

AL leader abducted in Bandarban

Party unit points finger at PCJSS

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Criminals abducted an Awami League leader from Bandarban Sadar upazila on Wednesday night, said police.

The victim is Chaw Thowai Mong Marma, vice-president of Bandarban town unit AL. He is also a former commissioner of ward-5 in Bandarban town.

Quoting the victim's wife, Shahidul Islam, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station, said at gunpoint, some criminals picked up Chaw from his farmhouse near Uji Headman Para around 8:45pm.

Kwe Shwe Hla, president of Bandarban AL, alleged that an armed group of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) kidnapped Chaw.

Uchow Mong Marma, president of PCJSS Bandarban unit, refuted the allegation and said, "Our party men are in no way involved in abducting Chaw; rather we strongly condemn the incident."

Protesting the abduction, the district unit of the ruling party held processions in Bandarban town on Wednesday night and Thursday morning.

They demanded release of Chaw within the next 24 hours. Otherwise, they threatened to go for tougher programmes.

Army and police are trying to rescue the abducted AL leader, said Zakir Hossain Majumder, superintendent of Bandarban police.

On May 7, a member of PCJSS was shot dead and another PCJSS man was kidnapped from Rajbilla area of Sadar upazila.

Two days later, a PCJSS supporter was killed as a group of armed men opened fire on him in Bakichhara rubber garden area of the upazila.

On May 19, an AL leader's brother was shot dead in Rajbilla area while a Jubo League leader died as criminals fired on him in front of his family members in Rangamati's Rajasthali upazila the same day.

Law enforcers are yet to arrest anyone in connection with the incidents that triggered panic in this hill region.

Four of family killed in gas cylinder blast

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Four of a family died in a gas cylinder blast inside a residential house in Islampur Sharif Market area of Gazipur city on Wednesday night.

The victims -- Shah Alam, 38, his wife Monira Begum, 30, their eight-year-old son Bayazid, and four-year-old daughter Fatema -- lived in a tin-shed house.

Shah Alam used to work as a quality inspector at Renaissance Apparel Ltd and his wife Monira was a sewing operator at the same factory, said AKM Kausar Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of Bason Police Station.

Zakir Hosen, senior station officer at Joydebpur Fire Service Station, told The Daily Star that they were suspecting that the fire might have originated from a leakage in the rubber pipe attached to the cylinder while Monira was cooking inside the kitchen around 9:30pm.

"On information, a team of firefighters rushed to the spot and rescued the charred bodies," he said, adding that the fire also gutted the furniture of two adjacent houses but no one was injured.

Hasina

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India. Describing the victory as a historic one, the PM said the people of South Asia would be happy over this win and they could work together.

She invited Modi to visit Bangladesh and wished him success and good health, the press secretary said.

Earlier, Hasina in a congratulatory message to Modi said Bangladesh attaches highest importance to its multi-faceted relations with India which is driven by genuine good-will, mutual trust and respect.

She said India's critical role in support of Bangladesh's Liberation War under the leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1971 was a watershed moment in the relations. "I strongly believe that with the renewed mandate given to both of us by our respective peoples, Bangladesh-India ties, which have already been termed a role model of good neighbourliness, will be further consolidated and our relations will scale newer heights," Hasina said.

The PM wished the people of India peace, happiness and prosperity. Hasina said she looked forward to welcoming Modi in Bangladesh at his convenience.



A microbus is parked on a pavement along the Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue in the capital's Farmgate yesterday. Such illegal parking, which is common in many places of the city, causes inconveniences to pedestrians.

Population growth

FROM PAGE 1 this stagnation," Dr Barkat e Khuda, former professor of Dhaka University, told The Daily Star.

The adolescence fertility rate in Bangladesh is high compared to that in many other countries. Besides, the country is among the top four in the world in terms of child marriage rate, which is another contributing factor as child brides have been documented to be likely to bear more children, he added.

Government officials say the country's adolescence fertility rate or births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 was 108 per thousand in 2017.

A UN study found 59 percent of the marriages that took place in Bangladesh between 2006 and 2017 involved brides below the age of 18.

Prof Md Mainul Islam, chairperson of population science department at Dhaka University, said adolescent fertility rate remains high and it has not decreased since 2014.

"In 1993-94, it was 33 percent and came down to 30 percent in 2011. But it rose to 31 percent in 2014," he told The Daily Star.

"Without reducing the adolescent fertility rate, it is impossible to get the fruits of family planning because child marriage and early pregnancy is interlinked with the issue."

In education, Barkat said, female enrolment rate is increasing but dropout rate remains high, which contributes to early marriages and teenage pregnancy. Female unemployment is also another big factor.

The professor added that quality and sustainable education, vocational and technical trainings, more budgetary allocation in health and education can move forward the family planning campaigns.

POPULATION IN BANGLADESH (in million)

YEAR	POPULATION
1901	28.928
1911	31.555
1921	33.255
1931	35.602
1941	41.997
1951	41.932
1961	50.840
1974	71.479
1981	87.120
1991	106.313
2001	124.355
2011	142.319

SOURCE: THE 2011 CENSUS PRELIMINARY RESULT

Prof Mainul too said there were a host of factors involved in family planning. "Family planning is not only an issue of birth control. It is an issue of women empowerment. Husband and wife should take decisions collectively about having children, how many and after how long."

According to the Demographic and Health Survey 2017, only 20 percent respondents were visited by family planning officials once in the last six months, which should have been once every two months. The survey covered 20,250 households across the country.

Experts also say the use of long-acting reversible contraceptives, or methods of birth control that provide effective contraception for an extended period

without requiring user action, is also declining. Eight percent people use it but should be 20 percent.

GOVT INITIATIVES, LIMITATIONS

According to the Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP), the government set up 70 adolescent-friendly health centres called Maa O Shishu Community Shastho Kendra in districts and upazilas. Similar services are provided at 350 union-level health service centres.

"We are planning to ensure such services in all the unions across the country by 2022 to make adolescents aware of the importance of family planning," Kazi Mustafa Sarwar, director general of DGFP, told The Daily Star.

He said child marriage and adolescence fertility rate are big challenges as RMG workers and people in the slums remain out of family planning.

The government has formed 54 quality improvement teams at the district level and 10 regional teams to make people more cautious and encourage them to go for longer lasting birth control methods.

Apart from this, 12 facilitators were appointed in areas where use of contraceptives is low, like Chattogram, and in hard-to-reach places like haors.

In 1976, Bangladesh government approved a National Population Policy. At that time there were 23,500 family welfare assistants (FWA) but their number has not increased over the years.

"Currently there are 6,500 vacant posts at various levels of the department. We have already hired 3,500 paid volunteers to work in the field. We have signed an MoU with Brac and are hopeful that they will give us 1,500 family welfare assistants who will work until the vacant posts are filled up," said the director general of DGFP.

Yaba sneaking in thru' couriers

FROM PAGE 1 It is very difficult to trace any yaba consignment sent by courier if there is no specific information, he said.

THE NEXUS According to Rab officials, Mizan was playing a lead role in the syndicate for the last one year.

Though a contractual Ansar member, he used to live a luxurious life. He always took air routes for travel between Dhaka and Cox's Bazar and stayed in lavish hotels in the capital.

Before this, Mizan was arrested by police in 2015 with 150 pills in the capital. Released on bail, he again got involved with the racket, said the officials.

"During interrogation, the two arrestees told Rab that they used SA Paribahan service as it is safe. They sent the yaba consignment to Dhaka after consulting an office assistant of SA Paribahan's Cox Bazar office," reads the statement of the case filed with Uttara East police station.

"Apart from this one lakh pills, yaba consignments were brought to Dhaka earlier with the help of the SA Paribahan office assistant," it says.

Talking to The Daily Star, a high official of Rab said, "Primarily we have come to know that a dozen staffers of SA Paribahan and other courier service providers work with the syndicate."

Following a tip-off, Rab officials interrogated the SA Paribahan executive director and its Uttara branch manager and assistant manager.

"We are investigating the roles of courier service staffers," the officer said, but refused to disclose any name for the sake of the investigation.

Mizan also told the investigators that they earlier had transported big yaba consignments by courier four to five times, said a Rab official, requesting anonymity.

For each consignment, Mizan and his associate get one-third of the product price. According to investigators, if a yaba tablet is sold at Tk 300, his share is Tk 100.

Mizan was supposed to get at least Tk 1 crore for the successful delivery of one lakh yaba pills which he brought to Dhaka via SA Paribahan on Sunday, said an investigator.

Major Abdullah Al Maruf of Rab-3 said they are suspecting that a group of

people working with various courier services are connected with the nexus.

Earlier, yaba smugglers used orphans to smuggle the drug. Besides, the pills were also found being smuggled inside watermelons, jackfruits, tyres, motorcycles fuel tanks and shock absorbers, petrol containers, mobile phones and books.

Contacted, Salauddin Ahmed, chairman and managing director of SA Paribahan, told The Daily Star that they always check every parcel, especially those at the Cox's Bazar booking office, very carefully.

"Besides, our staff at the courier office in Cox's Bazar are transferred to our other offices every three to four months," said the chairman.

"Our staff members are not involved in any kind of illegal business. But law enforcers can take action if they find any employee involved in crime and we have no objection to that."

He added, "We have also launched an internal probe into staff activities."

On installation of a scanner, Salauddin said they have already taken an initiative to do so. But it is a lengthy process as they need to import the scanner and take approval from different authorities.

Salauddin said initially they have taken necessary action to set up an "x-ray type" scanner at least in the Cox's Bazar booking office.

This is not the first time yaba was recovered from a courier service office.

On December 21 last year, police recovered 3,500 pills from inside a water pump from SA Paribahan's Doublemooring office in Chattogram.

On September 30, Rab recovered 4,000 yaba pills from inside a steel pipe from SA Paribahan's Sirajganj office.

On November 16, 2017, the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) recovered 20,000 yaba pills from inside two harmoniums from SA Paribahan's Santinagar branch.

A month before this, on October 13, DNC recovered 5,000 yaba pills from inside a package from Sundarban courier service's Motijheel office.

enforcers found 15,400 pills inside two sacks of tea leaves from a courier service office in Dhaka.

500 UNAUTHORISED AGENCIES Hafizur Rahman Pulok, president of Courier Service Association of Bangladesh, said the government should strictly monitor the courier service agencies.

There are about a hundred courier service agencies registered with the association, he told The Daily Star yesterday. "But about 500 unauthorised agencies are operating in the country without taking permission from the government."

This is a grave security concern as they are sending and receiving parcels without any government surveillance, he added.

On the smuggling of narcotics, Pulok said they have asked their members to open every package before booking, and installing close circuit television cameras at every booking office.

At present, courier service employees receive and deliver parcels based on the cell phone numbers provided, he said.

"It is often difficult for the staff to check the phone number of the person who booked the parcel. But the person can easily be traced from CCTV footage."

"We are arranging meetings among the association members every month, where we share the necessary instructions that we received from law enforcers on narcotics smuggling."

"Whenever we find anything suspicious, we contact the law enforcers. A line man or booking person of a courier service may get involved with the nexus. But if we find it, we immediately hand them over to law enforcers."

Pulok, also the vice-president of Sundarban courier service, however has reservations on the installation of scanners, saying that it may be difficult to trace narcotics smuggling using scanners.

"Moreover, it would be difficult for the courier service providers to afford the scanners after completing all necessary paperwork. But we proposed sharing revenue with the government if they arrange the scanners."

Modi wins big again

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Janata Party was ahead in 302 of the 542 seats up for grabs, up from the 282 it won in 2014 and more than the 272 seats needed for a majority in the lower house of parliament.

That would give his party the first back-to-back majority for a single party since 1984. Votes will be fully counted by today morning.

The Lok Sabha has 545 seats. 543 seats were up for grab in the polls. An additional two seats are filled by nominees from the Anglo Indian community. Election Commission of India cancelled polls in Vellore constituency in Tamil Nadu on charges of in-volvement of money power.

The BJP kept its core states -- the Hindi heartland, Gujarat and Maharashtra -- while posting fresh victories in Bengal, Odisha and the northeast. It also scored a huge win in Karnataka - a state the Congress rules jointly with HD Kumaraswamy.

The BJP's main rival Congress were on just 51 seats, with Rahul Gandhi -- the great-grandson, grandson and son of three premiers -- conceding defeat and congratulating Modi.

In an added personal humiliation, Gandhi, 48, also admitted he had lost Amethi, a seat long held by his famous family, to a former television star and minister of Modi government.

"I can't comment on the results today. I want to say that our fight is a fight for ideology. I want to tell our leaders, who won and lost, don't worry, don't lose confidence. We will fight together for our ideology," Gandhi told a news conference.

"It doesn't matter what I think went wrong. Frankly people of India have decided that Modi should be the prime minister, as an Indian person I accept it," he said.

Gandhi was, however, expected to win from Wayanad, Kerala, from which he is also running for parliament.

NDTV reported that Gandhi had reportedly offered to resign as president of the Congress. However the party is unlikely to accept it.

Modi was showered with rose petals by some of the thousands of cheering supporters who waited for hours in a thunderstorm for his arrival at party headquarters yesterday evening.

"Whatever happened in these elections is in the past, we have to look ahead. We have to take everyone forward, including our staunchest opponents," he said in a televised address.

Modi has slashed red tape in the world's fifth-largest economy, though some overseas firms, including Amazon, Walmart and Mastercard, have complained about policies they say are designed to benefit domestic rivals.

He will face demands to provide jobs for the tens of millions of young people coming on to the market in the next few years and to boost depressed farm incomes.

"The immediate challenges are to address employment, the issue of agricultural income and revive the banking sector," said Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at Care Ratings in Mumbai.

But making good on his promise of unity will be difficult as the BJP campaign was often divisive, and India's Muslim minority has expressed fears that policies aimed at pleasing the Hindu majority could imperil their livelihoods.

Modi's pledge of a strong stand against a separatist movement in Muslim-majority Kashmir has fuelled tension with nuclear-armed rival Pakistan, although its prime minister, Imran Khan, congratulated Modi on his win.

"Look forward to working with him for peace, progress and prosperity in South Asia," Khan added on Twitter.

Shortly after a victory speech before thousands of supporters gathered outside the BJP's headquarters, Modi thanked Khan.

"I warmly express my gratitude for your good wishes. I have always given primacy to peace and development in our region," he said in a tweet.

"Congratulations to Prime Minister @narendramodi and his BJP party on their BIG election victory!" US President Donald Trump tweeted.

"Great things are in store for the US-India partnership with the return of PM Modi at the helm. I look forward to continuing our important work together!" he added.

Other neighbours and foreign leaders to congratulate Modi on his polls win include Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Japanese PM Shinjo Abe, President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani, Portugal Prime Minister Antonio Costa, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Singapore PM Lee Hsien Loong, Bhutan's Prime Minister Lotay Tshering.

Besides a harder line on national security, BJP members will look to Modi for progress on a project to building a Hindu temple on the site of a mosque demolished by Hindu zealots in the northern holy town of Ayodhya in 1992.

The NDA's predicted margin of victory, at 349 seats versus 93 for the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance, according to broadcaster NDTV, far exceeds survey fore-casts in the run-up to the vote. Non-aligned parties are projected to win 100 seats.

Most polls indicated a victory for Modi's alliance but expected it to fall short of an overall majority.

Modi was under pressure when he began campaigning, losing three state elections in December amid rising anger over farm prices and unemployment.

However, campaigning shifted towards India's relationship with Pakistan after a suicide bomber killed 40 Indian police in February in the Himalayan region of Kashmir claimed by both countries.

Modi ordered an air strike on what India said was a militant training camp on the Pakistani side of the border, a tough response that benefited the right-wing BJP, analysts said.

"After the air strike on Pakistan, almost all these important issues started fading and farmers decided to cast their ballot for the BJP," said Raghubar Das, 55, who grows rice and wheat on the outskirts of Ayodhya, which many devout Hindus believe to be the birthplace of the God-king Rama.

"Mind you, they didn't vote for the BJP, they voted for Modi. Everyone loves a strong leader."

Besides capitalised the star power of Modi, BJP also used its superior financial re-sources.

It outspent Congress by six times on Facebook and Google advertising, data showed, and by as much as 20 times overall, sources told Reuters this month.

"The Congress party has not been able to improve at all," said Rahul Verma, a fellow at the centre for Policy Research in New Delhi.

"One big story is the emerging challenge for the Congress to remain a national alternative to the BJP. That now is under question."

Among the states, the BJP made a clean sweep in Gujarat, Delhi and Rajasthan and is ahead in 38 of 40 seats in Bihar and 41 of 48 seats in Maharashtra. The party is also expected to win 28 of the 29 seats in Madhya Pradesh. In Chhattisgarh, it is marginally behind - leading in nine of the state's 11 seats.

Among the southern states, the BJP is ahead on 25 of 28 seats in Karnataka - ruled by the alliance government of the Congress and HD Kumaraswamy's Janata Dal Secular.

In the populous northern state of Uttar Pradesh, which sends the largest number of lawmakers to parliament, the BJP was leading in 63 of the 80 seats in the fray, out in front of a powerful alliance of caste-based parties campaigning to improve rural conditions, reported NDTV. The Mayawati-Akhilesh Yadav alliance is trailing with 16.

The party also won seats in several states where it has long struggled, including West Bengal, where it took on the Trinamool Congress, a powerful regional party. Data showed it leading in 18 of 42 seats, surpassing the two it won in 2014, data showed.

The Congress is ahead in eight of Punjab's 13 seats. It is also ahead in Tamil Nadu, where it is partnering the DMK led by MK Stalin and in Kerala, where it is ahead in 19 of 20 seats.

Long queues for Eid

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queue. "I tried several times to buy tickets using the Rail Sheba app yesterday [Wednesday]. I tried again this morning [yesterday morning], but in vain," she said.

"As I didn't buy bus tickets, I couldn't take the risk to depend on such an almost inoperative online ticketing system. That's why I came to the station at 5:00am and joined the queue."

Fatima, employee of a private company, finally got tickets for Rajshahi around 12:30pm.

"The government talks about digitalisation and massive development of the country. Then why do we still have to wait about eight hours for a ticket for a nearly five-hour journey?" asked the mother of two.

Another ticket seeker Shamim Sarker, a government employee, had a similar experience. He said people would not have suffered at the stations if the online ticketing system

worked properly.

"I got the tickets around 11:00am after waiting for nearly 12 hours. I would not have to waste my valuable time if I could buy tickets online," he added.

Several people alleged that sale of tickets at the counters was quite slow. They blamed slow network of the ticketing computers for this.

However, the railway authorities claimed that the problems were temporary as the online ticketing system started working normally a few hours after the opening of ticket sale.

Munir-Uz-Zaman Chowdhury, managing director of Computer Network Systems (CNS) Limited, which provides online ticketing service on behalf of the railway, said if more than 1 lakh people try to log on to a server simultaneously, most of them would not be successful.

Such a huge rush slows down the network, but it is not a technical glitch, he claimed.

Advance train tickets for Eid holidaymakers will be sold till Sunday.