

## Ex-BCL secy of Faridpur lands in jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Saiful Islam Jibon, former Faridpur BCL general secretary, was sent to jail by two courts yesterday in three cases filed over extortion and hacking two local Awami League leaders.

Saiful, 32, who has been absconding since June 7, 2020, surrendered to the courts and sought bail. But Shiabul Islam, additional district judge-2, rejected his bail appeal in the extortion case, while Akbar Ali Sheikh, district and sessions judge, denied his bail in two other cases, said Saiful's lawyer Shafiq Munshi.

The three cases include assault and hacking of Shamsul Alam Chowdhury, general secretary of Faridpur Sadar upazila unit AL, and Deepak Majumder, industry and commerce affairs secretary of Faridpur District unit AL, and extorting money from Dulal Lashkar, manager of BRTC Faridpur counter, the lawyer added.

Sources said Saiful was a close associate of Imtiaz Hasan alias Rubel, former president of Faridpur Press Club, and Sajjad Hossain alias Barkat, general secretary of Faridpur town unit AL.

In March last year, the Criminal Investigation Department submitted a charge sheet against Saiful and nine others in a money laundering case.

Suman Ranjan Sarkar, additional superintendent of Faridpur police (Sadar circle), said Saiful also stands accused in several other cases, including Chhotan murder and attacking the house of Subal Chandra Saha, former president of the district unit AL.

On May 16, 2020, Subal's house came under attack in Faridpur's town Goalchamot area. He then lodged a case against unidentified people.

Police arrested 10 people, including Rubel and Barkat, on June 7 in this connection. Saiful went into hiding since then.

Suman said Saiful would be shown arrested in other cases, including the money laundering ones.

# US watching processes to free, fair polls

## US ambassador tells Star

PORIMOL PALMA

Out of the five largest economies in the world today, three – China (2), Japan (3) and India (5) – are in Asia. The robust economic growth of Asian giants, China in particular, is rapidly reshaping the global distribution of power. With the global power shifting to Asia, the world's number one power USA rushes to join the geopolitical game, in which Bangladesh too, is likely to get pulled into.

Peter D Haas, the new US ambassador, who has been openly critical of human rights violations, accountability of Rab, political violence, touched on a few thorny points in an exclusive written interview with The Daily Star recently.

The Daily Star (DS): Based on the solid foundation built between the two countries over the last 50 years, how do you see the future relationship of Bangladesh and the US? What are the elements needed to improve the relationship?

Peter Haas (PH): I am amazed at just how much Bangladesh has accomplished over these 50 years and proud of the support the United States has provided to the Bangladeshi people and its government. We have collaborated across many sectors, and I predict that over the next 50 years, our partnership will become even stronger.

The United States will continue to work with Bangladesh and build on the progress we have made together in food security, health, and reducing poverty. We will also identify new and innovative approaches to address issues like climate change, promoting democratic principles, increasing trade, and sustaining Bangladesh's impressive economic growth. I am extremely optimistic about our future together.

DS: What is the latest US position, 10 months after the sanctions on Rab? Is Washington satisfied with the measures already taken by Dhaka? Specifically, what more is required?

PH: The US Department of Treasury is the lead agency for sanctions-related matters. For that Department to consider lifting sanctions, there must be accountability (i.e., holding those involved with human rights violations accountable) and change. The nomination of a human rights-sanctioned individual (just retired IGP Benazir Ahmed) to attend an international conference does not signal accountability or change.

More broadly, let me emphasise, sanctions need not limit our relations or cooperation in other areas. The United States and Bangladesh have a broad relationship and deep cooperation in many areas, including trade, development, health, and security.

DS: You have repeatedly spoken of fair and inclusive elections in Bangladesh as the Biden administration's key foreign policy focus is democracy and human rights. Do you think that Bangladesh is going the right way ahead of the upcoming national elections in early 2024?

Do you have any suggestions?

PH: The United States believes the strength of a democracy rests in the ability of its people to make their voices heard. Our policy on the Bangladeshi elections – or anywhere for that matter – is that the people of the country should be able to choose their own government through free and fair elections, conducted in accordance with international standards. We do not support any political party.

News reports of intimidation and political violence in Bangladesh are disturbing. Free and fair elections cannot take place in such an environment. We call on all parties to respect the rule of law and to refrain from violence, coercion, intimidation, or retribution. Moreover, for journalists to be able to cover the elections freely and fully, they must be protected from harassment and violence.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said she and her government want free and fair parliamentary elections. We welcome these words and look forward to understanding



how the government will ensure free and fair processes. We support constructive actions Bangladesh can take, ahead of the polls, to carry out a credible process.

DS: The US considers labour rights a very important issue. Exactly, what are the labour issues that the US is concerned with, and where do you think reforms are needed? What do you think is the overriding labour rights issue that Bangladesh needs to address?

PH: Although Bangladesh has taken some initial steps to amend its labour laws, workers continue to be subjected to unfair labour practices, and they too often face retaliation when they complain or attempt to organise collectively for change.

I note Bangladesh has adopted an occupation, health, and safety national plan and implemented remediation of some factories after the Rana Plaza tragedy. Yet, we continue to be concerned over workplace safety issues when we hear about deadly industrial incidents and workplace fires.

Due to these labour rights issues, Bangladesh has been ineligible for the Generalised System of Preferences trade benefit. The lack of significant progress in this area prevents

funding of development projects in Bangladesh by the US International Development Finance Corporation.

The US and Bangladeshi governments meet several times a year to discuss the necessary changes to protect labour rights in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government has indicated it is working to further amend its labour laws. We are committed to supporting Bangladesh to improve its labour rights, including through targeted development assistance.

DS: Bangladesh is paying a hefty price for the carbon pollution by global economic giants including the United States. Is there any prospect for US investment or cooperation in combating climate change?

PH: The United States applauds Bangladesh's leadership in addressing climate change and is a proud partner in addressing this problem.

Earlier this year, the US embassy launched a \$20 million project to protect critical forests and wetland areas in Bangladesh from degradation and help local communities develop long-term resilience to climate change. Our development programmes also strengthen resilience in communities most vulnerable to disasters or climate-related impacts – including support for early warning systems and shelters to mitigate severe weather emergencies, as well as interventions like helping farmers adopt climate-smart agriculture techniques.

DS: Stability in Asia has suddenly become a major concern as the Biden administration aggressively executes its new Indo-Pacific strategy. The common perception is that this geopolitical development has placed Bangladesh's traditional relationship with China under stress. Is a vibrant Sino-Bangladesh relationship an obstacle to a warm US-Bangladesh relationship?

PH: The United States' vision for the Indo-Pacific is a free and open region comprised of nations that are independent, strong, prosperous, and secure. We also envision a region that is more resilient to global challenges like pandemics and climate change, and in which nations and peoples are more interconnected. This is a vision we share with many of our allies and partners, including Bangladesh.

Let me be direct about the relationship between the United States and China by quoting President Biden at the UN General Assembly earlier this month. "As we manage shifting geopolitical trends, the United States will conduct itself as a reasonable leader. We do not seek conflict. We do not seek a Cold War. We do not ask any nation to choose between the United States or any other partner."

We know that many countries, including the United States, have vital economic and people-to-people ties with China that they want to preserve. Our engagement in the Indo-Pacific is not against any one country, nor is it designed to make anyone choose between countries. Instead, our engagement is about advancing a positive, shared vision for creating a region where all nations can thrive.

## UP member found dead in Kishoreganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police yesterday recovered the body of a union parishad member in Kishoreganj's Pakundia upazila.

The dead, identified as Abul Kashem Bazlu, 55, was a member of Burudia Union Parishad.

Bazlu, a timber merchant, went out for work on Saturday afternoon. He last spoke to his wife over phone at around 8:00pm that night and was unreachable afterwards.

Police recovered his body the next morning around 10:00am from Burudia union's Pukhia area, said Nahid Hasan Sumon, officer-in-charge of Pakundia Police Station, adding that there were no signs of injuries.

The body was sent to Kishoreganj General Hospital morgue for autopsy. No case has been filed in this regard yet.

## CID asked to submit BB cyber heist probe report by Nov 16

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday asked the Criminal Investigation Department to submit the probe report in the Bangladesh Bank cyber heist case by November 16.

The CID earlier failed to submit the report multiple times.

On August 17, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Arafatul Rakib ordered it to file the report by yesterday.

On March 15, 2016, Zubair Bin Huda, the then deputy director (accounts and budgeting) of BB, filed the case with Motijheel Police Station after unidentified hackers stole \$101 million from Bangladesh's central bank account with Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

## Man sent to jail over rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

A Brahmanbaria court yesterday sent a man to jail on charge of raping a teenage girl in the town.

Jibon Miah, 32, an ambulance driver, was arrested on Saturday and produced before the court yesterday, said Ibrahim Akand, sub-inspector of Brahmanbaria Police Station.

Victim's grandmother filed the case, he added. According to the case statement, the girl is a house help. While returning home from work on Saturday, she was taken by Jibon and raped.

The girl was sent to a local hospital for treatment and medical tests, said Emranul Islam, officer-in-charge of Brahmanbaria Sadar Model Police Station.

## 26 killed in India road crash

AFP, Lucknow

A tractor pulling a trolley packed with pilgrims in India overturned and plunged into a pond, killing 26, officials said yesterday.

The trailer was carrying around 50 people, mostly women and children, when the incident happened in Kanpur in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh on Saturday, senior local official Sudheer Kumar said.

## Sri Lanka cuts tax on female hygiene products

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's government yesterday cut taxes on female sanitary products in a bid to help women and girls unable to afford them because of the country's economic crisis.

Even before the downturn last year, many schoolgirls and women in Sri Lanka, like in other poor countries, would stay home when menstruating because they couldn't afford sanitary products.

## Remittance lowest

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owing to higher inflation and US dollar shortages.

The decline has already hurt the foreign exchange reserves, which stood at \$36.44 billion on September 28, down 6.7 percent from August 31. If the downward trend continues, the volatility in the foreign exchange market will deepen.

The local currency has lost its value by at least 25 percent against the US dollar in the past one year.

The forex market has been facing volatility for months as import bills rocketed amid an escalated cost of commodities. This prompted both the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh, a platform for managing directors of banks, and the Bangladesh Foreign Exchange Dealer's Association, an organisation dedicated to implementing foreign exchange policies in the market, to set the uniform exchange rates.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, said the uniform exchange rates might have put a negative impact on the remittance inflow.

Emranul Huq, managing director of Dhaka Bank, echoed Mahbubur. He added: "The exchange houses might not have remitted the money immediately so that the foreign exchange market faces further volatility and they can gain from the situation."

## AL, BNP in overdrive

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early 2024.

Amir Hossain Amu, coordinator and spokesperson of the alliance, told The Daily Star that the AL is planning to expand the combine with the pro-liberation forces.

"Our door is open for any democratic and pro-liberation party. Now we are trying to strengthen our relations with the alliance partners. We will organise some joint programmes in the coming days," he said.

AL praesidium member and Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque also told The Daily Star that the party is trying to brush up on its communications with the like-minded and pro-liberation parties.

It also plans to step up its political activities keeping in mind the BNP's series of programmes, insiders said.

The ruling party, however, does not want to come up with any counter programme as the party leaders believe such programmes would only invite confrontations.

Currently, the ruling party is holding grassroots conferences, and it believes these conferences and new leaderships will help it boost its political activities across the country.

But the party will resist the opposition on the streets if the BNP does excesses in the name of anti-government movement, said party leaders.

Talking to this paper, Razzaque said, "The Awami League is not an opposition party. We will not take to the streets with political programmes."

AL General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader on Saturday said the BNP would face stiff resistance if it tried to create chaos.

Meanwhile, the BNP started the second round of talks with the alliance and like-minded political parties to wage a simultaneous movement against the government. It held a meeting with the Bangladesh

Kalyan party yesterday and reached an agreement on launching a movement for a neutral election-time government.

In the first round of talks, the BNP leaders sat with 23 political parties including the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Rob), Nagorik Oikya, Biplabi Workers Party, and Gonosamhati Andolon.

After the talks, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told reporters that in the first round of talks, the parties agreed on waging simultaneous movements. And in the latest round, the parties are finalising the issues and the demands that will be highlighted in the movement.

"The BNP has drafted a number of demands for the movement and we have agreed on those points," Syed Muhammad Ibrahim, chairman of Bangladesh Kalyan Party, told The Daily Star.

He added that the BNP leadership wanted the movement to be simultaneous, not under an alliance.

Fakhrul said that in the second round of talks, the BNP leaders would meet all the political parties, except the AL.

The BNP is looking for simultaneous movements while keeping its 20 party alliance and Jatiya Oikya Front inactive.

Sources said the BNP adopted this strategy keeping in mind the local and international reservations about the Jamaat-e-Islami, a key component of the alliance.

BNP sources said the party faced widespread criticisms at home and abroad for its links to Jamaat, which is condemned for assisting the Pakistan occupation forces during the 1971 Liberation War.

There has been pressure from within the BNP to cut ties with the Jamaat. Besides, other political parties earlier showed reluctance to be in a coalition with the BNP because of its relations with the Jamaat.

## 125 dead

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oxygen due to the large number of people at the scene affected by tear gas, said paramedic Boby Prabowo.

The head of another hospital in the area told Metro TV that some victims had sustained brain injuries and that the fatalities included a 5-year-old.

President Joko Widodo said authorities must thoroughly evaluate security at matches, adding that he hoped this would be "the last football tragedy in the nation".

Jokowi, as the president is known, ordered the Football Association of Indonesia, PSSI, to suspend all games in the top league BRI Liga 1 until an investigation had been completed.

World football's governing body FIFA specifies in its safety regulations that no firearms or "crowd control gas" should be carried or used by stewards or police.

East Java police did not immediately respond to a request for comment on whether they were aware of such regulations.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino said in a statement to Reuters that the football world was in "a state of shock following the tragic incidents that have taken place in Indonesia" and the event was "dark day for all involved".

FIFA has requested a report on the incident from PSSI, which has sent a team to Malang to investigate, PSSI secretary general Yunus Nusi told reporters.

Indonesia's human rights commission also plans to investigate security at the grounds, including the use of tear gas, its commissioner told Reuters.

"Many of our friends lost their lives because of the officers who dehumanised us," said Muhammad Rian Dwicahyono, 22, crying as he nursed a broken arm at the local Kanjuruhan hospital. "Many lives have been wasted."

Yesterday, mourners gathered outside the gates of the stadium to lay flowers for the victims.

## BCL run at the whim

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the most influential units of BCL, expired in 2019.

The two also did not hold a single bi-monthly meeting of the central committee. As a result, the central BCL leaders could not discuss any political matters and express their opinions or dissatisfactions over organisational issues.

"There are no democratic practices within the Chhatra League. The president and general secretary make decisions on all matters without seeking opinions of the executive council. Other leaders in the committee have no roles except for occupying the posts," Sohan Khan, a vice-president of central BCL, told The Daily Star.

Enraged by the top leaders' activities, a faction of central BCL leaders went to Awami League President Sheikh Hasina's Dhamondi office on September 10 to submit a written complaint against Joy and Lekhak on various issues, including violation of the charter.

But the office secretary refused to accept it. They waited there for hours and left after a senior AL leader committed to sitting with them on the matter at a convenient time.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is organisational chief of BCL, picked Joy and Lekhak as acting president and acting general secretary on September 14, 2019. She made the decision after the president and general secretary of the previous committee – Rezwanul Haque Chowdhury Shovon and Golam Rabbani – lost their posts following allegations of bribery and other controversies.

Four months later, Hasina made them full-fledged president and general secretary.

Under the BCL charter, its president and general secretary are elected every two years through direct votes of the councillors coming from across the country. "VIOLATION IS THE NORM" According to the BCL constitution, the organisation must operate in the light of its charter.

Section 13 (Kha) of the BCL constitution limits the tenure of the central executive committee to two years, meaning the present committee has expired two years ago.

A fresh council must be held within two years for the election of the next committee. However, if required, the two-year tenure can be extended by up to three months upon approval from the central committee members.

"But the existing committee did not hold a fresh council nor officially extend its tenure," said a BCL vice-president, wishing anonymity.

Theoretically, the current BCL committee has no mandate to run the organisation.

The BCL vice-president said the previous six committees also occupied the posts for about four years.

The central committee is not supposed to have more than 301 members. But in reality it has 700 members.

"During the month of mourning [August], more than 500 people were included in the central committee without any scrutiny," reads the complaint prepared for submission to Sheikh Hasina.

Sources said Joy and Lekhak handpicked them and made them members of the organisation simply by sending them letters to this effect.

BCL leaders said the duo announced 13 committees of different units which include district, upazila, and university committees from July 6 to July 31. But it was done without holding any councils, which is a violation of its charter.

"Violating the constitution has become a norm for the top leadership. We are very frustrated to see that an organisation like Chhatra League is being run like this," said a central BCL leader.

## Rohingya man

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People along the Ghumdhum border are living in fear as the Arakan Army has been fighting with Myanmar security forces in the state.