

SKELETON RECOVERY 2 more arrested; prime suspect identified

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

The Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) arrested two more people, and identified a BCL leader as the prime suspect in the Rajeev murder committed six years ago.

The murder came to light last week after Rajeev's skeletal remains were found inside a drum buried in a septic tank of an office building in Jashore town's Puraton Kasba Kazipara.

The identity of the victim Rajeev Hossain Kazi, 32, of Chandoli Mahal village in Khulna's Digholia upazila, was found using a DNA test, said PBI Superintendent of Police Reshma Sharmin on Tuesday.

On the same day, the murder case was filed with Jashore's Kotwali Police Station.

Police identified Sajibur Rahman Sajib, liberation war affairs secretary of Jashore District unit Chhatra League, as the prime suspect in the murder case, she added.

Sajib is currently in jail over the murder of BCL leader Riyad, a student of Jashore University of Science and Technology, who was hacked to death on July 14, 2014, she also added.

PBI SI Ziaur Rahman said, "We will ask the court to show Sajib arrested in the Rajeev murder case and subsequently place him in police custody for interrogation."

Meanwhile, PBI arrested Ibrahim Molla, 33, of Puratan Kasba Lichutola area and Zainal Howladar, 30, of Niribili area in Jashore Town on Wednesday night.

They were sent to jail via a court order yesterday, said SI Ziaur, who is also the case investigation officer.

Earlier on Monday, rickshaw puller Salam Hossain, 55, of Mangalghata village under Lohagarh upazila in Narail, was arrested in Jashore's Kismat Nawapara in connection with the murder.

During primary integration, Salam said, in 2016, four people killed Rajeev and placed his body inside a drum and disposed of it in the septic tank of an office building, where the victim used to work at the time, said police sources.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6



Farmers push their bicycles with earthen pots full of the date palm juice in a foggy morning at Sabdarpur village of Jhenaidah. The delicious juice is sold raw and also used to make gur.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

WEST'S HEAVY WEAPONS PLEDGE TO UKRAINE

Russia warns of escalation

US, Germany head for showdown over tanks for Kyiv

AGENCIES

The Kremlin yesterday warned of escalation in Ukraine if the West gives the pro-Western country more weapons capable of striking Russia, as Kyiv intensified pressure on Western allies to provide heavier weapons to step up fight against Moscow.

"Potentially, this is extremely dangerous, it will mean bringing the conflict to a whole new level, which, of course, will not bode well from the point of view of global and pan-European security," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

The warning comes on the eve of a key donor meeting as Western countries consider sending more powerful weapons to Ukraine.

The United States is set to convene the meeting of around 50 countries -- including all 30 members of Nato -- at the US military base of Ramstein in Germany today to discuss military aid to Ukraine.

Addressing the annual World Economic Forum gathering in Davos yesterday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky singled out Germany for its hesitance to supply its modern Leopard tanks -- unless the United States also gives tanks, reports AFP.

"There are times where we shouldn't hesitate," Zelensky said via video-link. "When someone says 'I will give tanks if someone else will also share tanks'... I don't think this is the right strategy to go with."

DB arrests four senior bankers over defaming S Alam owners

3 of them Islami Bank's senior officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested four senior bankers including three Islami Bank officials in connection with a case filed over plastering posters and making social media posts to defame the owners of Chattogram-based S Alam Group.

The arrestees are Islami Bank's executive vice-presidents Sayeed Ullah and Shahidullah Majumder, Habibur Rahman, an official of the bank's security department, and Mosharraf Hossain, a former deputy managing director of Islami Bank who is now working at Social Islami Bank as the chief remittance officer.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Padma bridge site's unused land to be leased out

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA) is set to lease out 180 acres of unused land of the Padma Bridge project to the government-owned North West Power General Company for setting up a solar power plant.

The land of the Padma bridge site on the bank of the river is unused, so it is being leased out as per the relevant guidelines, Obaidul Quader, the road transport and bridges, told the media after the BBA board's 112th meeting yesterday.

The decision to lease out the land got the nod at the meeting, which was chaired by Quader.

The board also decided that only the president of the country will get an exemption from tolls on the bridges under BBA.

The prime minister always pays the toll while using the bridges, Quader said.

"Although I was exempt from toll, I used to pay. However, from now, even I am not exempt," he added.

Several organisations and individuals have sought exemption from paying the toll but the board yesterday decided not to entertain the applications, said a BBA official.

In another decision, the board asked the BBA authorities to negotiate with the lowest bidder for collecting the toll of the Bangabandhu bridge.

BBA has been collecting tolls in the last few years after the previous toll operator filed a case against the bidding process for selecting a new toll collector.

But a court has already disposed the case in favour of BBA, he said wishing not to be named.

Quader said they have asked the authorities to negotiate with the lowest bidder and take a decision in this regard. A Bangladesh-South Korea joint venture company was the lowest bidder, said a BBA official.

Pritom gets bail in DSA case, finally

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Pritom Das, a leader of left-leaning organisation Rashtra Sangskar Andolan, was freed from jail on bail yesterday, 131 days after he was arrested in a case filed under the Digital Security Act for "hurting religious sentiment".

Moulvibazar Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court-2 granted him the bail after a petition was submitted to the court, said Pritom's lawyer Abul Hasan.

Earlier, he was denied bail by the lower court and the High Court.

Abul said Pritom had been in jail since September 10 last year after the case was filed with Sreemangal Police Station by Mahbub Alam Bhuiyain, a BCL activist.

Pritom walked out of Moulvibazar jail at 6:00pm.

Anti-bullying policy in sight

FROM PAGE 1

study titled "Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying".

WHAT IS IN THE POLICY?

Hitting, slapping, kicking, pushing, punching, and spitting on others are included in the definition of physical bullying. Cyber bullying and ragging means demeaning someone by writing or posting indecent content about them on social media.

Deliberately touching or attempting to touch one's private parts, offensive signs and gestures, forceful stripping of clothes are considered sexual bullying and ragging.

Insulting and humiliating someone based on their race, caste, tribe, religion, profession, skin colour, and region are racial bullying.

"If bullying and ragging are not prevented, society will see a scarcity of good leadership and good citizenship," it reads. "In this context, this policy has been formulated to prevent bullying and ragging in educational institutions."

MONITORING AND PUNISHMENT

The policy proposed setting up security cameras at educational institutions, having complaint boxes, and observing anti-bullying and anti-ragging day on campuses. Both bullies and victims should be counselled.

The teachers, managing committee members and others will play a vital role in preventing bullying.

A bully can be suspended and expelled. If a teacher or employee of an institution is found to be a bully, actions will be taken in line with the Government Employee Discipline and Appeal Rules 2018.

Monthly Payment Order (MPO) benefits can be cancelled permanently or temporarily for them through issuing show-cause notices.

If a committee member is involved, they will be removed from their position.

Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of Campaign for Popular Education, said if the policy comes into effect, the children will remain safer.

Prompt steps should be taken against the bullying, she added.

"In the case of a departmental investigation, it should be done with transparency," she said.

The extreme cases can be tried under the Cyber Security Act or the Women and Child Repression Prevention Act, she said.

AL abuzz with names for country's next president

FROM PAGE 1

There were seven MPs from the BNP, but they have recently resigned from the Sangsad.

The tenure of Hamid, the longest serving president of the country, will expire on April 23, and according to the constitution, there is no scope for his re-election.

Article 50 (2) of the constitution reads that no person shall hold office as president for more than two terms, whether or not the terms are consecutive.

Hamid was appointed acting president of Bangladesh on March 14, 2013, while then president Zillur Rahman was in hospital in Singapore. Zillur died six days later.

Hamid was then elected unopposed as president on April 22, 2013, and was sworn into office two days later. On February 7, 2018, he was re-elected unopposed for a second term.

Meanwhile, six names are being discussed among the party leaders and activists.

Sources said there are high possibilities of Mashiur Rahman, an advisory council member of the party, becoming the next president.

Mashiur, also the PM's economic affairs advisor, who was always active in public events, hasn't been seen much lately. He also has refrained from making any public comments, AL insiders said.

He was vocal against World Bank's allegations of corruption in the process of building the Padma bridge, after the bank backtracked on its \$1.2 billion money-lending deal for the bridge's construction.

The allegations were later rejected

by a Canadian court.

Mashiur even went on a month-long leave as it was one of the WB conditions for reviving the loan during the probe into the graft allegations.

Hailing from Khulna, Mashiur was a former bureaucrat and was assistant private secretary to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from 1972 to 1975.

The name of Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury is also being discussed.

Shirin, an MP from Rangpur-6, became the youngest Speaker of the House and has been serving since April 2013.

She started her career as a lawyer of the Supreme Court and also served as the state minister of the women and children's affairs ministry.

Besides them, the name of ABM Khairul Haque, who was the 19th chief justice and is currently the law commission chairman, is being discussed as a presidential candidate.

Khairul came into the limelight after delivering the verdict that declared the 13th amendment illegal and unconstitutional. The amendment had enabled the caretaker government system.

His verdict on the fifth amendment declared the regime of Khondoker Mostaque Ahmed, Justice Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayem and Major General Ziaur Rahman unconstitutional.

As a judge of the High Court, Khairul also confirmed the death penalties of 15 in the murder of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq is also being discussed as a probable candidate for

presidency.

He is currently the president of Gazipur AL and has been leading the district unit for 38 years now.

Another name that has come up is that of engineer Mosharraf Hossain.

The number one presidium member of the AL and the MP from Chittagong-1, Mosharraf was earlier the minister for civil aviation and tourism, and for public works and housing.

The name of Obaidul Quader, who was elected AL general secretary for third consecutive time, is in the mix.

The road, transport and bridges minister and Noakhali-5 MP was also talked about before the AL's council on December 24.

After the party reshuffled the serial of joint secretaries, putting Hasan Mahmud on the top, Quader's possibility of becoming the next president of the country came into discussion.

The reshuffle has a significance because a provision in the AL charter says in absence of the general secretary, the responsibilities shall be vested onto the joint general secretary.

However, Quader himself recently said he was not qualified to hold the office of the president.

Asked, Law Minister Anisul Huq on Wednesday said the people will soon learn who will be the country's next president.

"Ahead of such elections, many names come to the fore and many kinds of speculations are made. As per the constitution, the election [of the next president] will be held within 60-90 days before the current president's five-year term ends," he told reporters at the Secretariat.

state-owned corporation Rosatom is the main contractor of the project, for which Russia is providing \$11.38 billion as loan.

The project was going to miss the December 2023 commissioning deadline as German company Siemens AG refused to supply the gas-insulated switchgear for the project's substation due to German and US-led western sanctions on Russia.

Project officials said the authorities have decided to procure equipment from a Chinese company -- an issue which somewhat delayed the project.

A project official yesterday said the equipment weighing about 50 tonnes, which was being carried by the Russian ship, would be delivered in alternative ways in a few months.

Another project official said every component of the project is crucial for starting the operation of the power plant. One of those remaining incomplete means the whole project would suffer.

Tambru tense

FROM PAGE 1

He added that firing between the two groups resumed yesterday morning and continued until around noon, he added.

Contacted, Naikhongghari Upazila Nirbahi Officer Romen Sharma said he was aware that "some Rohingya families have entered Bangladesh".

He added that the situation on the Bangladesh side of the border was normal, but people felt scared hearing the gunshots.

Around 6:28am on Wednesday, at least 100 RSO men laid siege to a meeting place of ARSA and started shooting, intelligence officials said.

The ARSA men then started shooting and the gunfight went on for around two and a half hours, said a Rohingya community leader, wishing not to be named.

The bullet-hit body of a Rohingya man named Hamid Ullah, 27, was found later. Doctors at an MSF-run hospital in Kutupalong confirmed the death.

Another man named Mohib Ullah, 25, was admitted to the facility with bullet wounds.

Both of them were wearing beige camouflage tops, said Sheikh Mohammad Ali, officer-in-charge of Ukhia Police Station.

A Rohingya leader, who was at the camp during the clash, said gunshots were again heard between 2:00pm and 3:00pm.

After that, the ARSA members set fire to their meeting place "possibly because they ran out of ammunition. ARSA strategy is to set fire to be able

to escape from a spot," added the community leader.

Rohingya leader Dil Mohammad said, "The gunfights were taking place over establishing supremacy."

ARSA members also set fire to several huts, which caused widespread panic among people. Many Rohingyas fled their houses and took shelter near Tambru Bazar.

Several Rohingya sources from the camp said RSO members took control of Konarpara yesterday morning and found a number of bunkers believed to be used by ARSA men.

The Daily Star received five photos of the bunkers sent by the local sources. RSO members in their camouflage shirts were also seen in the photos, which were not verified.

Neither of the two groups claimed to be responsible for the violence.

Officials said the Border Guard Bangladesh was asked to stay alert.

The Konarpara camp on no-man's-land hosts at least 4,232 Rohingyas who arrived there in 2017. Over a dozen refugees were injured during the clash over the last two days, said witnesses.

The ARSA and RSO have been rivals for years. The RSO was most active in the 1990s but lost its appeal to the people later. It reemerged last year while ARSA came into the spotlight in 2016.

ARSA is the group that launched deadly attacks on Burmese military and police outposts in Myanmar's border state of Rakhine in August 2017. [Our Bandarban correspondent contributed to this report.]

Padma Bridge

FROM PAGE 1

"The US dollar traded at Tk 78.3 in the foreign exchange market when we started the works but the rate has escalated since then. We had to spend an additional Tk 500-600 crore for this reason alone," Islam said.

The government on many occasions has changed VAT and income tax rates.

In the case of foreign contractors, the VAT and income tax have been increased to 15 percent from 10.5 percent, so the project authorities have to provide the additional 4.5 percent as per the contract, he said.

This cost the project authorities an additional Tk 687 crore, according to officials.

Besides, the project authorities have to spend about Tk 400 crore more for the detailed design and construction of foundations of seven 400KV transmission towers on the Padma.

They will also have to procure some equipment for the operation of the bridge, which will take about Tk 300 crore, he said.

Approved in August 2007, the project was supposed to be implemented at the cost of Tk 10,162

crore within June 2015. In 2011, it went through a major revision that took the project cost to Tk 20,507 crore.

After two more changes in expenditure, the project cost rose to Tk 30,193.34 crore. The latest deadline for the project is June this year, including a year as a defect liability period.

Asked about the reason behind the time extension, Islam said they would take up to June this year to complete the river training works.

Then, they would require another year for the defects liability period.

A defects liability period is the time period specified in the contract during which a contractor is legally required to return to a construction site to repair any defects which have appeared in that contractor's work since the date of completion.

"That's why we sought the deadline extension to June 2024," Islam added.

As of December last year, the project saw 95.8 percent overall progress, with 99.7 percent and 96.25 percent progress in main bridge and river training respectively.

The project saw 93.68 percent financial progress.