

Six killed in 2 road crashes in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, KUSHTIA

Six people have been killed in two road accidents in Kushtia over the last two days.

Four of them died after a tipper truck hit a battery-run rickshaw coming from the opposite direction on Kushtia-Jhenidah highway in Battail Dakshinpara area of Kushtia sadar, said Idris Ali, OC of Kushtia Highway Police.

Muktar Hossain, a rickshaw driver, and three passengers of the vehicle died on the spot around 5:30am yesterday, he said.

The three were identified as Jasmine, 30, of Swastipur, Rozina Khatun, 28, and Swapna Rani, 45, of Haldarpara of the upazila. They were workers of a local beedi manufacturing factory.

The truck was seized but its driver fled, said the OC, adding that another injured in the accident was receiving treatment at Kushtia General Hospital.

The bodies were kept at the hospital, he said.

Two more people were killed as the driver of another tipper truck lost control over the steering and hit a motorcycle in Taragunia area of Kushtia's Daulatpur upazila around 9:00pm on Sunday.

The victims - Bidyut and Rajan, both 38 and from Kaipale village of the upazila - were on the motorcycle. They died on the spot, said OC SM Jabid Hasan of Daulatpur Police Station.

He said angry locals stopped the truck and set it on fire.

The driver managed to flee, he added.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana offer prayers after placing wreath at the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in front of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Dhanmondi on his Homecoming Day yesterday.

PHOTO: PMO

Keep up the pace of development: PM

UNB, DHAKA

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon the country's people to keep up the pace of the economic progress that the country has achieved in the great stride of all to build "Sonar Bangla".

"InshAllah, we'll change the fate of distressed people by implementing the dream of the father of nation. I also urged the people of the country to keep up the progress already achieved for building Sonar Bangladesh," she said.

The PM was presiding over a programme titled "Jatir Pita Mukta Swadesh-a" (The Father of the Nation in his Independent Homeland), joining it virtually from the Gono Bhawan.

The National Implementation Committee for Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Birth Centenary Celebration arranged the programme at BTV's Shaheed Monirul Alam Auditorium in the capital, marking

the 50th historic Homecoming Day of Bangabandhu after the 1971 Liberation War.

Hasina said the goal of her government is to change the fate of the people for whom Bangabandhu liberated the country, struggled throughout his life, endured repeated incarcerations and repression, and dedicated his life.

"Today, I express my gratitude to the people of Bangladesh as they kept their trust in me and I've got the scope time and again to work for the development of the people, coming in power," said Hasina, the eldest daughter of Bangabandhu.

She said people came to know about a complete plan to rebuild independent Bangladesh from the historic 10th January Speech Bangabandhu delivered after returning home from Pakistan jail in 1972.

She said the father of the nation, in his speech, had mentioned how the independent country would run and

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Guliakhali beach now a reserved tourism zone

UNB, CHATTOGRAM

Guliakhali Sea Beach, a unique sea beach located in Sitakunda upazila, was declared a reserved area for tourism yesterday.

The civil aviation and tourism ministry made an announcement in this regard, bringing 259.1 acres of the beach under its protection as khas land.

The ministry notification said the area was being affected by unplanned establishments. The protection will also allow development of tourism in the beach, it said.

Lush Kewra forests crisscrossed by a dense network of thin canals give this beach a unique appearance. The canals swell during high tide. Unlike other beaches, it does not have sand, being covered with green grass instead.

The beach is only five kilometres off Sitakunda bazar. It has recently been developed into a popular tourist spot for locals and travelers wishing to see a beach that is beyond ordinary.

No 'crossfire' deaths since US sanctions

FROM PAGE 1
on law enforcers.

The government and law enforcers often claimed that such killings took place after criminals opened fire first. But in reality, the law enforcers "staged" such incidents, they said.

Similar break in "gunfights" was seen after the killing of Major (ret'd) Sinha Mohammad Rashed Khan in Cox's Bazar on July 31, 2020. Except one in Sylhet on August 2 that year, not a single "shootout" was reported in the country between law enforcers and criminals for over five months afterwards.

However, 184 people were killed in "shootouts" in the first seven months in 2020, according to the tally of Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK).

Following the killing of Sinha, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) in a statement on August 6, 2020 said the then army chief and the inspector general of police gave

necessary instructions to their respective forces so that no "such incident" occurs again in future.

Last year, 51 people were killed in "gunfights" between law enforcers and criminals, shows ASK data.

Speaking to The Daily Star on Sunday, noted rights activist Nur Khan said these are extrajudicial killings. Incidents of "shootout" or "gunfight" didn't occur at all as claimed by law enforcers, he added.

"If 'shootout' existed at all, it would have continued even after the imposition of US sanctions or after the killing of Major Sinha. After the sanctions, we saw one was tortured to death in Rab custody. It's quite evident that if the government wishes, it can either stop or continue extrajudicial killings."

Such extrajudicial killings increase, decrease or stop in special situations or times, the rights activist said, adding that

the number of arrests grows during or before elections and the number of enforced disappearance goes up during political movements.

"When a special situation arises or when people get angry, such shootouts stop. That's why it seems that extrajudicial killings can be a strategy of the rulers to create an atmosphere of fear so that people can't protest any offences or wrongdoings," said Nur Khan.

Human rights bodies say extrajudicial killings had begun in early 2002 in the name of "Operation Clean Heart". There had been a spate of "gunfights" between law enforcers and criminals since 2004.

According to rights organisation Odhikar, at least 3,135 people were killed in "gunfights" between law enforcement and security agencies and criminals from January 2001 to September last year.

The number of people

killed in "gunfights" increased in 2018 compared to the previous two years after a countrywide anti-narcotics drive began.

The Awami League in its 2008 election manifesto stated that "extrajudicial killings" will be stopped if it is voted to power.

After the party came to power, the then government in February 2009 informed the UN Human Rights Commission that Bangladesh adopted a "zero tolerance" policy for extrajudicial killings, torture, and deaths in custody. But "gunfights" took place throughout that year, except in March.

Asked about the pause in "shootout", Rab Director (legal and media wing) Commander Khandaker Al Moin yesterday said occurrence of "gunfights" does not depend on any special situation or time; rather it depends on the circumstances of a drive when criminals open fire first.

"The constitution and law of Bangladesh have permitted us to open fire in self-defence. It's not a matter of human rights. We might have not come under attack in the last one month. This proves that it's not a routine issue that gunfights would take place five-seven times every day. We only open fire when we come under attack," he claimed.

The USA on December 10 imposed human rights-related sanctions on Rab and seven current and former top officials of the agency, including Benazir Ahmed, now inspector general of police.

The State Department in a separate release said they barred two Rab officials including Benazir, former director general of Rab, from entering the US for their involvement in a gross violation of human rights, namely the May 2018 extrajudicial killing of a Teknaf municipal councillor.

Shamim Osman breaks silence, code of conduct

FROM PAGE 1
Taimur has always refuted the allegation, saying he wants to win to free the Narayanganj city corporation from the "clutches of contractors".

Shamim extended his support to Ivy at a press conference yesterday, just six days before the polls.

Speaking at a local community centre, he said, "I am sorry for holding this press conference during the electioneering. I was silent for a few days, and many tried to create an issue over this. It hampers the unity of the party. Some are hurting the party while

being a part of it.

"All Awami League leaders are here. I could not join the campaign earlier but I am joining it today."

He then asked party leaders and activists to go to voters' doors and seek blessings for Ivy. "Blaming others will not bring in votes."

The MP added, "It does not matter who the candidate is. It's the [Awami League's electoral] symbol that matters. 'Boat' is Bangabandhu's and we all stand by it."

Contacted after the press conference, Ivy told The Daily Star, "Shamim Osman is a party man

and he can extend his support, but I am reaching out to the voters.

"I want to stand by them as I need their votes. It is up to the party to see who is extending support to me and who is not."

About Shamim breaching the electoral code, Matiur Rahman, Narayanganj district election officer, said they would take action as per the rules.

Taimur said, "It seems the government is putting pressure... There is a big crack in my rival camp and that is why they always blame each other."

He alleged that law enforcement

agencies were intimidating his supporters and asking them to work in Ivy's favour.

Nur Uddin, president of Amra Narayanganj bashi, a non-political and social organisation, said Shamim's press conference was a big push for Ivy as he has a good number of followers in Narayanganj.

"But we have seen in the past that many of his words do not match his actions. It is also true that Shamim had no other option than to support Ivy. Now, those who had kept themselves aloof from the campaign might work to ensure Ivy's victory."

Now police press charges against JCD leader

FM MIZANUR RAHMAN, CTG

Police have pressed charges against Elias Khan, a Chhatra Dal leader in Chattogram, in an arms case filed by Rab with Akbar Shah Police Station.

Since Elias's arrest on November 26, his family members have been alleging that he was framed by a team of Rab after being picked up by law enforcers in plainclothes from the street near a shop he owned.

Elias, currently behind bars, is a former vice president of Chattogram City Chhatra Dal. Rab said it arrested Elias with a double-barrel pistol and two cartridges from CDA Road-1 of Bishwa Colony.

He used to sit in his shop named "E & I Traders" just in front of Akbarshah Police Station.

Sub-inspector Biswajit Chandra Debnath of Rab-7 filed the case on November 27. Family members, however, alleged that a local Rab informant in connivance with the SI implicated Elias in the false case.

The Daily Star investigated the incident earlier and found some discrepancy between the witnesses' version and the case statement by the Rab. In a report published on December 18 titled "Ctg Chhatra Dal Leader's Arrest: Everything goes against Rab claim", this newspaper highlighted the discrepancies.

However, the charge sheet, submitted by Akbar Shah Police Station SI Mohammed Sayem, failed to find out the source of the firearms or how the JCD leader allegedly collected the firearms. The charge sheet does not even answer whether Elias had any intention to do any criminal activities carrying the firearms.

SI Sayem submitted the charge sheet on December 28 in the prosecution section of the court, said court sources.

UP member shot dead in Abhaynagar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A newly-elected union parishad member in Jashore was shot dead at point-blank last night.

The incident happened around 8:00pm when Uttam Sarker, 34, was on his way home in Harishpur village from Shundali Bazar in Abhaynagar upazila.

He was attacked near Harishpur Primary School by assailants who were hiding in a bush.

The attackers shot him in the chest, killing him on the spot, said AKM Shamim Hasan, officer-in-charge of Abhaynagar Police Station.

Uttam became a member of Shundali union parishad after he won in the UP polls on December 26.

The OC said they were trying to identify those involved in the killing.

"We are investigating the incident," he said. The incident follows the fifth phase of the UP election which concluded last week. At least 10 people were killed in polls-violence in that phase.

A total of 86 people have been killed in the various phases of the UP elections since they began in mid-2021.

The most number of deaths happened during the second phase when 30 people were killed.

Form EC thru law, not search committee

JP (Manju) tells Hamid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party (Manju) yesterday said the new election commission should be formed through the enactment of a law in line with the constitution and not through search committee.

A seven-member JP delegation, led by party chairman Anwar Hossain Manju, said this at a dialogue with President Abdul Hamid at the Bangabhaban regarding formation of the new EC.

In response, the president said he will try to meet their proposal in accordance with the power bestowed upon him as per the constitution, meeting sources told The Daily Star.

"There is a clear provision in our constitution stating that the election commission will have to be formed after enacting a law in this regard," Sheikh Shahidul Islam, JP (Manju) general secretary, told this newspaper after the hour-long meeting that began at 6:30pm.

"We told the president we did not suggest any name for a search committee as the constitution has no such provision [for forming the EC by a search committee]."

"Rather, we told him that an EC should be formed comprising people who will be able to gain people's trust and hold a free, fair and acceptable election."

President Hamid has so far held the dialogue with 18 political parties, most of whom proposed the enacting of a law for the EC formation.

Covid curbs return

FROM PAGE 1

will have to show a negative Covid-19 certificate and undergo a rapid antigen test.

Only truck drivers will be allowed at the land port, while screenings at all ports will be increased. Embargoes would be imposed on crews to prevent them from leaving the vessels.

The measures are expected to contain the latest surge in Covid-19 cases, driven most likely by the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

The variant has undergone 50 genetic changes, making it more transmissible than the dominant Delta variant and more likely to evade the immune protection provided by vaccines or previous infection.

Subsequently, it is causing a fresh wave of Covid cases the world over, compelling governments to enforce measures to restrict social mixing.

In Bangladesh, the official tally of Omicron cases stands at 31, after 10 new cases were reported yesterday by the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b).

Samples from all of the patients were collected before December 28, according to the data published on the global database GISAIID.

But health officials believe the fast-multiplying variant is causing the spike in cases seen in recent days.

In the 24 hours to 8 am yesterday, the country logged in 2,231 new cases - the highest since

September 10 last year. In the preceding 24 hours, 1,491 new cases were registered.

The case positivity rate yesterday was 8.5 percent - the highest since Sept 5.

Vaccinated patients are more likely to experience milder disease if infected by the Omicron variant, while a booster dose is said to provide bigger and broader protection against the rogue variant.

In Bangladesh, the rate of vaccination is modest: as of January 6, 39 percent of the targeted population and 31 percent of the total population have received both doses of the Covid-19 vaccine, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The health ministry will take necessary measures and initiatives to expedite the vaccination campaigns.

Students, who have thus far not been a major focus of the vaccination campaign, will be given special attention.

Hours before the cabinet division issued the notice, Education Minister Dipu Moni at a press conference said they have taken a target of inoculating more than 75 lakh students aged between 12 and 18 by January 31.

There are about 1.16 crore students aged between 12 and 18. Of them, 44 lakh have got the first dose while another 4.2 lakh have gotten both.

As many as 75.5 lakh students are yet to get the vaccine.

"Earlier, we faced complexities on vaccine preservation and

registration. We have overcome the problem now. The DGHS is not seeking much documentation. The whole process has become easier for our students," she said.

If a student above 12 shows the relevant documents, he/she can get the vaccine, she said, while suggesting the students take at least a dose to attend classes in person.

Meanwhile, the education ministry is due to sit today to discuss vaccination of students of National University, Open University and Islamic Arabic University as a large number of the students from the institutes remain unvaccinated.

As of now, there is no plan to halt in-person classes and SSC and HSC exams will be held in the middle of the year, she said.

The education ministry will also heighten monitoring at the educational institutions to ensure the health guidelines are being followed properly.

US warns Iran after regime sanctions 50 Americans

AFF, WASHINGTON

Washington said Sunday it refused to be threatened by Iran's weekend sanctioning of some 50 Americans including senior officials, warning that Tehran would face "severe consequences" if it attacked any US nationals.