

It was all planned

Say eminent personalities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing concern over the recent communal violence in Bhola, 11 eminent personalities yesterday said the incident seemed to have been planned.

Some fundamentalists and opportunists led the vandalism at Hindu temples and swooped on the law enforcers though police and administration had taken immediate steps to resolve the matter, they said in a statement.

Mentioning that the incident resembles previous communal violence in Ramu of Cox's Bazar and Brahmanbaria, they said, "We want to say that people of Bangladesh will protect the country and communal harmony at any cost."

The signatories are Anisuzzaman, Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury, Syed Hasan Imam, Hasan Azizul Haque, Anupam Sen, Sarwar Ali, Ramendu Majumdar, Ferdousi Majumdar, Mamunur Rashid, Mofidul Haque, and Nasiruddin Yousuff.

They called upon the people to prevent communal and opportunist political forces.

In the last few days, they said, extreme fundamentalists and derailed political forces were giving "hate speech" in different social media and rallies to impede the progress of development and harm communal

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Man found dead after abduction

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

The body of a mauja headman was found dead in Rajasthali upazila of Bandarban yesterday morning, about 16 hours after his abduction.

Dipamoy Talukder, 45, the headman of Gilachhari Mauja, was the former chairman of Gaianda Union Parishad, and vice president of the upazila BNP. He was allegedly abducted by an armed gang on Tuesday evening from Zero Mile area, locals said.

Saiful Islam Panir, organising secretary of Rangamati district BNP, who confirmed Dipamoy's affiliation with the party, demanded exemplary punishment for the killers.

Meanwhile, local people brought out a protest procession in Rajasthali upazila headquarters yesterday, demanding arrest of the murderers.

With a bullet wound to the head, Dipamoy's body was recovered from Zero Mile area and sent for autopsy, said Mofojol Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Rajasthali Police Station. "Nobody was arrested till now. We are yet to identify the killers, and an investigation is underway," he said.

Two 'robbers'

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fire forcing the Rab members to fire back, triggering a "gunfight", the ASP claimed.

After the criminals fled the scene, the Rab members found the bullet-hit body of Kalu on the spot, he claimed.

Two firearms, including a foreign pistol and 27 bullets, were recovered from the spot.

On Tuesday, Rab arrested a human hauler driver, Md Omar Faruk, from the port city's Railway Station area, over the killing.

After Dr Shah Alam left his Sitakunda clinic around 9:30pm on Thursday for his home in Chattogram city's Chadgaon residential area, he went missing.

"A gang of five muggers, including Faruk, took part in the killing, while the physician was returning to Chattogram in the vehicle," the ASP said quoting Faruk.

The 61-year-old paediatrician, who established the Baby Care Private Limited at Sitakunda's Chhoto Kumira village after returning to the country two years back, was found dead with multiple injuries beside the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway on Friday.

The physician had returned to the country after working in a hospital in Saudi Arabia for 30 years. He was the head of paediatric surgery in Madina Maternity and Children's Hospital there.

In a different incident, another alleged robber, Prakash Selim was killed in crossfire while police. The gunfight began when police detained and took him to recover drug and illegal arms after arresting him in the early hours of Tuesday in Chamarkul area of Whykang union in Teknaf Cox's Bazar.

Pradip Kumar Das, office-in-charge of Teknaf police station, claimed they were acting on a tip-off when they arrested Prakash on Monday evening. Later, he was taken to Keruntoli Primary School area to recover arms and drugs as per his confession.

But his cohorts, who were waiting in the area, opened fire on the police and the law enforcers retaliated, police claimed.

Selim was hit and taken to Teknaf Upazila Health Complex where duty doctors declared him dead.

Three policemen, including sub-inspector Arifur Rahman, and constables Shukkur and Mehedi were injured during the incident. The police recovered a light machine gun, six rounds of bullet and one thousand yaba from the spot.

Selim was an active member of a local robber group, police alleged.

Healthier, wealthier

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December 2018 elections were neither free nor fair, Wells said.

"... and we have voiced our concern that police suppression and intimidation of civil society, free media, and political opposition took place ahead of those polls."

Wells said civil society was threatened by a shrinking space for activism and prohibitive draft regulations.

"Journalists continue to self-censor for fear of the Digital Security Act, which was introduced in 2018 to prosecute cybercrimes but offers a legal instrument to effectively criminalise some forms of free speech," she said.

It is crucial for the Bangladesh government to allow civil society organisations to operate; for individuals and groups to be able to express their views freely, including online; and for the political opposition to play its lawful role in a democracy.

The US diplomat said they are working with Bangladesh to improve its democratic governance, and maintained that fully respecting democratic rights, ensuring transparency and accountability will contribute directly to Bangladesh's aspirations for development.

Wells said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's decision to shelter over

700,000 Rohingyas since August 2017 deserves recognition from international partners, including the United States.

She said Myanmar must create the conditions for the Rohingyas' voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation and guarantee their rights as recommended by the Annan Commission.

In his testimony, Robert Destro, assistant secretary of state, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, said the 2018 elections were marred by irregularities and that the political opposition still struggles to operate, and many leaders face what appear to be spurious legal charges.

Security force abuses and reports of arbitrary and unlawful killings in counter narcotics and counterterrorism raids, as well as enforced disappearances, continue. Bangladesh has made some progress on worker safety, but minimal advances on labour rights, he added.

Members of the LGBTI community fear attacks and abuses, and members of the religious minority groups and persons with disabilities continue to be marginalised, Destro said, urging Bangladesh to take the path of inclusive development.

CONCERNS OVER NRC, KASHMIR

The US has expressed concern about India's National Register of Citizens (NRC), which puts 1.9 million people at risk of statelessness in Assam.

"The appeals process may disadvantage poor and illiterate populations who lack documentation. It is also unclear how the appeals process will be able to proceed in the allotted timeframe," Destro said.

He also expressed concern over the situation in the Kashmir Valley, where daily life for the nearly eight million residents has been severely impacted since August 5 when the Modi-led government scrapped the autonomy of Kashmir.

"As a whole, South Asia has experienced backsliding on democracy and human rights in recent months and years, including increased restrictions on fundamental freedoms," said Destro.

He said South Asia is critical to US President Donald Trump's Indo-Pacific Strategy built on three pillars: security, economics, and governance, but restrictions on civil society, media, abuses by security forces -- all erode democracy, leading to instability and deter investment.

The Trump administration is committed to partnering with South Asian nations to counter these abuses, Destro added.

Pry teachers threaten

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to clear the street, a scuffle broke out. At least five teachers suffered minor injuries during the scuffle, alleged teachers.

Some policemen were seen dragging teachers off the street.

Md Arif, sub-inspector of Shahabgh Police Station, said when they tried to clear the street, the teachers got angry and a scuffle began.

"We did not charge truncheons on the teachers," he said.

The teachers then gathered at Doyel Chatter where they held a brief rally.

At the rally, they demanded salary

of headmasters upgraded to the 10th grade and assistant teachers' salary upgraded to the 11th grade.

Currently, trained and untrained headmasters are getting salary under 11th and 12th grades. Trained and untrained assistant teachers are getting 14th and 15th grade salaries.

"We have been holding different programmes for the last five years to press home our demand, but to no avail," said Mohammad Shamsuddin, member secretary of the Oikya Parishad.

"The government must take effective measures immediately to

remove the disparity in salaries. Otherwise, we will continue our movement," he added.

At the rally, leaders of the platform demanded the authorities concerned arrange a meeting between their leaders and the prime minister.

Anisur Rahman, convener of the platform, said if the government did not meet their demand, they would lock the schools.

On October 13, the Directorate of Primary Education asked the teachers not to leave stations as their demand for eliminating the pay disparity was under consideration.

ACC seeks travel ban

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contractor SM Golam Kibria Shamim, Mohammedan Sporting Club Director In-charge M Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan and his wife Nabila Lokman, President of Kalabagan Sporting Club Mohammad Shafikul Alam, owner of an online-based gambling business Salim Prophan, ward councilors Habibur Rahman and AKM Mominul Haque Sayeed.

Of them, Sayeed is now living abroad, sources said.

The others on the list are: expelled office secretary of Jubo League Kazi Anisur Rahman and his wife Sumi

Rahman, Public Works Department (PWD) former chief engineer Mohammad Rafiqul Islam and additional chief engineer Abdul Hye, NRB Global Bank's former managing director Prasanta Kumar Haldar, Dhaka Wanderers Club's casino shareholder Enamul Haque Enu and his brother Rupon Bhuiyan, office staff Abul Kalam Azad, owner of Jakir Enterprise Jakir Hossain and Shafique Enterprise owner Shafiqul Islam.

On September 30, ACC's Secretary Dilwar Bakht told media that the Commission would inquire into the illegal wealth of the persons who amassed wealth through the casino

business.

Later, it prepared a primary list. Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) and Rab provided intelligence reports on their wealth.

Law enforcers began drives against illegal gambling business on September 18.

On the same day, Rab arrested Khalid for operating a casino. Two days later, Shamim was arrested from his Niketon residence. They were later sent to jail in separate cases.

Two weeks after the drive began, casino kingpin Samrat was arrested from Cumilla near the Indian border. He was later sent to jail.

Tribunal set to deliver verdict today

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Noman also hoped for maximum punishment of the accused.

Meanwhile, police were deployed in and around Nusrat's home yesterday to ensure security of the family members.

Besides, security has been beefed up on the court premises centring on the judgement, said Court Inspector Golam Zilani.

Nusrat, an Alim examinee of Sonagazi Senior Fazil Madrasa, was sexually harassed by madrasa principal (now sacked) Siraj Ud Doula on March 27. After the incident, her mother filed a case against Siraj, who was later arrested and sent to jail.

Since the arrest, the principal's associates were threatening Nusrat's family to withdraw the case. But the

family did not do so.

On April 6, Nusrat was set on fire when she went to the madrasa to sit for an exam in the madrasa building.

Around 80 percent of her body was burnt. After fighting for her life for five days, Nusrat died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on April 10, which triggered a huge public outcry across the country.

On May 29, the Police Bureau of Investigation pressed charges against 16 accused.

They are former madrasa principal Siraj, former vice-president of the madrasa governing body and Sonagazi upazila Awami League president Ruhul Amin, former member of the governing body and acting general secretary of Sonagazi municipality

unit AL Maksudul Alam, madrasa teachers Abdul Kader, and Afsar Uddin, madrasa students Saifur Rahman Mohammad Zubayer, Javed Hossain alias Shakhawat Hossain, Kamrunnahan Moni, Umme Sultana Poppy, Abdur Rahim Sharif, Iftekhar Uddin Rana, Imran Hossain Mamun, Mohiuddin Shakil, Mohammad Shamim, Nuruddin, and Shahadat Hossain Shamim. Maksudul is also a councillor of Sonagazi municipality.

Of them, 12 gave confessional statements before the court, said PP Hafez.

Trial of the case began on June 27. The court recorded statements of 87 witnesses. On September 30, the tribunal fixed October 24 for delivering the judgement in the case, he added.

2,730 more schools

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According to the new list, 439 are junior secondary schools (Class VI-VIII), 995 secondary schools (VI-X), 68 higher secondary schools, 93 colleges (XI-XII), and 56 degree colleges (XIII-XV).

Among the madrasas are 357 Dakhil, 128 Alim, 42 Fazil and 29 Kamil-level institutions.

The technical and vocational institutions include 62 agricultural, 48 vocational (independent), 129 vocational (affiliated), 175 BM (independent), and 108 BM (affiliated) ones.

Addressing the function, the prime minister asked the newly-enlisted institutions to follow all the conditions of MPO policy to continue enjoy the benefits. "The conditions will have to be maintained. If any institution fails to comply, it will be excluded from the MPO scheme."

Sheikh Hasina called for improving quality of education and creating an education-friendly atmosphere for children, with an eventual goal to build a poverty-free country as dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

In the future, the government will give the benefit to more institutions,

which are in real need and fulfill the conditions, she said. "Those who want to come under the MPO scheme will have to follow these directives (conditions of the policy)."

The prime minister, however, said the government, in some cases, relaxes conditions for the institutions located in remote places like haors, hills, chars and inaccessible areas. These regions get special consideration for inclusion, she said.

Sheikh Hasina said her government brought qawmi madrasas under the certificate system as tens of thousands of qawmi students were being neglected in the job market due to not having recognition of their certificates.

"Many employers don't want to recruit anyone without a government-approved certificate," she said. "So, they needed the institutional approval. It would not be fair to neglect them and put blame on them (qawmi students)."

Education Minister Dipu Moni, Deputy Minister for Education Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury Nowfel, and Senior Secretary to Secondary and Higher Education Division Md Sohorab Hossain were also present at the programme.

UN sees risk

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continued genocidal intent on the part of the state in relation to the Rohingya and there is a serious risk of genocide recurring," Darusman said Tuesday.

"Myanmar is failing in its obligations under the Genocide Convention to prevent genocide, to investigate genocide and to enact effective legislation and to enact effective legislation criminalizing and punishing genocide," he said.

Darusman said the fact-finding mission has transferred 1,227 interviews with victims and witnesses of crimes against the Rohingya to another specially established UN body, the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar. It said the material included "a list of over 150 people suspected of involvement in numerous international crimes."

He called on countries to support the investigation by the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court of alleged crimes on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border and plans for Gambia, on behalf of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation, to pursue a case against Myanmar before the International Court of Justice for breaching the 1948 Genocide Convention.

In the absence of a referral by the UN Security Council of the situation in Myanmar to the ICC, he said, "these initiatives are all the more important."

Darusman urged the assembly to also consider additional measures,

including the establishment of an ad hoc tribunal like the UN did for crimes in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia.

Yanghee Lee, the UN's independent investigator on Myanmar, told the assembly that the Independent Commission of Inquiry formed by Myanmar's government "does not represent a possible end to this impunity."

"It has not produced a single report after nearly 15 months," she said.

Lee also urged the international community to impose sanctions on companies owned by Myanmar's military and on "its commanders most responsible for serious violations."

Lee said that "there is no discernible improvement" in the human rights situation in Myanmar.

"Discrimination against religious minorities continues unabated," she said. "I am informed of 27 villages which describe themselves as 'Muslim free', banning Muslims from entry."

Myanmar's government has barred both Darusman and Lee from entering the country -- and both stressed that it is unsafe for the Rohingya refugees to return from Bangladesh.

Last month, Lee said, up to 30 Rohingya were arrested just because they left Rakhine state. They were denied access to lawyers, she said, and a court sentenced 21 adults to two years in prison and sent eight children to a detention center while a 5-year-old boy went to prison with his mother.

Russia discovers

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inaccessible mineral resources easier to exploit.

This summer's expedition to two archipelagos -- Franz Josef Land and Novaya Zemlya -- involved some 60 people including civilians from the Russian Geographic Society and was the first aboard a rescue towboat instead of an icebreaker.

Video of expedition members encountering an angry walrus that attacked their inflatable landing craft went viral last month.

"The two months this year when we held our expedition to Franz Josef Land can be described as warm," said Denis Krets, commander of the northern fleet's expedition force.

"We were very lucky because we

could land on islands where not every year the shore and the inshore water is free of ice."

During the expedition, the defence ministry announced it had found five new islands in Vize Bay off Novaya Zemlya, a vast mountainous archipelago with two main islands.

The islands had previously been seen on satellite images but the expedition was the first to see them.

It also said it had also confirmed the existence of an island that had been previously mapped as a peninsula of Hall Island, part of the Franz Josef Land archipelago, west of Novaya Zemlya.

Moiseyev said names for the new islands were "upcoming".

The law goes into effect

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sections of the law. Their demands include making all offences under the law "bailable".

There have been reports that the government was going to amend the law, giving into the pressure of transport leaders.

But Nazrul Islam yesterday told The Daily Star that the law would be put into effect without any amendment.

Nazrul said the rules, orders, and directives of the Motor Vehicles Ordinance 1983 will be followed until the new rules are formulated.

The Bangladesh Road Transport Authority submitted a draft of rules for the act in May and the division formed a 10-member committee, led by its Additional Secretary Abdul Malek, to scrutinise the rules.

"I don't think we will be able to finalise the rules before [November 1]. I think we have been able to complete 50 percent of our job," he told this correspondent last night.

The Motor Vehicles Ordinance will be cancelled once the new law is put into effect.

THE ACT

Thirty-four years ago, the maximum

punishment for causing death by reckless and negligent driving was a jail term of seven years. But in the face of truckers' protests in 1985, the Ershad government reduced the term of imprisonment to three years by amending the Penal Code.

Anguished over growing incidents of reckless driving, road safety campaigners have long been demanding that the government increase the punishment to at least 10 years for causing death by rash driving.

Following a writ petition that challenged the 1985 amendment, the High Court in a 2014 verdict declared void the amendment that reduced the jail term.

In March 2017, the cabinet approved in principle a proposed legislation titled Road Transport Act. But it gathered dust at the law ministry for more than a year amid opposition of transport owners and workers to some of its provisions.

But the cabinet gave final approval to the draft in August last year amid student agitation for safer roads.

The demonstrations were triggered by the death of two college students in the capital on July 29.

The parliament on September

19 last year passed the act with a maximum punishment of five years' imprisonment for causing death to a person by reckless driving.

CONTROVERSIES

The act drew strong criticism from road safety campaigners who termed it too lenient.

On the other hand, Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation observed a two-day strike on October 28-29 last year demanding changes to the law.

Bangladesh Goods Transport Owners-Workers United Council also observed a strike for three days in Dhaka demanding the same.

Amid this situation, a three-member committee led by Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan was formed on February 17 to look into how the act could be implemented. Khondaker Enayet Ullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said they have recommended several amendments after the law was passed.

"The authorities said they will analyse the recommendations after the law comes into effect," he told The Daily Star.

"We hope the rules would be framed soon."

No fuel

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89,269 vehicles have collected fitness certificates in August and September following an HC directive.

The office of inspector general of police (IGP) also submitted a report to the HC, saying that the law enforcers are continuously conducting drives against the unfit vehicles across the country.

Following a suo moto rule, the BRTA placed a report before the court in July, stating that 4.79 lakh vehicles without valid fitness certificates were on the roads.

On July 23, the HC directed the vehicle owners to collect fitness certificates in two months from August 1.

If an owner fails to comply, his or her vehicles would not be allowed to ply the roads after September 30, the HC also said.

BRTA statistics show that only 89,269 vehicles renewed their fitness certificates in August and September. However, the state-run organisation has no specific data of how many vehicles among the 4.79 lakh got their fitness certificate renewed in the two months.

"We think a very few of the 4.79 lakh unfit vehicles renewed their fitness certificates before the deadline," a

BRTA official said.

Many among the 4.79 lakh vehicles might not be plying the roads now, the official added.

About 41.76 lakh vehicles, including 27.54 motorcycles, got registered with the BRTA until September this year since the country's independence.

As per the law, all vehicles, except motorcycles, must have their fitness checked and certificates renewed by the BRTA every year. Therefore, 14.22 lakh vehicles are required to have their fitness certificates renewed annually.

But the BRTA data shows that only 5.75 lakh vehicles renewed their fitness certificates in the last fiscal year. Around 1.40 lakh received fitness clearances in the first three months of the current fiscal year.

People involved in the transport sector said there are several lakh unregistered vehicles in the country. Meanwhile, Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik told the court that the prime minister was concerned about road accidents. The PM wants discipline on the roads so that accidents are averted, he added.

Moyeen Firozee and Rafiqul Islam appeared for the BRTA.