

AVIJIT ROY MURDER

Verdict on Feb 16

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka tribunal yesterday fixed February 16 for delivery of judgment against six members of banned militant outfit Ansar-al-Islam in a case filed over the killing of blogger and writer Avijit Roy in February 2015.

After conclusion of arguments, Judge Md Majibur Rahman of the Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal of Dhaka set the date, Assistant Public Prosecutor Golam Sharuar Khan told The Daily Star.

During yesterday's closing arguments, the prosecution told the tribunal that they were able to prove the charges against all the accused and sought capital punishment for them.

The six accused are Sayed Mohammad Ziaul Haque alias Maj (sacked) Zia, Akram Hossain Abir, Mozammel Hossain Saymon, Abu Siddiq Sohel, Arafat Rahman Siam and Shafiqur Rahman Farabi.

Of them, Zia and Akram are on the run while the rest are in jail.

Earlier, 28 prosecution witnesses, including Avijit's father Prof Ajoy Roy, who passed away on December 9, 2019, gave depositions before the tribunal.

On February 26, 2015, Avijit, a US-based Bangladeshi blogger, was stabbed to death on the Dhaka University campus

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Workers of Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Development Project hose the road in the capital's Khamarbari area, to suppress the dust that is produced due to the construction of the metro rail lines. Air quality in the capital often gets to hazardous level in winter, owing to dry weather. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Elections to 4,300 union parishads could be delayed

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Starting of staggered elections to over 4,300 union parishads (UP) might be delayed because of completion of final voter list and Ramadan.

Election Commission officials yesterday said although elections were supposed to begin after March 21, it might be delayed as the final voter list will be published on March 2.

The officials said after publication of final voter list, they would need several more days to prepare compact disc of the lists to be sent to different election offices.

"Ramadan will be observed from mid-April; we would not be able to complete the all works to start election by March 21. So there is strong chance that election will start in late May after the Eid-ul-Fitr," a source said preferring not to be named.

Election Commissioner Kabita Khanom yesterday told journalists that they would consider the issue of voter list and Ramadan while announcing the UP election schedules.

Usually, UP elections take place every five years.

The EC had announced schedule for Union Parishad elections to be held in six phases. The previous round of polls were held on March 22, March 31, April 23, May 7, May 28 and June 4 in 2016.

However, the tenure of the chairmen begin from the day of his first meeting in office, and elections can also be held before the tenure ends.

The source said if it is not possible to hold election government even within the end of the current chairmen's tenure, the government has

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'Ensure uninterrupted power supply first'

People in Rajshahi demand suspension of pre-paid meter installation project

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Speakers at a views-exchange with the Northern Electricity Supply Company (Nesco) officials yesterday demanded suspension of the government project for installing "smart" prepaid meters in Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions.

They alleged that Nesco, an enterprise of Power Development Board (PDB), was hastening the project and forcing it upon people.

Speakers pointed out that Nesco appeared indifferent to corruptions, faulty power distribution system, inability to supply uninterrupted and quality power and upgrading the wires that remain clogged in most places, and should address those first.

They also said Nesco should explain to people why this new system is beneficial and help them learn how to use it.

Nesco organised the three-hour meeting at its Rajshahi headquarters.

Leaders of different political parties,

social organisations, consumers, lawyers, freedom fighters, and journalists took part in it, chaired by Nesco managing director Zakiul Islam.

The meeting was called after locals obstructed Nesco employees from installing new meters at several places in the city in last few weeks.

Nesco took up the Tk 418 crore project in July 2018 for installing pre-paid meters to some five lakh subscribers in six districts of Rajshahi division -- Rajshahi, Natore, Chapainawabganj, Bogura, Pabna and Sirajganj.

The installation was scheduled to end by October last year, but the work got stalled due to the pandemic, said Mahbubul Alam Chowdhury, the project director.

In January, Nesco managed to install some 4,200 new meters, and began witnessing unrest among people.

"We have to complete the installation by June," said the project director.

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AL JAZEERA REPORT

BNP seeks govt explanation

UNB, Dhaka

Expressing deep concern over the report aired by Qatar-based news channel Al Jazeera, BNP has sought an "acceptable and credible" explanation from the government.

BNP senior joint secretary general Ruhul Kabir Rizvi made the demand through a statement yesterday.

"Al Jazeera has aired a report titled 'All the Prime Minister's Men', which embarrassed and disturbed the people of Bangladesh. BNP is also deeply worried over the matter," the statement reads.

It alleged that the government has tried to refute the report only through its statement and political rhetoric instead of giving people a clear explanation on each of the allegations raised in the report. "It's made people more concerned and deepened their anxiety over the allegations," it added.

The statement said, "Like the country's people, BNP is also waiting to get an acceptable and credible explanation from the government on every issue mentioned in the report."

Meanwhile, the foreign ministry in a statement has termed the Al Jazeera report "false, defamatory and a politically motivated smear campaign."

"The report is nothing more than a misleading series of innuendos and insinuations in what is apparently

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'Anti-democracy, anti-dev forces still active abroad'

Says Quader, urging all to remain united

BSS, Dhaka

Noting that anti-democracy and anti-development forces are still active abroad, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday urged all to remain united to strengthen the hands of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to deal with such evil forces.

Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, said this while speaking at a press conference on contemporary affairs at his official residence in the capital.

He said the undemocratic behaviour of BNP and its politics of conspiracy are main impediment to the country's democracy.

Quader said Bangladesh has moved up four notches in the latest Democracy Index 2020 of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) while the scope of democracy has minimised in different parts of the world due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"This democratic progress is a global recognition of the Sheikh Hasina government in advancing the progress of democracy," said the AL general secretary.

He said the country's democratic progress amid the pandemic was reflected in the EIU index. This recognition will accelerate the efforts of Sheikh Hasina to advance the country's democracy, he added.

Mentioning that the role of the opposition party is also vital in this regard, Quader said BNP often says that the government wants to make the country opposition-free.

In fact, he said, people want to see BNP as a responsible and stronger opposition party.

The AL general secretary said although BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir is staying abroad for treatment, he is continuously criticising the government.

Responding to a remark of Fakhrul, he said everything that is anti-people and harmful to the country's politics was introduced by BNP.

Quader asked the authorities concerned to take steps to form AL organisational committees at district, upazila and union levels where the committees have already expired.

Father Peixotto passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rev Fr Joseph Stephen Peixotto, former principal of Notre Dame



College, passed away in Dhaka yesterday, aged 87.

The catholic priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross breathed his last around 8am at Moreau House in Banasree.

Jyoti F Gomes, director at St Joseph International School, said Father Peixotto had been suffering from heart-related ailments and received treatment in Bangladesh and Thailand.

In December, he was admitted to Square Hospital with Covid-19 infection. He, however, recovered and was staying at Moreau House, a residence of the Holy Cross Congregation that Father Peixotto belonged to.

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Fraudster's 3-yr run ended by DB

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

It's good to learn from mistakes, but it's another thing entirely when the lessons from a mishap goes on its own tangent of more errors.

Take the case of 21-year-old Saikat Hossain Bhuyan alias Topu, who, rather than taking the lessons of his digital defraud, chose to become a fraudster himself!

It all started in 2017. After the year's SSC exams had ended, Topu started spending a lot of his free time on Facebook.

While browsing some groups, he came across some interesting posts. They read something like this: "Contact inbox to change your results. Results can be changed officially."

Unsatisfied and in fear with his own exam results, he contacted one of the posters for help. He was told to pay them Tk 1,500 in exchange of any result he preferred. But soon after he sent them the money, the person blocked all communication channels and just... disappeared.

It took Topu a while to realise he had been defrauded. But instead of learning the lesson and steering clear of similar traps, his takeaway was polar opposite -- "Why not start something like this myself?" he thought. It seemed easy enough, and carried the potential to earn big bucks.

Topu proceeded to open up around 28 e-mail accounts and 19 Facebook profiles. Curiously, on some of his Facebook accounts, he used pictures of the education minister, public service commission chair, and the education ministry secretary! It might seem bizarre, but Topu had plans.

He started to post on Facebook groups with the same promise to change people's results. This was done on two levels. With one profile he would make the post, and then with others comment on it, saying things like "You saved my life!" and "Thank you, you did a lot for me" to add credibility to his offer.

Soon enough, customers started flowing in. Once contacted, Topu would ask them for their marksheets and ask from Tk 1,500 to 6,000, depending on the customer's requirement.

Once someone expressed interest, it was time for his high-profile fake profiles to come into play. He would chat with these fake profiles from his business-profile, and ask the "ministers" to help with the customer's results.

He would then take screenshots of these conversations and send them back to the customers, so that they can trust him and feel secure sending money.

But then, in exact emulation of his own experience, once the money arrived, Topu

would be gone.

This correspondent came to know of this from the police's Detective Branch (DB), who arrested Topu on Monday.

SM Rezaul Hoque, additional deputy commissioner of DB, told The Daily Star, "Upon receiving information that someone is duping people by impersonating ministers, we initiated digital surveillance and got trace of Topu."

On Monday, police conducted a drive in the capital's Khilkhet area and arrested Topu from in front of the Regency Hotel, said Rezaul, who led the drive. "In the last three years, he has defrauded hundreds of people, scamming each for Tk 1,000 to Tk 6,000."

Investigating transaction details from Topu's mobile financial account between October and December of last year, the DB team found evidence of around Tk 6.90 lakh worth of exchanges. The Daily Star has also obtained a copy of the transaction history.

Mashur Rahman, deputy commissioner of DB police, said they are trying to find out whether there were more people involved in Topu's scheme.

Though it earned him a monthly income of around a lakh to a-lakh-and-a-half for the last three years, according to Rezaul, Topu now stares at a hefty fine and a prolonged period in jail.

Support group for cancer patients launched

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Cancer Aid Trust (BANCAT), in partnership with International Medical Information Centre (IMIC) has launched Warriors' Club, a support group for cancer survivors at an event at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

The club is meant to be a source of emotional, mental and spiritual support for cancer patients. Club members will support patients suffering from cancer and their families through a monthly event.

The aid trust's Executive Chairman, Barrister Sarwat Siraj launched the club virtually. "This initiation of the Warrior's Club will play a leading role in cancer awareness and prevention in Bangladesh," she said.

Media personality Sara Zaker joined the event virtually and she spoke about her and her late husband Aly Zaker's journey of fighting cancer. Aly Zaker was diagnosed with stomach cancer in 2016 and passed away on November 27, 2020. Sara Zaker was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2012. "Besides, women should be more aware of their health and be selfish [in attending to their own needs] to get the screening/ They show reluctance in getting themselves screened, while prioritising the health and well-being of the children and other members of the family," she added.

Raina Mahmud, a renowned photographer and event manager, shared her journey of fighting breast cancer. Raina said her family and well-wishers provided her support both mentally and financially in the battle. Raina also received Tk 5 lakh from the Prime Minister for her treatment.

Ivy Huq Russell, founder and chief executive officer of Maya, joined the event virtually. She shared how cancer created an adverse impact on her mother's mental health before her death.

The event was moderated by BANCAT author Najmus Ahmed Albab, who is also a leukaemia survivor.

IMIC, the integrated partner of the club, works as a patient assistance centre with high quality and cost-effective options for healthcare seekers.

686 children drowned last year

SoMaSHTE's compiled data shows

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some 833 people drowned last year and 82 percent (686) of them were children, said SoMaSHTE—a non-government organisation— yesterday in a consultation meeting with senior journalists from different national media houses at The Daily Star Centre.

Society for Media and Suitable Human Communication Techniques [SoMaSHTE] found 467 drowning incidents published in the media from January 2020 to January 2021.

SoMaSHTE found, 281 were girl children among the deceased. Most of the child victims went to nearby water bodies unattended. The highest number of deaths occurred in August.

"If children can remain in care especially during the first half of the day, we can prevent 70 percent incidents of children drowning," said Aminur Rahman, Deputy Executive Director of the Centre for Injury Prevention and Research Bangladesh (CIPRB) with the reference to a survey paper.

The CIPRB survey showed, around 40 children drown every day and such deaths occur in ponds within 20 metres of the home from 9am to 1pm.

"Apart from deaths caused by diseases, drowning cases is very much preventable. Bangladesh has pledged to reduce the under-five mortality rate to 25 per thousand children by 2030 to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)," said Mir Masrur Zaman, director of SoMaSHTE.

The meeting recommended that the government should develop a nationwide strategy to prevent child drowning, learning from proven interventions targeting those most prone to risk.



The Satmasjid Road in Dhanmondi is one of the most densely populated ones of the capital in terms of restaurants and cafes. Due to the constant flow of orders from the area, this spot in front of Road 8/A has basically become a junction for food delivery workers. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Bangladesh a frontline climate leader: Ban Ki-moon

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Leading climate change advocates and diplomats have praised Bangladesh government for its extraordinary capacity of early warning and disaster preparedness.

"Bangladesh is a frontline climate leader," said Ban Ki-moon, former UN Secretary-General, referring to the successful evacuation of 2.4 million people during super Cyclone Amphan last May.

Organised by the London-based Chatham House on Wednesday, Moon, also chair of the Board of the Global Center on Adaptation, lauded Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's "Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan", a transformational nature-based investment and socio-economic growth concept.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan, UK International Champion on Adaptation and Resilience for COP26 Presidency and Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth; London-based diplomats and Chatham House Director Robin Niblett CMG, also spoke at the CoP-26 Diplomatic Dialogue on Adaptation.