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NEWS

PILOT'S DEATH

Sister accuses pvt hospital of negligence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Youssef Hassan

A Jordanian-American pilot has died due to the negligence of a reputed private hospital in Dhaka, his sister has alleged.

Tala Ilhendi Josephano yesterday said her late brother Gulf Air pilot Mohammad Youssef Hassan Al Hendi was not given timely and proper treatment at the United Hospital after he had a heart attack.

"I have come all the way to Bangladesh only to seek justice for my brother's murder. My brother was a victim of mistreatment and murder," the US resident told a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity.

Tala said she would take legal action against the Gulf Air and United Hospital.

Meanwhile, the hospital in a statement said the allegations

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Awami League leaders and activists take part in a rally on the capital's Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday. The Dhaka city (south) unit of the ruling party organised the meeting protesting the "terror and anarchy" by the BNP-Jamaat.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

World 'dangerously unprepared' for next pandemic

Warns Red Cross, says building trust, equity, local action networks vital to get ready for the next crisis

AFP, *Geneva*

All countries remain "dangerously unprepared" for the next pandemic, the Red Cross warned yesterday, saying future health crises could also collide with increasingly likely climate-related disasters.

Despite three "brutal" years of the Covid-19 pandemic, strong preparedness systems are "severely lacking", the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) said.

The world's largest humanitarian network said building trust, equity and local action networks were vital to get ready for the next crisis.

"All countries remain dangerously unprepared for future outbreaks," the IFRC said, concluding that governments were no more ready now than in 2019.

It said countries needed to be prepared for "multiple hazards, not just one", saying societies only became truly resilient through planning for different types of disaster, as they can occur simultaneously.

The IFRC cited the rise in climate-related disasters and waves of disease outbreaks this century, of which Covid-19 was just one.

It said extreme weather events were growing more frequent and intense, "and our ability to merely respond to them is limited".

The IFRC issued two reports making recommendations on mitigating future tragedies on the scale of Covid-19, on the third anniversary of the World Health Organization declaring the virus an international public health emergency.

"The Covid-19 pandemic should be a wake-up call for the global community to prepare now for the next health crisis," said IFRC Secretary General Jagan Chapagain.

"The next pandemic could be just around the corner; if the experience of Covid-19 won't quicken our steps toward preparedness, what will?"

The report said major hazards harm those who are already vulnerable the most, and leaving the poorest exposed was "self-defeating", as a disease can return in a more dangerous form.

The IFRC said if people trusted safety messages, they would be willing to comply with public health measures and accept vaccination.

But the organisation said crisis responders "cannot wait until the next time to build trust", urging consistent cultivation over time.

The IFRC said if trust was fragile, public health became political and individualised -- something which impaired the Covid response.

It also said the coronavirus pandemic had thrived on and exacerbated inequalities, with poor sanitation, overcrowding, lack of access to health and social services, and malnutrition creating conditions for diseases to thrive in.

"The world must address inequitable health and socio-economic vulnerabilities far in advance of the next crisis," it recommended.

The organisation also said local communities should be leveraged to perform life-saving work, as that is where pandemics begin and end.

The IFRC called for the development of pandemic response products that are cheaper, and easier to store and administer.

By 2025, it said countries should increase domestic health finance by one percent of gross domestic product, and global health finance by at least $15 billion per year.

The IFRC said its network had reached more than 1.1 billion people over the past three years to help keep them safe during the Covid pandemic.

Explain in four weeks

HC asks govt about detainees in fetters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday issued a rule asking the government to explain in four weeks why it should not be directed to formulate a guideline through a committee on handcuffing and fettering the detained accused.

In the rule, the court also asked the government to show causes why the handcuffing and fettering of Ali Azam in Gazipur and Selim Reza in Shariatpur by the law enforcers during the namaz-e-janaza prayers of their mothers on December 20 and January 16 should not be declared illegal.

The HC in the rule asked the authorities concerned to explain why they should not be directed to give adequate compensations to Azam, a local BNP leader, and Selim, a Chhatra Dal leader, as they were mentally and physically harassed and humiliated.

Secretaries to the ministries of home and law, inspectors general of police and prisons, deputy commissioners and superintendents of police of Gazipur and Shariatpur, the jailer of Kashimpur jail and

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191 news sites to be blocked for spreading anti-state propaganda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dr Hasan Mahmud, information and broadcasting minister, yesterday said a letter was sent to the Department of Posts and Telecommunications to block 191 online news portals.

The minister made the announcement in response to a question tabled by Jatiya Party MP Mujibul Haque at the Jatiya Sangsad.

Currently, 346 online newspapers are registered under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, including 162 online news portals, 169 online portals for daily newspapers and 15 online portals for TV channels, said Hasan Mahmud.

Referring to the government's plan to stop the dissemination of anti-state propaganda, he said, "Based on the information of intelligence agencies and the activities that spread confusion among the public, a letter has already been sent to the Department of Posts and Telecommunications to cancel the domain of 191 online news portals."

AL man dies after falling off train roof

He was on his way back from party's Rajshahi rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Rajshahi*

An Awami League supporter died yesterday from critical wounds he sustained when he fell from the roof of a train on his way back from the party's rally in Rajshahi on Sunday night.

Musa Sarker, 40, was undergoing treatment in the ICU of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital when doctors pronounced him dead at 1:30pm, said Brig Gen Shamim Yazdani, the hospital's outgoing director.

According to hospital officials, three other people received emergency treatment at the hospital after being injured while riding the trains that the Awami League arranged to help its leaders, activists, and supporters reach Rajshahi to attend the rally.

Musa, also an agricultural labourer, took the train to Rajshahi and joined the AL rally. On his way back, he fell off the roof of the train near Rajshahi University Station.

Two RU students rescued him and took him to RMCH and he was immediately shifted to an ICU.

1,136 bottles of foreign liquor seized in Cumilla

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Cumilla*

Rapid Action Battalion yesterday detained a man and seized a covered van carrying a large cache of foreign liquors in the Tomsom bridge area of Cumilla city.

Md Sabuj, 27, was hiding 1,136 illegal liquor bottles, which were smuggled in from India, inside his covered van among old AC parts, said Rab sources.

Shakib Hossain, commander (Cumilla) Rab-11 CPC-2, said, "During primary interrogation, Sabuj said he had been involved in the drug trade for a long time."

A case has been filed with Cumilla Sadar South Police Station in this connection.

IMF approves $4.5b loan for Bangladesh

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remittance receipts through formal channels are also on the task list.

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 and reporting on net foreign reserves are the other agreed reforms.

The government has already started implementing some of the reforms such as raising the fuel and power prices and the central bank is aiming to move towards a market-based, flexible and unified exchange rate regime (within a 2 percent variation) by the end of this fiscal year.

And yesterday, Bangladesh Bank Governor Abdur Rouf Talukder said the $7 billion Export Development Fund has been trimmed by $1 billion already and will be reduced further.

The EDF is made from foreign currency reserves and is not immediately usable, so the IMF said it should be excluded when reporting on the reserve position or wound down.

Talukder also said no new funds would be created from the foreign currency reserves.

The IMF staff mission insisted on reporting on gross reserves as per the lender's balance of payments and investment position manual (BPM6), which is followed faithfully by central banks around the world. But Bangladesh's central bank is yet to adopt it.

As per BPM6, gross reserves are reserve assets that "must be readily available in the most unconditional form"; it should be "liquid in that the asset can be bought, sold and liquidated for foreign currency (cash) with minimum cost and time, and without unduly affecting the value of the asset".

But the central bank includes various funds created from foreign currency reserves in its gross computation.

The mission also called for reporting on net reserves as gross reserves can provide a misleading view of the size of the country's precautionary buffers available to meet potential foreign exchange liquidity needs in adverse circumstances.

Man shot dead in broad daylight

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him dead on the spot.

After the attackers fled the scene, locals took Milan to Phultala Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead.

Police sent the body to Khulna Medical College Hospital for an autopsy, said Ilias Talukdar, officer-in-charge of Phultala Police Station.

Four bullet marks were found on different parts of Milan's body -- his head, abdomen, hand and leg, said police.

However, no case was filed regarding the murder till the filing of this report last evening.

RIVALRY OVER LEASE LED TO KILLING?

A cousin of the victim, Zakir Hossain Mohan, said Milan used to live in Malaysia and returned home around eight years ago. He then worked as a broker for purchasing and selling land.

"Milan was trying to get a lease of Shikir Hat Kheyaghat [a local boat terminal]. Today [yesterday] was the last date for dropping off tender documents for the lease. He was scheduled to go to Khulna Divisional Commissioner's office for this."

Alamgir Hossain, a former member of Phultala Union Parishad, currently controls the boat terminal, Zakir told The Daily Star.

Last year, Milan contested for the vice-president post of the Phultala Bazar Marchant Association. But he could not win the election. Although Milan did not have any post in any political party, he used to maintain close relations with local Awami League leaders.

He was a close aide of Faruk Mollah, who got elected as a member of ward-4 of Phulata Union Parishad by defeating Alamgir.

"So, we think that Milan had a rivalry with Alamgir over getting the lease of the boat terminal and local politics. These may be the reasons for his killing," claimed Zakir.

However, Alamgir could not be contacted over the phone despite repeated attempts.

Milan's son Md Emon, who is a student of a local college, said, "I don't know anything whether my father had enmity with anyone."

Contacted, Khulna Superintendent of Police Muhammad Mahbub Hasan said police were investigating to trace the killers.

'Biggest militant threat'

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Rab officers learnt these by interrogating the arrested militants, including their two top leaders, seized documents, and analysing the video made by the suspects on their training.

"With motivation, determination and combat training, Jama'atul Ansar is the biggest militant threat Bangladesh has ever faced from militants," said a Rab officer, wishing anonymity.

Lt Col Moshiur Rahman Jewel, Rab director (intelligence), said, "By analysing the video, one clearly understands that those militants are highly capable in terms of firearms and physical training. It would have been a catastrophe if they managed to come to the plain lands and carried out attacks."

Its members are trained in using assault rifles, and five or six of them have the expertise in making powerful Improvised Explosive Device (IED) with gelatin sticks, he added.

The eight-minute video shows the militants being trained in modern fighting techniques. They know about trigger safety and how to properly hold a weapon. The video also shows the commander assigning jobs to the armed members through hand gestures during an operation and informing them about enemy locations by drawing a map on the ground.

Three officers, who were members of the team that raided the camps in the hills, said Jama'atul Ansar has a camouflage uniform and its members are trained to ambush. For self-defence, the militants dug bunkers and trenches around their camps at an altitude of 3,000 feet.

"No other militant organisation has such training," said one of the officers who has been involved in tracking down militants for the last nine years and participated in several operations, including the one during the Holey Artisan Bakery attack.

The militants used to guard the camps along with KNF members and often engaged in gunfights with other insurgent groups of the hill tracts. One of their members, Abdur Rahman who went by the alias Jahir, got killed during one such fight around seven months ago.

Another man died there due to starvation and sickness.

As many of the KNF members are converted Christians, Jama'atul Ansar took their help, said an officer.

The KNF provided arms training and shelter under a three-year deal, they added. The KNF, which has around 200 armed members, would get the trained militants to fight against other insurgent groups in the hills.

Jama'atul Ansar was formed by some leaders of Ansar Al Islam, Neo JMB and Huji-B. Its leaders used to keep an eye on mosque goers and selected potential recruits. The leaders then motivated the potential recruits for one to three years.

The highly radicalised individual was then asked to leave home to become a militant.

The recruits were asked to go through physical training and acquire the skills of electricians, carpenters, masons, mobile phone mechanics, drivers and tailors. They also preferred to recruit physicians, especially the surgeons, according to the seized document of the militant outfit.

Many of the 55 militants trained in the hills have MBBS and business degrees while others have madrasa education.

Eight of them, including two key leaders, have been arrested.

The militant outfit owned farm animals in Munshiganj, Cumilla and the hill tracts, officials said, adding that it also owned a perfume and panjabi shop in the capital's Gulistan and a mobile accessories shop in Maghbazar.

Minister optimistic, challenges aplenty

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rosyas the progress of the work is quite slow in the western part of the bridge in Sirajganj compared to the eastern part in Tangail.

The work at the eastern part saw 65 percent progress against the western part's 36 percent till early this month, said sources at Bangladesh Railway.

The project authorities were not able to use Tk 1,151 crore from the allocation it was supposed to receive from the Annual Development Programme (ADP).

In this given situation, it is likely to be very difficult for the authorities to meet the August 2024 deadline, and they may take four to six more months to complete the work, the sources added.

Taken up in 2016, the Tk 16,780.95 crore project is being implemented with a Japanese soft loan (72 percent) and government funds. However, physical work of the project started in August 2020 and it saw 55 percent progress till this month.

The bridge is being constructed 300 metres upstream of the existing Bangabandhu Bridge over the Jamuna.

Once built, the dual-gauge double-track bridge will be the largest dedicated rail bridge in the country. It will improve the capacity of BR in operating more trains between the capital and the western districts of the country. It will also help reduce train delays which are now quite common, officials said.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

The government approved the bridge project in December 2016 at a cost of Tk 9,734 crore. The deadline was set at December 2023.

But the costs of two work packages of the main bridge saw a huge rise after the detailed design was completed in September 2018. Besides, the expenses for land acquisition, land lease and building a museum were also included in the project, taking the total cost to Tk 16,781 crore and the deadline was deferred to December 2025 with a one-year defect liability period.

The project authorities divided the bridge in two parts --western part with 23 piers and eastern part with 27 piers -- to complete the work promptly, and hired two Japanese joint-venture firms for the work.

A joint venture of Obayashi Corporation, TOA Corporation and JFE was given the contract for the work in the eastern part while another joint venture of the IHI and SMCC was tasked with the work in the western part.

As per the contracts, their work is supposed to be completed within August next year.

While the construction of most of the piers at the eastern part is completed, only three in the western part are done, BR source said.

Asked about the reason, the railways minister said the contractor working at the eastern part had previous experience of working in Bangladesh and many of their equipment were in the country.

However, the other contractor took time to start the work, but they are now working in full swing and are hopeful of making up for the delay by the deadline, Sujan said.

But BR sources said the second contractor would require four to six more months beyond the August 2024 deadline to cover the delay.

A total of Tk 3,850 crore were allocated for the project through ADP this fiscal year, but in the revised ADP the project authorities will surrender Tk 1,151 crore, shows a BR document.

Asked about the reason, Project Director Al Fattah Md Masudur Rahman said although they made significant progress in physical work, they cannot clear payments to contractors if the work of a particular segment is not completed.

"We had sought more funds thinking that the contractor in the western part will be able to make up for the delay. But they could not do so. This is another reason for us not being able to use the total allocated fund," he said told The Daily Star recently.