

Jamaat chief's son linked to militant outfit Say CTTC officials after his arrest in Sylhet

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and
DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Rafat Chowdhury, son of Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafigur Rahman, is the Sylhet regional coordinator of Al-Qaeda-inspired militant outfit Ansar Al Islam and has been inspiring youths to leave their homes for so-called jihad, claimed police yesterday.

The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit (CTTC) of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police made the claim after arresting Rafat from Sylhet city's Jalalabad area.

A CTTC team went to Sylhet, made the arrest and returned to Dhaka with the suspect, said Azbahar Ali Sheikh, deputy commissioner (north) Sylhet Metropolitan Police.

In July 2021, Rafat, along with 11 other youths from Sylhet, went on hijrat to Bandarban to join the so-called jihad. Before that, they communicated with the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO), two insurgent groups, claimed the CTTC.

"Hijrat" is an Arabic word, derived from "hijr," which means "to depart." Rafat held a meeting with the RSO leaders in 2021 at the zero line near the Naikkhanchhari border in Bandarban, said CTTC officials, adding that he returned to Sylhet for not getting adequate support.

Rafat, 29, a 20th batch student of Jalalabad Ragib-Rabeya Medical College, is popularly known as Rafat Abdullah on campus.

A student of the medical college, requesting anonymity, said Rafat's behaviour was suspicious.

"Rafat did not talk to other students much and did not even live in the college dormitory regularly. He used to ride a motorbike and often came to the dormitory late at night and left again in the morning," said the student.

Prof Abed Hossain, principal of the medical college, told The Daily Star yesterday that Rafat's batchmates completed their internships a year ago, but he failed to do it "due to some reasons".

But the principal did not mention the reasons.

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Dhaka, Ankara can be 'forces of good'

PORIMOL PALMA

Bangladesh and Turkey have shared historic and cultural roots dating long before the creation of an independent Bangladesh. Despite the fact that Turkey sided with Pakistan during the Liberation War and expressed objections over the war crimes trial in 2012, the relations between the two countries have been growing rapidly in recent times.

In a recent conversation with The Daily Star, Turkish Ambassador (TA) to Bangladesh, Mustafa Osman Turan, shared various dimensions of the ties as his tenure here is nearing an end.

TDS: How did you overcome the previous issues and reach today's stage of the bilateral relationship?

TA: Our relationship has always been a very close one, because our countries share common values, culture and traditions. Though we had some hiccups in the past, we solved those through our friendship and honesty. Those issues were there as we don't want Bangladesh to fall into instability. In 2016, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina wrote a letter to our president, expressing solidarity, when there was an attempted coup to topple our government.

Also, Turkey showed full support to Bangladesh during the 2017 Rohingya influx.

TDS: How do you define today's relationship?

TA: It is exemplary and excellent. Our trade is booming. In 2020, it was \$815 million, which has now reached close to \$1.5 billion. Also, the number of tourists from Bangladesh to Turkey has increased exponentially this year. Meanwhile, our investment is also growing. We buy a lot of jute yarn and RMG products from Bangladesh. We have our own RMG products. So, we would like to find complementary products that can add value. Our design capabilities are very good in the RMG sector. We may collaborate and have joint ventures in the future. We export mainly machinery in the RMG and agro industry, along with chemicals and cotton. Turkey is strong in the agriculture

and technology sectors. We also have light engineering and SMEs. There are also opportunities in the ICT sector. We have many opportunities for collaboration.

TDS: What are the challenges we face in trade between the two countries?

TA: Turkey has high tariffs on RMG as we want to protect our local products. If we can find complementary ways of RMG production, we can revisit and review those tariffs on selective products. There is big opportunity of Islamic fashion.

TDS: There has been good cooperation in security sector. What are we buying?

TA: In January this year, two countries signed a security agreement on training law enforcers, exchanging information, and counterterrorism. We have another agreement on defence cooperation. Bangladesh has been procuring military hardware and defence systems from Turkey since before I came here in 2020. Multi-launcher rocket systems and armoured personnel carriers were also purchased by Bangladesh for the UN peacekeeping missions.

Bangladesh will also buy drones, which we export to more than 20 countries, including Ukraine. We don't have any political agenda in this matter. Our relations are based on mutual trust and so, is becoming very strategic. In the future, we

can be a favourable source of procurement in the field of navy, patrol vessels and frigates.

TDS: Global geopolitical polarisation is sharpening due to the Ukraine-Russia war. Developing countries like Bangladesh are being heavily affected. How can Turkey help in this regard?

TA: In the wake of the war, we are trying to bring Ukraine and Russia into a dialogue. We have been successful in brokering a grain deal. Of course, the real need now is cessation of hostility and armed conflict. We think Russia has violated the international law by invading Ukraine. On the other hand, we don't find sanctions on Russia having necessary impact in

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Mustafa Osman Turan

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One held over BNP leader's murder in Sylhet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Police yesterday arrested a man in connection with the murder of BNP leader AFM Kamal in Sylhet.



Kamal

The arrestee, Aziz Hasan Kuti, 30, was the fifth person named in the murder case, said Azbahar Ali Sheikh, deputy commissioner of Sylhet Metropolitan Police (North).

However, the police did not give details about where Kuti was arrested. On Sunday night, AFM Kamal, former health affairs secretary of Sylhet district BNP, was stabbed to death in the district's Barabazar area.

Forty-eight hours after the incident, his brother Moinul Haque filed a case with the Airport Police Station accusing 10 named people, including a trader named Azizur Rahman Samrat, and 4-5 unnamed persons Tuesday night.

AFM Kamal had an altercation with Azizur Rahman Samrat over business-related issues on October 15, police earlier said adding that Azizur on October 21 filed a case accusing Kamal in this regard.

Hours after the murder, BNP leaders and activists staged demonstrations on Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital premises Sunday night.

At that time, several motorcycles were burnt and a car was vandalised in Rikabibazar area where a clash broke out between some BCL and BNP activists.

Besides, pictures of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina were torn during the procession.

Later, police reached the spot and dispersed the protesters.

Four people were arrested in connection with the vandalism, said Mohammad Ali Mahmud, officer-in-charge of Sylhet Kotwali police station.

'Pushed off from moving bus', man dies in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 45-year-old man died at a city hospital yesterday afternoon, hours after he was pushed off a moving bus in the capital's Gabtoli area.

The deceased, Ekhlhas, was a manager of Matin Paribahan which operates buses on Dhaka-Pabna route.

Parvin Akhter, wife of the deceased, said she came to know that her husband sustained injuries to his head after being pushed off a moving bus around noon.

He was first taken to National Institute of Neurosciences and Hospital. Later, he was moved to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where he died around 5:00pm.

Man gets life for abducting, raping schoolgirl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A court yesterday sentenced an accused to life imprisonment in a case filed over abducting and raping a schoolgirl in Tangail's Gopalpur upazila more than 14 years ago.

Judge Khaleeda Yasmin of the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal in Tangail handed the punishment to Alamgir Hossain, 36, a resident of Bhatia village in the same upazila.

Alamgir has jumped bail. The court also fined him Tk 1 lakh, in default of which he will have to serve six more months in jail.

Ali Ahmed, special public prosecutor of the tribunal, said Alamgir abducted the class-IV student on her way to school on September 7, 2008, and raped her at one of his relatives' house.

The following day, the victim's father filed the case with Gopalpur Police Station accusing Alamgir.

Suspected thief killed in transformer explosion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A suspected thief was killed and another injured as an electricity transformer exploded while they were trying to remove it from an electricity pole in Faridpur's Yusubpur village early yesterday.

Locals caught another suspect of around 16 years of age and handed him over to police.

Deceased Shakil Sheikh, 22, was a resident of Yusubpur village.

According to locals, the explosion left Shakil dead on the spot and Majnu Sheikh, 25, injured.

Suvas Chandra Baroi, station manager of Faridpur Fire Service and Civil Defence, said fire service rescuers rushed to the spot and recovered the body which was hanging from the electricity pole.

IMF's \$4.5b loan coming

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the books and accounts of the country, says Bangladesh is doing fine, nobody else will say no to us," Kamal said.

The agreed loan programme will now need to be approved by the IMF's top management and the executive board, which is expected in the coming weeks.

"This was the need of the hour," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

He went on to express hope that the programme would have sufficient core elements of reforms and that the government will implement those "sincerely, forcefully and timely".

"This is a programme of the authorities -- the authorities own the programme and the IMF is supporting the authorities as its trusted advisor," said Rahul Anand, who led the ten-member IMF mission, in a press briefing yesterday.

The IMF though did not articulate the specifics of the programme.

Kamal said reforms include raising the tax-GDP ratio, implementing

the VAT law and setting up an asset management company to dispose of soured loans.

Bringing down the banking sector's default loans to within 10 percent and raising the capital adequacy ratio to the BASEL 3 requirement of 12.5 percent, periodically adjusting the fuel price, implementing the climate-related proposals made in the budget and on various international conferences and increasing remittance receipts through the formal channels are also on the task list, according to BB Governor Abdur Rouf Talukder.

Increasing social spending and better targeted social safety net programmes, increased exchange rate flexibility, developing the capital and bond market, expanding and diversifying exports and modernising the monetary policy framework are the other agreed reforms.

Withdrawing the interest rate cap or cutting back on fertiliser subsidy and tax exemption were off the table, Kamal said.

The reforms will shore up the foreign currency reserves in the

short-term and create the fiscal space for higher social spending and mitigating the effects of climate change in the medium- to long-term.

The immediate task at hand is to stabilise the macroeconomic situation by rebuilding the reserve buffer, Anand said.

"During the pandemic, reserves went up to \$48 million but that was a one-off. Exports rebounded very quickly because of the stimulus package but also trade diversion from China, Vietnam and Myanmar, while imports were very low. That led to an artificial build-up of reserves."

Imports started to pick up as the economy rebounded, but then the war happened and the commodity prices went up considerably. This started depleting the reserves fast.

The import bills are expected to stay high and the balance of payment to remain under pressure.

As of November 2, net foreign currency reserves stand at about \$27.7 billion -- which is enough for three-and-a-half months' import bills.

"Whether three months' reserves are high or low is difficult to say in the current situation because the global economy is in such turmoil. There is so much uncertainty -- nobody knows how this war will play out and what would be the spill-over effects."

More reserves are needed going forward and the IMF programme will catalyse additional financing from other developmental and bilateral partners, which will prop up the dollar stockpile.

Anand dismissed any concerns of Bangladesh heading the way of Sri Lanka.

"We don't expect Bangladesh's debt will suddenly become unsustainable -- it is a slow-moving target. With fiscally prudent policies, fiscal deficits have always been kept in check. And that has led to debt sustainability."

Asked if the IMF has factored in the forthcoming national elections in its decision-making, Anand said: "We have no such concerns. Bangladesh has never defaulted and the election cycle will not change anything on this front."

An exam question to ignite bigotry

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college students? Most importantly how did this segment creep into the question paper when there are specific guidelines about making sure no question is formulated that disrespects religion? Why didn't the moderator -- the last person who has the authority to critique a question and even scrap it -- remove the offensive section and alert their colleagues?

The education board has identified five teachers involved in preparing and moderating the question and a probe has been started. This is encouraging, though it does not erase the fact that this is not a one-off incident of how our national education curriculum has been tampered with. Unfortunately, there have been other attempts to "de-secularise" the national curriculum. In 2017, as if to comply with the demands of Hefazat-e-Islam, a Qwami madrasa-based group, some poems and prose by non-Muslims were excluded from school textbooks. link <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/the-big-picture/disturbing-deviations-childrens-books-1348375>

Writings of famous poets and writers were scrapped because the authors were either non-Muslim or the

content they wrote was considered to be somehow contradictory to Islamic thought. This includes Humayan Azad's poem "Boi" (class 5 textbook) that encourages students to read books and avoid texts that promote insularity and narrow-mindedness. Gulam Mustafa's "Prarthona" (Prayer) that pays tribute to the Creator, Jasimuddin's "Desh" (motherland), a philosophical song by Lalon Shah, Rangalal Bandhyopadhyay's "Swadhinota", Sunil Gangopadhyay's "Shakota Dulchhe" about childhood and friendship, Rabindranath Tagore's poem "Bangladesher Hridoy" (Bangladesh's heart), a patriotic poem about the poet's motherland and Kazi Nazrul Islam's essay "Bangaleer Bangla".

Funnily enough, it was virtually impossible to nail these deliberate attempts to communalise textbooks on anyone. According to a Prothom Alo report at the time, no one from the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) or the National Coordination Committee (NCC) or the editors and writers of the textbooks seemed to know how these omissions took place. This took place despite the fact that according to the rules, changes cannot be made to textbooks without the knowledge

of the NCC and the textbook editors. As far as we know, these dropped texts that have been part of the school curriculum since independence and aligned with the secular values of Bangladesh's liberation movement and the constitution, have not been restored.

Eminent educationists and cultural activists have strongly objected to these illogical omissions, pointing out the dangerous effects it will have on young people who are the future leaders of this country. We are already facing serious challenges to our liberation spirit from religious extremists who sometimes resort to violence to prove their point. The horrific images of the attacks on Buddhist temples in Ramu, Hindu temples and houses in Narail, Nasirnagar, Cumilla, Noakhali and countless other places, are haunting reminders of how threatened our much-cherished communal harmony is.

But what is more frightening is the government's disturbing tolerance of bigotry and communal acts. Religious sentiments, however flimsily they can be interpreted, have taken precedence over freedom of speech and the right to practise one's own religion

(other than the majority's faith) as guaranteed by our constitution. This is why we have the abhorrent sections of the Digital Security Act that allows law enforcers to arrest anyone who is deemed to have "hurt religious sentiments" whether it is because of a post from a fake Facebook account or a metaphorical expression in a Baul song. Now our children are in danger of catching the communal bug through textbooks that omit the works of great minds who have promoted inclusivity, diversity, and tolerance -- all the values necessary for an enlightened society and which are integral to any education system. The much talked about question in this year's HSC Bangla question paper indicates a stealthy attempt to show Bangladesh as a communal nation where there is no place for followers of the Hindu faith or any other faith other than Islam.

So, what does all this mean? Is Bangladesh's national education curriculum being infected with the disease of bigotry? If so, why is the Awami League government, the champion of our Liberation War which was very much a movement against racism and religious prejudice, allowing it?

Over one in 3 teachers

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that about 23 percent of the school teachers prepare the questions with the help of other schools and about 15 percent collect questions from other sources.

Some say that they actually buy questions from teachers' associations, defying government orders not to do so.

Robul Kabir Chowdhury, who leads Bangladesh Examination Development Unit under the Dhaka education board, said the preparation of questions is a matter of expertise.

A question setter needs to have the ability for critical thinking and analytical and other skills to prepare such question papers, he said.

"If someone does not have deep knowledge on the subject, it is tough for them to prepare questions ... it is also tough for untrained teachers," he added.

Secondary school teachers are trained in preparing questions under the Secondary Education Sector Investment Programme.

Its official said 107,000 teachers have so far had the training. Of them, 67,000 received three-day training until 2017 and 40,000 got six-day training since 2017.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, there are 237,272 teachers in all secondary schools.

DSHE officials said many teachers think their training was inadequate, prompting them to seek help from guidebooks to prepare questions.

Another problem is that the teachers who have been trained do not practise preparing such questions at school.

"Two issues ... many teachers lack the capacity to prepare questions under the creative method and many lack adequate training on preparing question. Both are related to each other," said educationist Prof Siddiqur Rahman.

Prof Siddiqur, also a former teacher at the Institute of Education and Research of Dhaka University and a member of the National Education Policy 2010 Formulation Committee, said there were serious weaknesses in training.

"The duration of training sessions is insignificant. Teachers should be given hands-on training," he said.

DSHE Director [College and Administration] Prof Shahedul Khabir Chowdhury said training is a continuous process.

"If we increase the number of days of training from six days, we will need many years to complete the training of all teachers," he said.

Many DSHE officials said inadequate training was related to questionable questions being prepared for public exams, the latest case being the number II question of the HSC Bangla first paper exam held on Sunday. The question hurt the religious sentiments of the Hindus.

A question of the technical board's Bangla second paper exam held on the same day demeaned a renowned prose writer of the country.

Asked about it, technical education board Chairman Ali Akbar Khan said: "You are the first person to tell me about this. If it is true, I will enquire how it happened."

"You cannot do such things. You cannot set questions undermining anyone. There is no right to defame anyone," he said.

In 2020, there were allegations that an SSC Bangla question was copied from a guidebook.

Meanwhile, Education Minister Dipu Moni after an event in the capital said: "We have to be more careful in assigning the responsibility of question setting and moderating. All boards need to be more alert regarding this."

"Our question setters and moderators are given various training and there is a guideline in place. Even then, if someone does it [prepare questions that create controversy], it is his deliberate negligence," she said.

Referring to an investigation against teachers who had set and moderated the question on Sunday's Bangla first paper exam, she said they would decide what kind of action will be taken against them after getting the probe report.

Pakistan roll over NZ

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Pakistan last claimed the title in 2009 at Lord's in England when they beat Sri Lanka by eight wickets, and it has been a rollercoaster ride in Australia to make another final.

After agonising last-ball losses to India and Zimbabwe in the group phase, they bounced back to topple the Netherlands and South Africa and were only able to scrap into the last four only after the Netherlands had upset South Africa last Sunday.

New Zealand, who topped Group 1, were aiming to make the final for the second consecutive time, but their hunt for a maiden T20 title again fell short.

Teams batting first had won five from six games played in Sydney this tournament and when Kane Williamson won the toss he had no hesitation in asking Pakistan to bowl, but it proved to be tough going.