dedicate

this Friday's Khutbah (sermon) to the Christchurch mosque mass shooting.

'UNITED FRONT'
Ardern, who has vowed to tighten New Zealand's lax gun ownership laws, said yesterday the horrific events in Christchurch showed the need for a global approach to confront the dangers posed by extremists' use of social media.

"There is an argument there to be made for us to take a united front on what is a global issue," she said.

"This is not just an issue for New Zealand, the fact that social media

Europe gets

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above water to underwater through the building ... The big window exposes the underwater not like an aquarium, it's the real thing," Snohetta's founder Kjetil Traedal Thorsen told Reuters.

Entering Under initially feels like going into a sauna, as wooden planks cover its upper section, but an eight-metre flight of stairs leads down to a large dining area that sits about 40 guests, walled by a gigantic transparent window to the ocean.

Traedal Thorsen said the construction can cope with very harsh weather and is shaped in such a way that it can withstand what he called "the wave of the century".

The restaurant is laid out so there are minimal reflections in the glass wall, which fills the room with natural light during the day, filtered by the greenish colour of the water.

A full 18-course meal, based on local ingredients and seafood, can cost up to 3,700 crowns (\$430) per person including drinks.

"The goal is to get 50 percent of the guests who eat there to spend the night in the hotel as well... We expect around 12,000 people eating dinner every year," said Gaute Ubostad, one of two brothers who own the restaurant and a nearby hotel.

Under opened yesterday for friends and family of the owners and the first paying guests will be able to visit from early April.

There are only a handful of underwater restaurants around the world, mainly found in tropical waters like the Maldives in the Indian Ocean.

Court issues

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After hearing, the court asked the Shabbagh OC to submit a report after conducting an investigation.

In the complaint, Siddique alleged that Khaleda, at a programme on December 31, 2016, said Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman wanted to be the prime minister of undivided Pakistan rather than leading Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan) to independence.

She further alleged that the Awami League government, in the name of development, looted a large amount of money by delaying the work of flyovers and the Padma Bridge.

The BNP chief made the comments at the 38th founding anniversary of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh in Dhaka.

Such remarks had defamed the image of Bangabandhu as well as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the plaintiff said.

He appealed to the court to issue an arrest warrant against the BNP chief.

Another Dhaka court adjourned until April 15 the hearing on charge framing against Khaleda in connection with two cases filed for undermining the national flag and celebrating her fake birthday on every August 15.

Trump ramps up claims of Big Tech bias

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump stepped up claims of political bias by Big Tech firms Tuesday in a fresh assault on Silicon Valley after one of his key congressional allies sued Twitter claiming it discriminates against conservatives.

The latest diatribe from the president comes with online platforms facing heightened scrutiny on how they filter and amplify content -- but with the industry fiercely defending itself against claims of political bias.

Trump renewed his attacks after retweeting news of a lawsuit filed by Republican Representative Devin Nunes seeking \$250 million in damages from Twitter.

"Facebook, Google and Twitter, not to mention the Corrupt Media, are sooo on the side of the Radical Left Democrats," Trump tweeted.

Hours later, he went further when asked about social media at a joint press briefing with his Brazilian counterpart Jair Bolsonaro.

platforms have been used to spread violence (and) material that incites violence."

New Zealand yesterday charged a second person with sharing the gruesome livestream video of the deadly attack, reported AFP.

Philip Apps, 44, who was arrested the day before, was charged with two counts of distributing objectionable material under the Films Act and was remanded in custody after appearing in Christchurch District Court.

A teenager appeared in court earlier this week on the same charge.

Karadzic gets life

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in Europe since World War II.

Judges at the original trial "underestimated the extreme gravity of Karadzic's responsibility for the most grave crimes committed during the period of conflict, noted for their sheer scale and systematic cruelty", head judge Vagn Joensen said.

The panel of appeals judges therefore "imposes a sentence of life imprisonment", he said.

Relatives of the victims had called for a life sentence.

"If he is not given a life sentence, the tribunal will have committed genocide against justice," Munira Subasic of the Mothers of Srebrenica victims' association told reporters ahead of the verdict, where a small group of relatives held banners and photos of the dead outside the tribunal.

Karadzic, who has been in detention for 11 years, was "calm" ahead of the verdict, the Belgrade daily Vecernje Novosti quoted his brother Luka as saying.

The paper also published several cryptic "aphorisms" written by Radovan Karadzic including one which said: "A man who swallows his honour for breakfast may have something for dinner."

'POLITICAL TRIAL'
A former psychiatrist and amateur poet turned brutal political leader, Karadzic was arrested in 2008 in Belgrade after nearly 13 years on the run during which he posed as a new age healer called Dragan Dabic.

In 2016, Karadzic was found guilty on 10 counts including orchestrating a nearly four-year siege of the Bosnian capital Sarajevo, where more than 10,000 people died in a campaign of sniping and shelling, according to prosecutors.

He was also found guilty of genocide in Srebrenica, where Bosnian Serb troops slaughtered more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys in eastern Bosnia, which was supposed to be under UN protection, and buried their bodies in mass graves.

Prosecutors said Karadzic and others including his military alter-ego, former Bosnian Serb army commander Ratko Mladic, wanted to "permanently remove Muslims and Croats" from territory claimed by

Bosnian Serbs at the time.

Besppectacle and with his trademark mane of white hair swept back from his face, Karadzic said nothing as the verdict was read out, but shortly afterwards looked to the public gallery and gave a small smile.

Appeals judges repeatedly dismissed Karadzic's claims that he was not aware of orders by Bosnian Serb forces to eliminate Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica, and to indiscriminately target civilians in Sarajevo.

They rejected Karadzic's claims that he did not know a military directive he drafted and signed on the fate of Srebrenica called for Bosnian Serb forces to create an "unbearable situation with no hope of further survival for inhabitants.

Karadzic's case still bitterly divide the country he helped drive to war, with widows of Srebrenica hoping he dies in prison even as Bosnian Serbs have honoured him with a university dorm in his name.

'HANDFUL OF BONES'
Families of the victims of Srebrenica were watching the verdict at the Women of Srebrenica association building in the town of Tuzla.

Hajrija Oric, 63, who arrived at the Srebrenica memorial centre to watch the verdict showed AFP photos on her mobile phone of her son 17-year-old son Elvir and husband Sahin who were both killed in the massacre.

Their remains were found years later and buried.

"My hope.. is that (Karadzic) is sentenced to life," she said ahead of the verdict.

"All I found was a handful of bones and head. I would give everything, I would give my eyes if I could bring them back but it cannot happen."

The case also comes at a crucial time for international courts as they come under attack from quarters including the administration of US President Donald Trump, and reel from a series of mistrials.

Ex-military chief Mladic, 76, dubbed the "Butcher of Bosnia", is currently appealing a life sentence on similar charges.

Former Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic, Karadzic's long-time patron during the war, was on trial in The Hague until his death in 2006.

13 killed in road

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The bodies were kept in police custody, said the OC, adding that a case would be filed in this connection.

The injured were admitted to different nearby hospitals.

Meanwhile in Chattogram, two people were killed in separate train accidents in Sadar and Sitakunda upazilas.

None of the victims could be identified, police said.

Jakir Hossain, in-charge of Sholoshahar Station Railway Police Outpost, said a 13-year-old boy was sleeping on the door of a running Dobazari-bound local train and suddenly fell off around 11:30am in Jhaowtola area of Sadar upazila.

He died on the spot, the IC added.

Besides, another unknown person, aged around 27, was found critically injured near the rail tracks in Kadam Rasul area of Sitakunda upazila after he was hit by a train around 12:30am.

Locals rushed him to Chittagong Medical College Hospital where doctors later declared him dead, police said.

In Gaibandha, a school girl was killed as a truck rammed her bicycle in Chhatiantola bazar area on Gaibandha-Sundarganj highway of Sundarganj upazila yesterday afternoon. Her pillion rider sustained severe injuries.

The dead is Sumi Akhter, 15, a ninth grader at Karunamaye Girls High School, and the injured is Shahnaz Akhter, a ninth grader at Katgora High School.

SM Abdur Sobhan, officer-in-charge of Sundarganj Police Station, said the body was handed over to family members following legal procedures and the injured was sent to Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

In a similar accident, a sixth grader student in Jashore lost her right leg yesterday.

The sixth grader Nipa Khatun and her schoolmates became victims of a

road accident as a pickup van rammed into their school van in Jashore's Sharsha upazila, said witnesses.

According to them, doctors dismembered the right leg of Nipa after she was rushed to a local hospital.

Two other students -- Rina Khatun, 12, and Saleha Khatun, 13 -- were also injured in the accident.

Mashiur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Sharsha Police Station, said agitated people set the pickup van on fire and blocked Benapole-Jashore highway following the accident.

Elsewhere, three people were killed and 20 others injured in two separate accidents in Natore on Tuesday.

The dead are Rony Ahmed, 17, Zorip Sheikh, 38, and Saidur Rahman, 45.

According to witnesses, a pickup van overturned besides a road at Gurudaspur upazila around 8:00pm on Tuesday, leaving Rony and Zorip dead on the spot and 20 others injured in Gurudaspur upazila of the district.

In a separate incident, a truck rammed into a motorbike near Gol-e-Afraz Government College in Singur municipality area around 5:00pm on Tuesday, leaving the motorbike rider Saidur injured.

Later, the victim was rushed to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries.

In Gopalganj, three people were killed as their motorbike was hit by a train at Bhennabari level crossing in Sadar upazila around 11:40pm on Tuesday.

The dead are Raju Shikdar, 25, Tanvir Chowdhury Rocky, 19, and Lebu Mollah, 25.

A local train from Rajshahi hit the motorbike at night while the motorcyclists were trying to cross the level crossing, police said quoting witnesses, adding that all the victims died on the spot.

Our Benapole, Faridpur, Gaibandha, Natore, and Pabna correspondents contributed to this report.

Cyclone Trevor causes Australia power outages, set to strengthen

AFP, Cairns

A powerful tropical cyclone that lashed the northeast coast of Australia, closing ports and causing power outages, is expected to strengthen further Wednesday.

Tropical Cyclone Trevor was a category 3 system -- with winds gusting at 165 kilometres (100 miles) per hour -- when it made landfall on the Cape York peninsula Tuesday evening, hitting small isolated communities.

The Bureau of Meteorology said it is now tracking slowly west out of the Gulf of Carpentaria and will intensify

to a category 4 system by the weekend before making landfall again.

Queensland energy provider Ergon Energy say they are ready to fly crews in to help restore power with all residents in Lockhart River and Coen now in darkness following the event.

Spokesperson Emma Oliveri told AFP local police have reported multiple lines are down across the region.

"A total of 460 people have lost power and while those numbers may not seem high, every person in the communities of Lockhart River, Coen and close to half of Aurukun are in darkness," she said.

Funerals of NZ victims

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taqiyah (skullcap), others in shalwar kameez (long tunic and trousers), while women wore hijabs and scarfs.

Heavily armed police stood watch with flowers tucked in their revolver holsters and attached to their high powered rifles.

Six victims were buried yesterday, with more expected during the week.

Ardern said this coming Friday's call to prayers for Muslims in New Zealand will be broadcast nationally and there will be a two minute silence on Friday.