

Six cops sued for extortion of Tk 15 lakh

Ctg businessman says they threatened him with crossfire; 3 others also made accused

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A businessman yesterday filed a case against nine people, including six policemen of Chattogram Metropolitan Police, on charges of extorting Tk 15 lakh from him last year.

Nurul Absar, 40, of Chattogram's Patenga area, lodged the case with the court of Metropolitan Senior Special Judge Akbar Hossain Mridha, alleging that the policemen threatened to implicate him in a yaba case or kill him in crossfire.

The accused are: Abul Kashem Bhuiyan, former officer-in-charge of Patenga Police Station, Sub-Inspector Pranay Prakash, SI Abdul Momin, Assistant SI Tarun Kanti Sharma, ASI Kamruzzaman, ASI Mihir of the police station, and police informants

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MARCH 18 UZ ELECTION Video shows AL candidate assaulted polls official

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An Awami League chairman candidate punched on the face of an on-duty presiding officer during the March 18 upazila election in Moulvibazar's Kamalganj, according to a video clip obtained by Deutsche Welle.

The clip, captured with a mobile phone, shows Rafiqur Rahman assaulting Md Ifzalur Rahman Chowdhury inside a polling centre.

At the beginning of the 29-second clip, Ifzalur is seen sitting in a chair, talking to someone over a mobile phone. An angry Rafiqur goes near him and repeatedly asks him to hang up the call.

Rafiqur then punches on Ifzalur's face and takes away the phone, shows the clip available on DW's Bangla service website.

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No complaint, says Mro girl

Her public comments come after her photos with UZ chairman go viral on social media

STAR REPORT

Runpau Mro, whose photos with Alikadam Upazila Chairman Md Abul Kalam went viral on social media, yesterday clarified that she had no allegations to make against the chairman.

Responding to a query on whether Kalam had made non-consensual physical contact with her, she replied in the negative.

Runpau made the remarks at a press conference held at Kalam's residence yesterday afternoon, reports our Bandarban correspondent.

Her elder brother Men Rung Mro also said that their family had no allegations to make against the newly-elected chairman.

The press conference was held following uproar from a cross-section

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'Robber' killed in 'gunfight' with Rab

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A suspected robber was killed allegedly in a "gunfight" with Rab members in Banshkhalia upazila of Chattogram early yesterday.

The dead, Abu Taleb, 35, was a resident of Chakaria upazila in Cox's Bazar. Major Mehedi Hasan, Deputy Director of Rab-7 told The Daily Star the "gunfight" took place at Chhoto Chonua area of Banshkhalia upazila at around 4:00am.

"Acting on a tip-off, a patrol team of Rab raided the area where the robbers were preparing to commit robbery in the sea-bound fishing trawlers," Mehedi said.

Sensing presence of the law enforcers, the robbers opened fire on them, forcing them to fire back, triggering a "gunfight".

Later, the Rab members recovered Taleb's body and handed it over to Banshkhalia Police Station.

They also recovered seven firearms and 22 rounds of bullets from the

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the recipients of the Independence Award 2019 pose for a picture at the award-giving ceremony at the capital's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

Work for int'l recognition of Genocide Day

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Hasina was addressing the Swadhinata Purashkar-2019 ceremony at the city's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

She asked all to work together to give the benefits of the hard-earned independence to every home, being imbued with the spirit of the Liberation War and ideals of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"Whenever we come to power, we try to develop the country's socio-economic condition in the quickest possible time to make Bangladesh a

developed country free from hunger and poverty as dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman."

She said the country would achieve 8 percent GDP growth this year and the per capita income now stands at \$1,909.

Highlighting different initiatives taken by Bangabandhu, the PM said seven percent GDP growth was achieved in 1975 before his assassination.

Hasina said if Bangabandhu had been alive, the country could have been developed in five to 10 years after its independence.

But the anti-liberation forces and their international collaborators had assassinated the Father of the Nation as a part of their conspiracy as they realised that Bangladesh would soon achieve economic emancipation under his visionary leadership, she mentioned.

The PM said the country's economic development was stopped with the assassination of Bangabandhu on August 15, 1975.

"We assumed power after 21 years and started building Bangladesh as a developed country, following Bangabandhu's footsteps and ideals."

The premier handed over Swadhinata Purashkar-2019 to 13 eminent personalities and an organisation for their outstanding contributions to their respective fields.

The awardees are martyred intellectual Mufazzal Haider Chowdhury (posthumous), martyred ATM Zafar Alam (posthumous), AKM Mozammel Haque, Mosharrif Hossain, Kazi Misbahun Nahar, Abdul Khalek (posthumous), Prof Mohammad Khaled (posthumous) and Shawkat Ali Khan (posthumous) in independence and Liberation War, Brig Gen Dr Nurun Nahar Fatema Begum in medical

science, Qazi Kholiuzzaman Hadid in social service, Murtaza Bashir in culture, Hasan Azizul Haque in literature, Prof Hasina Khan in research and training and Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture in science and technology.

Each winner was given a medal, Tk 3 lakh and a citation. Mosharrif Hossain, among the award winners, spoke on the occasion.

The chief justice, cabinet members, PM's advisers, lawmakers, chiefs of the three services, foreign diplomats, freedom fighters, and top civil and military officials were present.

The northern uprising

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put up the resistance.

A number of men, including former AL leader Siddique Hossain, lawyer Abdul Goni, Sheikh Amzad Hossain, Taibur Rahman and Mojibar Rahman, teamed up.

As per Bangabandhu's directive, they formed an all-party Sangram Parishad, excluding members from the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim League.

They held meetings in villages to organise the movement.

Although they had no weapons, the desperate time called for a desperate measure.

Mojibar said Mollah Master of Mahiganj used to supply food to the cantonment. "We contacted him and asked him to stop the supply and Mollah agreed."

With the pantry empty, Pakistan army men started going to localities in search of food.

"Bangalees were angry as the jawans took their food without paying," Mojibar told The Daily Star a few days ago.

On March 24 in 1971, Pakistan army Capt Abbasi along with three jawans and a driver went to Damadarpur (Sammanipur) village to take villagers' food.

Shahed Ali, a young butcher of the village, led a surprise attack on the Pak soldiers with the help of villagers. He

stabbed Abbasi, who died of his wounds later.

The Pakistan army retaliated by torching nearby villages and opening fire. This left several people injured.

An ongoing curfew was beefed up.

After the black night of March 25, the freedom fighters communicated with Nawajesh, a Bangalee captain in the cantonment.

"We learnt that the Bangalee jawans outnumbered the Pakistani jawans in the cantonment," recalled Mojibar.

He quoted Nawajesh as saying, "If the Bangalee jawans help, it will be possible for us to arm the freedom loving-people with weapons and ammunition."

The freedom fighters then held meetings in villages to organise a siege to the Rangpur Cantonment.

"We thought it would be easy to take part in the Liberation War if we were able to take the arms and ammunition from the cantonment," said Mojibar.

As per the plan with Capt Nawajesh, thousands of villagers of Mithapukur, Baldhipukur, Badarganj, Ranipukur, Manzail, Tapat, Palichara, Ramjiban, Bongaon, Burihat, Haragachh, Gangachara, Shyampur, Damdara, Lalbag, Goneshpur, Damadarpur, Dewdoba, Pathanpara, Paglapir, and Taraganj of Rangpur gathered on the bank of the Ghagat river around noon



on March 28.

Indigenous people came with their traditional weapons -- bows and arrows.

Nuhash Kerketa, 75, a Santal man who took part in the siege on March 28, said, "We left our village [Baldipukur] around 10:00am and arrived in Nishbetganj village near the Ghagat around 1:00pm."

Mojibar said, "Before we launched our attack, we had held a brief meeting right there."

As the people approached the cantonment, the army men fired shots in the air.

"We thought the Bangalee members of the EPR [East Pakistan Rifles] opened fire to receive us, as per our discussion with Capt Nawajesh the day before," he said.

But things did not go as planned.

Pakistani army men came out of the cantonment and mowed down freedom fighters with gunfire. "More than 1,500 people were killed on the spot,"

Mojibar said.

At least 500 bodies were burnt with petrol on the bank of the Ghagat, said the 82-year-old.

The people had no idea that the Pakistan army personnel knew about their plans as there was a mole among the Bangalee army men in the cantonment. They later learnt that the Pakistani army men captured the Bangalee jawans and that Capt Nawajesh had to flee.

Maj Nasir Uddin, who was at the Rangpur Cantonment during the incident, in his book *Juddhey Juddhey Swadhinata* said around 10 Jeeps went out of the cantonment. Within five minutes, the unarmed people were silenced by a hail of gunfire.

In the book, he mentioned that 500 to 600 bodies were burnt with petrol.

Dogs, foxes, and vultures ate many bodies, said Somra Singh of Pachchapura village in Rangpur's Mithapukur upazila.

The killings did not stop that day. The Pakistani army men killed 11 people at Rangpur Central Crematory and 32 more in Lahirihat area on April 3 and May 7.

In memory of the lives lost in the siege, a monument -- *Rakta Gourab* -- was built in Nishbetganj village in 2002. The people of Rangpur observe March 28 as Rangpur Cantonment Siege Day

every year.

Those who directly took part in the cantonment siege urge the government to observe the day officially and recognise them as freedom fighters.

Sadrul Alam Dulu, a freedom fighter of Rangpur, said people in the district started their Liberation War by killing Capt Abbasi on March 24.

Meanwhile, the investigation agency of the International Crimes Tribunal in October last year said it had evidence against Oahidul Haque, 69, in connection with his involvement in the crimes committed in Rangpur on March 28.

The agency claimed that Oahidul was adjutant of the 29th Cavalry Regiment of the Pakistan army at Rangpur Cantonment. He directly took part in the March 28 massacre.

After the change in the political climate in August 1975, Oahidul joined the police force as assistant superintendent in October 1976.

Police arrested Oahidul, who went on to become the acting chief of National Security Intelligence in 1996, in April last year. The prosecution of the tribunal has pressed charges against him.

[This report is based on the statements of Mojibar Rahman, Nuhash Kerketa, Somra Singh and Mokbul Hossain who directly took part in the Rangpur Cantonment siege.]

Mired in misery

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On March 3, 1971, when Sanku was in grade six, his life was about to come to a rapid and unexpected end.

That day a hartal had been declared. Given a respite from school, Shanku stayed with his mother while she helped him with his homework.

Afterwards when his mother went to cook their meal, Shanku was left alone. Sitting idle, he saw a procession passing by his home in Guptapara area.

With the child's interest piqued, he decided to join the procession. "I am coming back soon," he yelled to his mother.

His last words would ring untrue, for Shanku would never return.

"I tried to hold him back but I failed," Dipali recalled, voicing a regret she had felt for the rest of her life.

The procession was heading towards Rangpur Railway Station and Shanku found himself at the forefront of it.

Suddenly, Sarfaraj Khan, a non-Bangalee, fired a pistol from inside his house around 10:00am.

Shanku collapsed on the street immediately, with the bullet lodged in his forehead.

Other members of the procession rushed Shanku to hospital, where doctors declared the boy dead.

His death is considered to be a watershed moment in the course of the liberation movement, especially in the context of Rangpur town.

As the news spread, widespread protests broke out and a curfew was

imposed in the town.

"I heard neighbours saying that my son was shot," Dipali said.

As she recalled how she rushed to Rangpur Hospital and could not find him there, Dipali broke down, as if the hopelessness of that day had resurfaced in full force.

Shanku's body was later brought home in a police van.

"My son is the first martyr in the Liberation War," she said.

Unfortunately, Dipali's tribulation had not ended there. Her husband Santosh Samajdar, a priest, died in 2002.

Afterwards, the family never became solvent, said Nazrul Mridha, a journalist and Dipali's neighbour.

He told this correspondent that Shanku's mother had struggled her entire life. But now, she can't take it anymore.

Her elder son Kumaresh has no job, and her daughter Jhorna and daughter-in-law Mira are the only bread winners in the family.

Jhorna provides private tuition and Mira works at a private firm.

The government's issuance of a gazette on Shanku's martyrdom may have come as some relief for Dipali.

But she does not want to be a beggar, at this age.

"I do not want to beg... I want the sympathy of Sheikh Hasina, so she rescues my family from such a financial hardship," she said, mentioning that she needed medicine worth Tk 40 every day.

Independents faring well

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under the second phase, were not available till yesterday.

This was the first time in Bangladesh's history that political parties nominated candidates for chairman, vice-chairman and female vice-chairman posts of upazila parishads.

"Independent candidates are posing a challenge to Awami League nominees as many registered political parties are not participating in the election," Election Commissioner Rafiqul Islam told The Daily Star.

"The parties that are not contesting the local government election might have extended support to the independent candidates," he said.

"Many of these independent candidates who won are Awami League rebels. This shows that many deserving aspirants did not get the party ticket" said election watchdog Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar.

He added that many AL lawmakers are working in favour of rebel candidates as they are their relatives and cronies, which could be another reason behind the win of so many independent candidates.

EC officials said not less than 80 percent of the independent candidates who won in the election are rebel candidates from the ruling AL.

This year, elections in 480 upazilas are taking place in five phases. Election in 122 upazilas will be held on March 31 and the EC is yet to announce the schedule for the fifth. There are 492 upazilas in the country.

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

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

The EC has prepared the result sheets of chairman elections, held in 79 upazilas on March 10, 114 upazilas on March 18 and 122 upazilas on March 24.

In all the three phases, voters appeared to be hardly interested to go to polling stations with overall turnout lowest since 2009.

In the elections, at least 27 upazilas saw less than 30 percent voter turnout, said EC officials.

The voter turnout in the 2009 upazila polls was 70.57 percent, it fell to 61.23 percent in 2014 and 43.31 percent in the first phase of this upazila election and 41.25 percent in the second phase. The turnout stood at 41.41 percent in the third phase.

Badiul Alam Majumdar has expressed doubts on the EC's voter turnout figures for this year's elec-

tions. "We have seen evidence of voterless elections as no voter came to vote," he said.

"Voters are 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 votes even if they did turn up at the centres.

Election Commission sources said only 8.63 percent voters cast vote in the Dakhhin Surma election in Sylhet and 9.38 percent voted in Jaintapur election in the same district in the first two phases.

Less than 30 percent cast vote in Kushtia Sadar; Kishoreganj Sadar and the district's Pakundia; Shahrastra of Chandpur, Laxmipur Sadar and Ramgati of the district, Boalkhali and Chandnaish of Chattogram, and Bashkhali of Cox's Bazar in the third phase.

"The commission does not bother about voter turnout in the elections," Election Commission Secretary Helal Uddin Ahmed said on Sunday.

It is not a matter of concern for the EC how many voters cast ballots in the polls. The commission rather cares whether the voting was peaceful or not.

"A quarter, which is not participating in the election, is running a campaign asking voters not to go to the polling stations," he added.