

Ex-DAE official arrested with 512 litres of edible oil

DMP starts surveillance to monitor hoarding of essentials

MUNTAKIM SAAD

With edible oil fast vanishing from retailers' shelves in the wake of a supply crunch, a retired government official turned out to be on the list of hoarders after stockpiling 512 litres of soybean oil.

Layekuzzaman, former deputy assistant agriculture officer of the Department of Agricultural Extension, hoped to make a hefty profit during Ramadan by selling the illegally stockpiled oil worth Tk 81,984.

On Friday, Mohammadpur police team arrested the 60-year-old and seized 512 litres of oil from a Lalmatia flat, said Biplob Kumar Sarkar, deputy commissioner (Tejgaon Division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, at a press conference yesterday.

Layekuzzaman lives in a flat in Lalmatia and looks after his father-in-law's one next door. That is where he had stored the oil.

During primary interrogation, Layekuzzaman showed a receipt of Surya Enterprise, in Mohammadpur's Krishi Market, from where he bought 40 litres at Tk 159 per litre.

"He forged the receipt and included prices of more oil. We will try to find out from where he bought the rest," Biplob added.

A case was filed against Layekuzzaman under the Special Powers' Act with Mohammadpur Police Station.

Biplob added, "We will also interrogate the trader who sold 40 litres of oil to one person."

The DMP has started surveillance this week on business establishments and warehouses in the capital so that no syndicate can hoard the products.

"We will monitor if anyone is stockpiling to create an artificial crisis... If we get any such clue, we will inform the department concerned, like the Directorate of National Consumer Rights' Protection, and then conduct drives," DMP Commissioner Shafiqul Islam told The Daily Star.

"There is a tendency to increase prices of essentials like edible oil, pulses ahead of Ramadan. We will look into whether anyone is doing illegal business."

The prices of oil, onion, potato, beef, mutton, chicken, flour, cardamom and sugar have increased within a week, according to the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

The logical price chart of the Department of Agriculture Marketing shows that the average prices of 39 daily items have shot up almost 17 percent from last year.



Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury talks to an alumna of Dhaka University at the event celebrating 100 years of the university yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

12 impounded buses torched

CID had seized them in money laundering case against ex-AL leader, brother

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

At least 12 buses of South Line Paribahan were burned to ashes in police custody in Faridpur town's Goalchamat area yesterday.

The Criminal Investigation Department seized a total of 22 buses in a money laundering case.

Ten of the buses were kept under a shed and 12 others under the open sky in the district police's jurisdiction as evidence of the case.

Around 1:00am yesterday, a group of miscreants set fire on the buses kept under the open sky in two rows.

According to locals, the fire broke out on the second bus of the first row at the beginning and the fire spread rapidly to other buses.

On information, a team of

firefighters in Faridpur rushed to the spot and doused the fire after one and a half hours.

Nazrul Islam, assistant deputy director of Faridpur fire service, said it seemed the fire was an act

of sabotage.

Sheikh Mohammad Ali, the night guard of the shed where the buses were kept, said, "The fire spread very quickly. It was a planned work."

The owners of the buses are Sajjad Hossain alias Barkat, suspended general secretary of Faridpur town Awami League, and his brother Imtiaz Hasan alias Rubel, former president of Faridpur press club.

Both of them were arrested in the money laundering case.

Subal Chandra Saha, president of Faridpur district AL, filed the case



Shakib's U-turn

FROM PAGE 1

leaving for Dubai on March 6 to fulfill a commercial commitment that he was not mentally nor physically fit to play cricket. But by that time, the board had already included Shakib for both the ODI and Test series in South Africa.

The next day Hassan raised questions about Shakib's sincerity, asking the media whether the left-hander would have done the same thing if it was ahead of the Indian Premier League instead.

After a meeting, the BCB decided to grant Shakib a break for two months from all forms of cricket till April 30. Upon his return from Dubai on March 10, Shakib spoke to the BCB boss and, after another meeting at the home of cricket in Mirpur, the star cricketer eventually changed his mind.

"I spoke to [BCB president Nazmul Hassan] Papon bhai over the past few days and we managed to make a plan for the whole year. Since I am a part of all three formats [in the latest central contract list], I will always be available for all three formats. The board will decide when it is necessary to rest me and that goes for the South Africa series as well. So I am available for the South Africa series," Shakib said after the meeting at Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

On the other hand, Hassan stated that the cricketer was mentally disturbed, which is why he had problems with his decision-making. He also asked the media to stop

speculating about possible reasons when a player asks to rest or is left out of the team.

"If someone does not play a series or two, there is no reason to speculate. The board might even decide to drop players and try someone new. I would like to ask you to take this sportingly. It's part of the game and happens all over the world."

"Since Shakib has told us that he is feeling mentally disturbed, we should be giving him our support. All the talk shows and discussions speculating about it are not good in that context. We have to stand beside someone when they are suffering mentally or physically. Do not speculate because that causes more problems," Hassan told the media.

Bangladesh will play the first of three ODIs against South Africa on March 18 in Centurion. The second and third ODIs are scheduled for March 20 and 23 in Johannesburg and Centurion respectively. The first Test will begin on March 30 in Durban while the second and final Test will start on April 7 in Port Elizabeth.

Turkmenistan votes for father-son transition

AFP, Ashgabat

Voting was underway in Turkmenistan yesterday for a tightly-controlled leadership election that is all but certain to yield ex-Soviet Central Asia's first father-son succession.

Not much done since Accord left

FROM PAGE 1

After Accord left, over 70 factories out of Accord and RSC's list of factories have still not implemented even 50 percent of the remediation measures recommended by Accord, shows the RSC website.

A handful of the factories are barely getting started with their preliminary inspection happening after the RSC took over.

Iqbal M Hussain, managing director of RSC and its chief safety officer, said 373 of the listed factories are "yet to complete the structural remediation based on an engineering assessment" and 1,241 are yet to have their fire alarm systems verified.

At the time of Accord's departure, nearly two-thirds of the listed un-remediated factories had implemented over 90 percent of the remediation measures recommended -- but even the minor work left can cause major accidents.

For example, in late January, a factory named Zaheen Knitwear Ltd in Narayanganj's Madanpur caught fire. The resulting inferno was so big that it took five hours for 13 fire-fighting units to bring the fire under control, and sixteen hours to completely douse the flames.

Zaheen was a listed factory with Accord -- meaning it was eligible for receiving orders from big brands like US Polo Association, Woolworths, Lidl and Target. It was also classified as "behind the

schedule," but only had a bit of work left.

Since it was a Friday, there were no workers at Zaheen and no casualties were reported; but to put into context the kind of disaster averted -- four out of six of the factory's units were engulfed in the fire.

Among the issues left unresolved, Zaheen's fire alarm system was supposed to be replaced, and fire doors and a standpipe system was supposed to be installed.

According to RSC inspection notes, the factory was first asked to install these in 2016.

The factory was in the process of installing the standpipe system, and importing the alarm systems and fire doors but as of January this year, it was yet to be completed.

Executive Director of Zaheen Knitwear Misbahuddaza Misbah admitted that they faced delays in ensuring the necessary remediations, saying the pandemic was also to blame. "We faced delays in importing the supplies, there was a worker crisis, and then the pandemic happened."

The factory management sought until June 2022 to complete the installation. RSC documents seen by The Daily Star said it was unacceptable.

"The corrective action plan should be completed as per the RSC recommendation with immediate concern," it added.

It wasn't fixed

immediately. Following the fire, Lt Col Zillur Rahman, a director of the fire service, said, "The fire safety system in the factory was inadequate. We faced difficulties in fighting the fire as the factory did not have water supply."

Similarly, a whole host of issues were reported to be resolved but were pending verification by the RSC since 2019.

"During the pandemic, the RSC did not inspect as many factories as it should have," said Kalpana Akhter, a labour rights activist, who runs Bangladesh Centre for Workers Solidarity.

The RSC's annual report 2020-21 outlines their problem. "The RSC's operation experienced partial halt several times [June to early September 2020 and March to May 2021] due to nationwide lockdown and movement restrictions," it said.

During the reporting period, out of the targeted 100 boiler safety inspections, only 10 were completed.

To make up for the stalled activities, the number of initial inspections to onboard new factories has been doubled, the report added.

It also states that inspections are categorised according to priority, with inspections related to industrial accidents and safety concerns getting precedence, followed by the factories ready for final approval.

Meanwhile, with nearly a thousand factories to

remediate, the challenge faced by the RSC is enormous.

This is further complicated by the fact that the RSC cannot legally force brands to stop buying from factories that are not making progress in remediation. The Accord agreement had this power -- but since the Bangladesh Accord has been made to leave the country, it exists as an international agreement called the International Accord for Health and Safety in the Garment and Textile Industry. This agreement came into effect on September 1 last year.

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) said the International Accord cannot be applied to Bangladeshi factories, and the RSC will not adhere to it either.

When the International Accord was signed, BGMEA issued a press release stating, "Clauses and subclauses of any agreement signed outside Bangladesh, which are directly contradictory to the dictates of the laws of Bangladesh must stand as null and void and have no scope of being implemented and RSC would not be functioning beyond its mandated remit."

"The industry has zero tolerance for backsliding on matters related to safety, even while the rate of progress of certification may not be as per expectations," the BGMEA stated.

Student stabbed in N'ganj dies

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A college student, who was stabbed in Narayanganj on Friday night, died at a clinic in the capital yesterday.

Mabia Begum, mother of Mahfuz Ahmed, 20, a first-year student of Narayanganj College, said some of his friends took him out of his home in Narayanganj city's Khanpur Baubazar area around 9:00pm on Friday. Later, he was stabbed in Patharghat area.

Shah Jaman, officer-in-charge Narayanganj Sadar Police Station, said they detained three youths for questioning.

Police suspect the youths stabbed the victim over a feud. "We are investigating the matter."

9-yr-old raped in Kurigram

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Police were trying to arrest a 50-year-old man who allegedly raped a third-grader of a madrasa in Kurigram's Rowmari upazila.

The nine-year-old girl's father filed a case against the man, Sadkul Islam Sadek, of Kajaikata village of the upazila, with Rowmari Police Station on Friday night, alleging that when his daughter was collecting firewood near his home earlier in the day, Sadek grabbed her from behind and took her to his room, where he raped her, said MR Sayeed, OC (investigation) of the police station.

Hearing her screams, locals rushed there and rescued the girl, but Sadek managed to flee, he said, adding that she was sent to Kurigram General Hospital for medical tests yesterday morning.

Man 'kills daughter, dies by suicide' in Sirajganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A family planning official strangled his nine-year-old daughter to death and then died by suicide in their home in Bangala union of Sirajganj's Ullapara yesterday morning, OC Humayun Kabir of Ullapara Police Station said, quoting the victims' family members.

The deceased were Monjurul Alom Rajib, 40, an inspector of family planning in the union, and Rifat Tasnim Raka, he said, adding that the other family members were out when the incident happened around 9:00am.

Rajib was not mentally stable, said the OC, quoting the family members, as well as Rajib's colleagues.

Police are investigating the incident, Kabir said, adding that the bodies were sent to hospital for autopsy.

Bomb explodes near journo's home in N'ganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A bomb exploded in front of the house of a journalist, vocal about justice for Tanwir Muhammad Taqi, in the city's Alam Khan area around 3:00am yesterday.

Mahabubur Rahman Masum, editor of Dainik Khaborer Pata, alleged that those who killed the bright teenage boy were trying to intimidate him. No one was hurt, he also said.

OC Shah Jaman of Narayanganj Sadar Model Police Station said a general diary was filed over the matter and that they were looking into the incident.

Rape suspect

FROM PAGE 1

She left a suicide note, mentioning that Tamim "confined her to a room and did something very bad with her that she could not tell".

Ashik Uzzaman, commanding officer of Rab-14 of Jamalpur Camp who led the drive to arrest him, said in primary interrogation Tamim confessed his involvement in the rape.

Dilip Chandra Sarker, sub-inspector of Melandah Police Station and the investigation officer of the case, said Tamim was produced before a Jamalpur court yesterday afternoon after being interrogated.

The court sent him to jail.

Locals alleged that Tamim used to get support from his uncle Mirza Wahab Ali, ex-chairman of Nayanagar Union Parishad, and also worked for Mirza to hire people in the local polls.

He, along with some other youths, tried to cast votes forcibly in Nayanagar UP polls in 2017 for his uncle who was a rebel candidate of the Awami League.

Contacted, Mirza admitted that Tamim was his nephew and the son of his younger brother's second wife.

He said that his nephew grew up at his maternal uncles' house and had a very little contact with them.

"After hearing the incident, I assisted Ram and police to arrest Tamim", said Mirza, also an ex-member of Awami League Melandah upazila unit.

SHELL SHOCKED FAMILY Nothing could stop the family members and relatives of the girl from

grieving. She was the only child of her parents.

The victim's father said he tried his best to arrange money for her daughter's education.

"Everything is shattered now. I don't know how I will bear the pain for the rest of my life," he said.

On Friday, the father lodged a case with Melandah Police Station accusing Tamim.

The girl's father alleged that Tamim used to stalk his daughter on the way to school.

MM Moydul Islam, officer-in-charge of Melandah Police Station, said the body was found hanging from the ceiling in her room on Thursday night.

Two notes were also found there, he said.

Protesting the death, her classmates and teachers brought out a procession and formed a human chain in front of the school yesterday morning, demanding exemplary punishment for the culprit.

In Ukraine ghost city, florist stays open to 'cheer people up'

AFP, Mykolaiv

Most business owners have shut up shop and fled Ukraine's Nikolaiv, but florist Angela Kalisnik continues to sell tulips and roses just a short drive away from the frontline.

"We didn't know the war was coming," says the 25-year-old.