

# ‘Sympathisers’ of Arsa shoot 2 Rohingyas

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two Rohingyas were shot after allegedly a group of “Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army” supporters attacked them in Ukhiya camp in Cox’s Bazar on Tuesday night.

The injured, Hossen Kalaboda, 48, and Abul Basar, 37, were hospitalized, said police.

Hossen is a sub-majhi (community leader) of Camp 2 (South).

Another Rohingya was stabbed by the criminals during the incident, but his identity could not be ascertained.

Witnesses said a group of armed criminals, locally known as sympathisers of Arsa, swooped on Hossen around 9:00pm.

They opened fire on Hossen and Basar and stabbed the other Rohingya.

APBn-14 Commanding Officer Naimul Haque told The Daily Star, “The supporters of ‘Arsa’ attacked the duo and opened fire, leaving two people shot. Inside the Rohingya camp, several armed groups introduce themselves as ‘Arsa’ members so we are trying to identify who exactly launched the attack.”

“Police too were trying to arrest the attackers,” he added.

Rohingyas at the camp said around 12 to 15 armed men, led by Moulovi Mizan and Shahed, opened fire. They said Mizan calls himself an active “Arsa” organiser.

## ‘Not yet time’

### WHO warns against lowering guard on Covid-19

AFP, Geneva

The World Health Organization’s emergency committee unanimously agreed that now is not the time to lower the guard on Covid-19, the group’s head told a press conference yesterday.

“The decision was unanimous that it is not yet the time,” said Didier Houssin, after the committee concluded that the pandemic still constituted a public health emergency of international concern – the highest level of alert that the WHO can sound.

This comes as the UN health body in its weekly update had also stressed that countries should continue surveillance, where possible, and rapid data sharing on publicly available databases.

According to WHO, the SARS-CoV-2 virus continues to evolve. With such intense transmission worldwide, further variants, including recombinants, will emerge. “This is expected.”

It also informed that it is continuing to monitor “several descendent lineages” of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.



Blocks and geo bags dumped to protect an embankment in Noliyan area of Khulna’s Dacope upazila are in dilapidated condition. In the aftermath of Cyclone Aila in 2009, the authorities went for the block dumping, but years of neglect has turned them this way, posing risk of erosion.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

# Fewer school students attend in-person classes

Shows study conducted by 21 organisations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About one-third of secondary students and one-fifth of primary students remained absent from schools as educational institutions resumed in-person classes after Covid-induced closure.

A campaign titled “Safe Back to School”, organised by 21 national and international organisations, revealed the findings yesterday.

According to the report, the attendance at the secondary level was between 57 and 69 percent whereas it was between 65 and 86 percent at the primary level.

The primary reasons behind the absence are students’ involvement in economic activities, migration to other places, shifting to other educational institutions such as madrasas, loss of interest and child marriage, said Abu Said Md Juel Miah, team lead of research and evidence at Brac’s advocacy for social change.

He mentioned the reasons while presenting the report at a programme in the capital.

Researchers collected the data related to students’ attendance for three weeks starting from September 12, 2021, when schools resumed in-person classes after the Covid-induced closure from March 17, 2020.

The study was done on 328 primary and secondary schools in 17 districts in seven divisions.

**“We have to work at the grassroots level to bring back the victims of child marriage. We have started training 200,000 teachers to work on mental health.”**

Education Minister Dipu Moni

The research was conducted on school attendance, maintenance of health safety measures and mental well-being of the students after the long closures of the schools.

According to the report, the proportion of girls’ attendance was higher than that of the boys during the survey.

Absenteeism was 16 percent to 37

percent for boys and 14 percent to 35 percent for girls in the primary schools, and 34 percent to 45 percent for boys and 28 percent to 41 percent for girls in the secondary schools.

About mental health, Save the Children Senior Manager of Advocacy and Campaign Samia Ahmed said they found 47 percent of boys and girls got average scores (29-44) on the Stirling Children’s Well-being Scale.

The mental health survey result means these students were in some kind of depression as they were confined at home during school closure.

Education Minister Dipu Moni said the government has planned to make up for the losses in the primary and secondary schools.

“We have to work at the grassroots level to bring back the victims of child marriage. We have started training 200,000 teachers to work on mental health,” she said.

Each educational institution will have at least two trained teachers and a professional counsellor in each district, she added.

## 4 to die

FROM PAGE 1

Shahid and Minhaz were present in the courtroom. The two others are absconding.

In her reaction to the verdict, Azad’s elder daughter Mauli Azad said, “Although it’s late, we’re happy to finally get the verdict. We now want its quick execution.”

She hoped that the verdict would be upheld by the High Court.

“We demand that the authorities catch the absconding killers immediately and bring them to book,” she told The Daily Star last night.

Prof Azad was stabbed near Bangla Academy in the capital on February 27, 2004. He was attacked by militants while he was about to get on a rickshaw on his way to his university residence from the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela.

He was found dead at his apartment in Germany six months after the attack.

The charge sheet in the case, quoting the autopsy report, said the wounds from the attack resulted in the victim’s death. Azad had gone to Germany on a research scholarship.

The attack on the author left a 15cm long, bone-deep gash in the front of his head, a 13cm long gash in his back, and a 22cm gash in the left part of the lower face, in addition to injuries to his arms, according to medical reports.

The skull was fractured and his brain tissue was bruised. He had no teeth left in his lower jaw, and had a few upper teeth.

He was unable to close his left eye, and drooled constantly.

The trial dragged on for 18 years.

Upon hearing the verdict, convicts Minhaz and Shahid stood holding the bars of the lockup, staring at the judge. They looked impassive.

According to Minhaz’s confessional statement, he was one of the two who hacked Prof Azad with machetes.

Shahid was armed with explosives in order to create a smokescreen to help all the attackers escape the scene.

Talking to this newspaper last week, Mauli Azad had said, “Many years have gone by. At first, we used to keep track of the case ... I have given witness testimony myself. We had thought the case would get resolved quickly, but that was not the case.”

Mauli narrated how every year, during his birth and death anniversaries, journalists would ask about the case’s progress.

They would enquire about the proceedings, only to find it progressing at a snail’s pace. The prosecution squarely put the blame for the delay on the challenges of producing witnesses before the court.

“We will get some sort of satisfaction after the verdict,” Mauli had said.

They, however, will have to wait longer to see the verdict’s execution. The judgement is likely to be challenged at the HC. Besides, two of the convicts are on the run.

## Baishakh gets back colours after two years

FROM PAGE 1

This time it will be observed with the characteristic vibrancy, unlike the low-key celebration of the previous two years.

Like in pre-Covid days, festivities will start early in the morning with people from all walks of life donning the traditional attire of this joyous celebration. Men in colourful panjabis, women in saris and children in bright clothes will once more be able to join the cultural programme at Ramna Batamul where Chhayanaut will welcome the day.

The revellers will also gather at the traditional Baishakhi Mela – a fair where all kinds of traditional handicrafts, toys and other items will be bought and

sold. It is an integral part of the celebration of the first day of the Bangla New Year in Dhaka and the rest of the country.

Mangal Shobhajatra, a procession seeking the wellbeing of all, will start from the Institute of Fine Arts in the morning. Businesses will open their halkhata (sales books) to start a brand new business year.

“The severity of the pandemic had shrunk everything. The last two years have been very painful for us,” said Chhayanaut President Sanjida Khatun, explaining how Covid-19 forced her organisation to scale back traditional celebrations.

For the last six decades Chhayanaut has taken

the lead in organising the programme to welcome the Bangla new year. It could not hold the event in 1971 during the country’s Liberation War. The last two celebrations of Pahela Baishakh were observed on a small scale and online to comply with the government’s Covid-19 health protocols.

In 1967, Chhayanaut organised its Pahela Baishakh programmes in protest of the then Pakistan government’s blatant suppression of Bangalee culture.

After independence in 1971, the festival became a symbol of the country’s nationalist movement as well as an integral part of people’s cultural heritage and identity.

## Whose pen was mightier than sword

FROM PAGE 1

An author himself, Prof Islam considers Humayun Azad one of the best prose writers of our time, and said his book “Prabachanguchchha” (Maxims of Humayun Azad) was an outstanding piece. “He had a strong sense of humour and satire.”

Prof Azad started receiving threats from militants after his book “Pak Sar Jamin Sad Bad”, a scathing criticism of religious extremism, was first published in the Daily Ittefaq’s Eid supplement in November 2003.

The book depicts the story of a zealot who wants to turn Bangladesh into a “Taliban-styled nation”.

This book earned praise from secular thinkers but for the bigots, it was anathema. Addressing a demonstration at Baitul Mukarram in December, leaders of an anti-Ahmadiyya outfit

demanding the arrest and trial of Prof Azad.

On January 25, 2004, Delawar Hossain Sayedee, then a Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker and now incarcerated for war crimes, called for the introduction of the Blasphemy Act to block publications of “such books”.

The next month, members of the militant outfit Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) launched a machete attack on Prof Azad near Bangla Academy when he was returning from the Ekushey Boi Mela, leaving him grievously injured.

Failing to bear mental and physical trauma from the assault, he died in Munich on August 12 that year, while carrying out a research on romantic German writer Heinrich Heine.

Born in 1947 in Munshiganj, Prof Azad

earned critical acclaim for his nonconformist writing and views, and at the same time gained huge readership while never compromising with the market demand.

His novel “Chhappanno Hajar Borgomile” on the role of military autocracy that causes rot in the political system was a bestseller and widely praised. His novel “Shob Kichhu Bhenge Pore” depicted frictions in society.

His feminist book “Naree”, which attracted huge negative reactions from the conservatives, was banned in 1995.

“Dwitiya Linga”, translation of French existentialist philosopher and feminist activist Simone de Beauvoir’s “The Second Sex”, was welcomed by freethinkers but hated by religious extremists, according to Osman Gani of Agamee Prakashani, the

publisher of some 70 books by Humayun Azad.

His command over literary criticism and intellectual depth can be observed in the books like “Shamsur Rahman/ Nihshanga Sherpa”, “Bhasha Andolon: Sahityik Patabhumi” and “Amra Ki Ei Bangladesh Cheyechhilam”. Prof Azad started writing poems early in life. One of his books of poetry “Sob kichhu noshtoder odhikare chole jabe” had a poem with the same name. This title has become a well-used quote to describe unfairness, discrimination and injustice.

His first book of poetry “Aloukik Istimar” and book of essays “Rabindra Probandha: Rashtra O Samajchinta” were published in 1973.

His book for teens, “Abbuke Mone Pore”, was translated into Japanese. Many consider “Koto Nodi

## Hasina greets new Pakistan PM

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has congratulated newly elected Prime Minister of Pakistan Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

In a message of felicitations yesterday, Hasina stressed that the entire region must work together to overcome its challenges for common benefits.

On April 11, PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif, brother of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, was elected the 23rd premier of Pakistan because 174 lawmakers voted in his favour after Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf MNAs boycotted the election.

Earlier, Imran Khan was ousted from the PM’s post by a no-confidence vote in parliament following a week of political turmoil.

## Woman killed in her home

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A housewife has been murdered in her home in Nothkhola Uttarpara village of Tangail’s Basail upazila.

The in-laws of the victim, Lima Akter, 30, said she along with her four-year-old son were asleep in their room early yesterday. Her husband, Moynal Hossain, is an expatriate worker in Saudia Arabia.

Around 2:00am yesterday, the in-laws heard her screams and saw one of their neighbours, Wasim, fleeing from that room.

Lima was then found lying in a pool of blood. There was a large chunk of brick next to her. Her head was severely injured, they said.

The family members, with the help of locals, rushed her to Tangail General Hospital, where on-duty doctors declared her dead.

Later, her father-in-law filed a murder case against Wasim with Basail Police Station.

OC Mostafizur Rahman of the police station said they were trying to arrest Wasim. The motive behind the murder was yet to be known, he added.

## Bangladeshi killed in Brunei road crash

UNB, Chattogram

A Bangladeshi expatriate was killed in a road accident in Brunei on Tuesday, said his family.

The victim, Nur Mostofa, 45, was the son of freedom fighter Sirajul Islam of Dharmapur village in Chattogram’s Sitakunda upazila.

Five others also sustained injuries in the accident. Their identities were yet to be known. They were undergoing treatment at a local hospital, sources said.

Mostofa, who went to Brunei years back, was crushed under the wheels of an unidentified vehicle, said his cousin Nur Alam.

A friend of Mostofa from Brunei called his wife around 8:00pm on Tuesday and informed her of the accident, he added.

Nur Alam said they sought the help of Bangladesh embassy and other authorities concerned to bring back the body.

Shobhajatra.

Cultural personality Nasiruddin Yousuff pointed out that the sudden rise of religious bigotry lends special significance to this year’s Pahela Baishakh, which is celebrated by everyone irrespective of religion.

“This year’s celebration is most important because this time we are facing the big question of our Bangalee nationality. It is worrying that in recent times, so-called practitioners of religion have created an adverse situation in various educational institutions. In order to defeat this evil, this year’s celebration should be even livelier,” said Yousuff, also a freedom fighter, theatre director, and

filmmaker.

Golam Quddus, president of the Sammilita Sangskritik Jote, said, “We are going to have a double festival this time as Pahela Baishakh has coincided with Ramadan. Bangalees will now celebrate religion and culture together. This is not contradictory at all.”

However, a section of people is trying to mislead people for the sake of politics, he said.

Founder of The Flag Girl, Priota Ilthekhar said she is eagerly waiting to celebrate Pahela Baishakh after two years. “This is part of our culture, our heritage and now it is quite safe to celebrate since we are vaccinated and are also getting our booster doses.”

Shorobor Ba Bangla Bhashar Jiboni”, on Bangla language, and “Lal Neel Deepabali Ba Bangla Shahitter Jiboni”, on Bangla literature as two of his seminal works.

His PhD dissertation “Pronominalization in Bangla”, which was later published as a book and pieces on linguistics like “Bangla Bhashar Shatru-mitra” and “Bakyatatva” were well accepted among academics and researchers.

His long-time colleague, Prof Abul Kashem Fazlul Haq of DU Bangla department said “Shamsur Rahman/ Nihshanga Sherpa” “Lal Neel Deepabali” and two volumes of essays on Bangla language titled “Bangla Bhasha” are considered important works for students (of Bangla language and literature).

Prof Azad got a PhD in linguistics from Edinburgh University. Starting his

professional career as a teacher at Chittagong College, he later worked at Chittagong University and Jahangirnagar University before joining DU in 1978.

He received the Bangla Academy Award in 1986 and posthumously Ekushey Padak, one of the highest civilian awards, for his outstanding contribution to literature and linguistics in 2012.

“With his death, there is a great vacuum in the literary field. And the vacuum is yet to be filled,” said his publisher Gani.

Prof Manzoorul Islam concludes: “The spirit of protest is dwindling in our society ... we accept everything without anyone raising questions and debate. Humayun Azad will remain our inspiration in the struggle against attempts to snatch away our freedom from us.”