

KHULNA YOUTH MURDER
Two arrestees confess at court
 OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Two arrestees yesterday gave confessional statements before a court in connection with the murder of Mohidul Islam, 27, in Khulna city.

The arrestees are Md Sagar, 19, and Md Ashik, 19, both hailing from the city.

Metropolitan Magistrate Atikus Samad recorded the statements.

On Wednesday night, Mohidul's brother Shohidul Islam filed a murder case with Sonadanga Police Station, accusing four men. Police arrested Sagar and Ashik the same night.

Suman and Masum, two of the main accused, are still on the run.

Suktant Das, sub-inspector of Sonadanga Police Station and investigating officer (IO) of the case, said Mohidul's group had previously beaten up Sumon and

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Star LIVE

SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH VIDEO

Workers chop down a tree beside a road in Dhamrai as part of a road expansion project. Though the project is yet to be approved by the authorities concerned, Forest Department has already started felling over a thousand old trees along two roads in the area. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

1,200 trees being felled before project finalised

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH, Savar

Forest Department is felling some 1,221 fully-grown trees in the name of widening two roads in Dhaka's Dhamrai, although any road expansion project is yet to be taken.

The trees -- on both the sides of Kalampur-Balia road and Mauna-Dhamrai road, stretching around 22km in total -- are being chopped down, sources said.

Forest officials said the trees were planted under social forestation programme, but could not show any document in support of the claim.

They could not even say how many years ago the trees were planted. However, locals said most of them are 50 to 60 years old.

According to residents, most of the trees are mahogany and rain tree, and more than half of them have already been cut down in the last couple of weeks.

Talking about the issue to this correspondent, many became nostalgic and frustrated.

Intaj Ali from Batulia is very familiar with the greenery, as the trees have grown up in front of the 80-year-old's eyes.

"The plants conserve beauty in the area," he lamented.

"We used to walk to Kalampur Haat [a local market] along the road [Kalampur-

Balia] under tree shade," said the elderly man. "Now, the roadsides are turning into a desert."

"The trees were planted after the road was made from clay. I was 18 or 20 at that time," reminisced Intaj, who worked as a labourer in building the roads.

"I feel happy when I see those trees. But it breaks my heart when I imagine those will not exist anymore," he said.

"We have nothing to say, as the government is felling the trees."

Tara Miah, 70, a shopkeeper in Batulia, said he only heard about widening of the road. "But, we are yet to see any sign of such work," he said.

Motaleb Al-Momin, Dhamrai upazila forest officer, told The Daily Star they started cutting the trees following multiple applications from Roads and Highways Department (RHD) that the roads will be widened.

He showed this correspondent two copies of the letters.

Motaleb said they leased out the trees to different buyers, at a total cost of about Tk 80 lakh after offering separate open tenders.

When asked under which project and how long ago those trees were planted, the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

BNP should thank Sheikh Hasina and AL: Quader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said BNP should thank Awami League and Sheikh Hasina.

"AL started correction drive from its own house. What BNP could not do, AL showed how to do it," Quader said.

He was talking to journalists at Sylhet MCA Osmani Airport after arriving to attend a programme.

He said, "Tender grabbing, corruption, ransoming started in the country during BNP's reign but they never took steps against their partisans."

"BNP should not criticise just for the sake of it, but they should practice constructive criticism," he added.

Later in the afternoon, he attended a programme to commemorate the recently deceased AL central committee member and Sylhet district unit's former president ANM Shafiqul Haque at Kabi Nazrul Auditorium at Rikabibazar area in the city.

Remembering ANM Shafiqul, he said, "People are now busy in the politics of consumption. Most people join politics to earn money. ANM Shafiqul did not come to politics with that intention, and people will remember him for his good work."

Youth stabbed dead in broad daylight

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A youth was stabbed to death yesterday, allegedly by a group of armed miscreants at Bagmara village in Rupsha upazila of Khulna district.

The deceased was identified as Sarjil Rahman Sangram of the village. He was a computer operator at a shrimp processing factory in the area.

The killing took place in front of a tea stall near Bir Shrestha Ruhul Amin Road of eastern Rupsha at noon, according to two eyewitnesses, who are colleagues of Sangram.

"They said the assailants stabbed him in the chest with a 'gupti' (a locally-made sharp weapon) outside his workplace. They then quickly boarded a boat on Rupsha river from a nearby ghat, and went towards Khulna, they added.

Locals rushed a critically injured Sangram to Khulna Medical College Hospital, where he was pronounced dead by doctors around 2:30pm.

Referring not to be named, the witnesses said they knew the youths, who were local goons involved in extortion and mugging.

Mujibur Rahman, the victim's father, told The Daily Star, "A few days ago, my son had an argument with Rahat, a youth gang leader, over losing a mobile phone."

Mujibur, who was with his son when he was being taken to the hospital, said Sangram mentioned names of four assailants to his rescuers before dying -- Rahat, Amit, Saju alias Sadhu and Sohel.

Mollah Zakir Hossain, officer-in-charge (OC) of Rupsha Police Station, said Sangram was hit by a sharp weapon on the left side of his chest.

Police could not immediately ascertain the cause behind the killing.

Students rally for provost's removal

Demos flare up as RU students demand justice for fellow harassed by teacher's brother; VC assures of action by Sunday

RU CORRESPONDENT

Protesting sexual harassment of a fellow at the house of a female dormitory administrator on Wednesday night, students of Rajshahi University demonstrated on the campus yesterday.

They demanded removal of Dr Bithika Banik, provost of Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Hall, as "her negligence in duty" led to the student being abused by her brother Shyamol Banik.

Students, however, postponed their protest after RU Vice Chancellor Prof Abdus Sobhan assured them that Dr Bithika, a teacher of Sanskrit department, will be removed from her administrative post within Sunday.

Mentionable, the victim is a resident student of the same hall.

On Wednesday, the student alleged that she was sexually abused by Shyamol, 45, when she was staying back at Bithika's house after going there to tutor her seventh-grade daughter in the city's Dharampur area, said Hafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Motihar Police Station.

Police arrested Shyamol after the

20-year-old RU student filed a case against him with the police station, saying that Shyamol forced himself onto her after the provost had to leave the house around 1:30am, answering a call from the dormitory.

To save herself, the girl started shouting and Shyamol ran away from the room. Finding no way to get out of the house, she called her father in Gopalganj. Around 3am, her father called the national helpline 999, added OC Rahman.

Police then contacted RU Proctor Prof Lutfar Rahman, who lives nearby, conducted a raid at Bithika's house along with him and rescued her.

Yesterday, protesting the incident, several hundred students brought out a procession from the central library at 11am. They also laid siege to the dorm and locked the provost's office.

An hour later, students took position in front of the administrative building, demanding action against the provost within two hours. The protesters also demanded exemplary punishment for her brother.

Around 1:30pm, the VC, proctor and student adviser went to the area and spoke to them.

The VC told students that their demands were logical and he would seize the hall provost's administrative power within Sunday.

During the protest, one of the agitators said if the hall provost could not secure a student at her home, how she would protect hundreds of students at the dormitory.

The victim student's father also joined the demonstration.

Talking to The Daily Star, the father said his daughter often helped Dr Bithika with her academic and other tasks. "Although she helped Dr Bithika in all her needs, she [Bithika] turned her back when my daughter fell victim to her brother," he said.

"It was police who responded timely and saved my daughter," he added.

A fellow student said the girl texted him that night for help and he also called 999.

Dr Bithika Banik could not be contacted for comments, despite repeated attempts. The Daily Star found her cell phone switched off all day long, while she remained absent in her department and office at the dorm.

Goal is to restore democracy, not to assume power: Fakhrul

OUR CORRESPONDENT, M'singh

Termining Khaleda Zia the heartbeat of 16 crore people, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said the present autocratic government will not be able to keep Khaleda behind bars for long.

"We are not demonstrating to go to power. Our goal is to restore democracy and voting rights of people through releasing our party chairperson," said Fakhrul.

The BNP leader said this while addressing a rally in Mymensingh as chief guest. The district unit of BNP organised its first divisional rally at Railway Station Krishnachura Chatter in the city in the afternoon.

BNP activists and leaders from ward, upazila and union levels of the division participated in the event.

"Many locals also joined us," said AKM Mahbubul Alam, organising secretary of the party's city unit. "Despite getting permission for the venue around 11:30am today [yesterday], the rally was a success."

At the rally, Fakhrul said prices of gas, electricity and commodities are rising regularly, but farmers are being denied fair price for their products.

"No one voted for this government and ruling Awami League robbed the national election of December 30 a night before, with the help of state agencies," alleged Fakhrul.

He demanded that the parliament be dissolved and a fair election be held under a neutral Election Commission.

The senior leader also alleged that some of their party men had been arrested in last few days and many were barred from attending yesterday's rally.

He urged law enforcers not to favour the "anti-people" government as they are looting peoples' property and engaged in misdeeds.

BNP central standing committee member Khondokar Mosharrif Hossain said Khaleda Zia is in jail due to political vendetta. "The administration gave us permission for the rally just three hours before the scheduled time, but they could not stop people from attending," he added.

About casinos, Mosharrif said they were being run with the government's patronisation.

Mirza Abbas, another standing committee member of the party, said, BNP is the only party that can restore democracy. "We will continue our movement to free Khaleda Zia, democracy and the country."

The rally was chaired by Prof Shafiqul Islam, acting president of BNP's Mymensingh district (south) unit. Standing committee members Goyeshwar Chandra Roy and Nazrul Islam Khan; vice chairman Dr AZM Zahid Hossain; joint secretary general advocate Syed Moazzem Hossain Alal; divisional organising secretary Syed Emran Saleh and assistant organising secretary Wares Ali Mamun also spoke.

A large contingent of police were present outside the field, but no untoward incident took place.



RU students demonstrating on the campus yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



The ambassadors of Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark and Norway at Cox's Bazar.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

European diplomats seek int'l community's support

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Four European diplomats have urged the international community to work jointly to help ensure conducive conditions for safe and sustainable return of the Rohingyas to Myanmar's Rakhine state.

"We note with concern that the conditions for repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Rakhine State in a voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable manner are not yet met. The international community must work jointly to urge and support steps by Myanmar towards a situation where this will be possible," they said in a joint statement yesterday.

It comes after the four ambassadors -- Winnie Petersen of Denmark, Sidsel Bleken of Norway, Charlotta Sklyter of Sweden and René Holenstein of

Switzerland embassies in Dhaka -- visited the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar on September 25-26.

Two repatriation efforts over the last two years failed as the Rohingyas refused to return saying that they do not have guarantee of citizenship and safety in Rakhine.

The four ambassadors lauded Bangladesh's government and people for their continued humanitarian and other assistance.

They said the UN agencies, NGOs and INGOs involved in humanitarian response are playing instrumental roles in Cox's Bazar.

"We encourage the government of Bangladesh to continue its close collaboration with the humanitarian organisations," said the statement. The four diplomats said a safe and secure situation in the camps and surrounding areas must be upheld for both refugees and host communities.

Man dies after falling off roof in Ctg

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A house painter died after falling off a school's roof at Lohagara upazila in Chattogram yesterday morning.

The deceased is Md Saber, 35, from Ramu upzila in Cox's Bazar, said Assistant Sub-inspector (ASI) Alauddin Talukdar of Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) police outpost.

While painting a ledge on the edge of the roof of Al Hadwara Islamic School, Saber fell off around 11am, said Alauddin, quoting locals.

Locals rushed critically injured Saber to CMCH where on-duty doctors declared him dead, the ASI added.

Road accidents kill four, injure five

STAR REPORT

At least four people were killed and five injured in road accidents in three districts during the last two days, our correspondents and news agencies report.

In Tangail, Kadbhanu, 52, was killed on the spot as a bus hit her in Tarutia area of Sadar upazila yesterday noon, said police.

Her body was sent to Tangail General Hospital.

In Sirajganj, two people, including a Petrobangla official, were killed and at least five injured when a bus collided with a microbus in Pacholia area on Wednesday, said police.

The deceased are Petrobangla Deputy General Manager Shahidullah Bari, 55, and microbus driver Anwar Hossain, 37.

Anwar died on the spot while Bari passed away on the way to a hospital.

The five injured were admitted to hospitals in Sirajganj and Bogura. Three of them are in critical condition.

In Nilphamari, Joydeb Roy, 30, a factory worker of Uttara EPZ, was killed after a truck ran over his motorbike at Bosuniapara on Saidpur Bypass around 8:30pm on Wednesday night, said police, quoting locals.

Locals took critically injured Joydeb to a nearby hospital but he succumbed to his injuries around 10pm.

The truck driver and helper fled the scene with the vehicle