

Printing press staffer 'picked up', owner goes missing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of plainclothes men claiming to be DB officials picked up an employee of a printing press from the capital's Fakirapool on Tuesday. His employer went missing after the incident, said family members.

Saiful Islam, 28, a designer of Herar Jyoti Design and Printing, and Mominul Islam, 47, the owner, remained traceless as of filing of this report last night.

Quoting witnesses, Masum Billah, brother-in-law of Mominul, said some plainclothes men claiming to be Detective Branch officials went to the press on Aliza Tower around noon on Tuesday.

They interrogated Saiful, picked him up and took away computers from the press, Masum alleged.

Wishing anonymity, a trader at Aliza Tower also gave a similar account of the incident.

Masum said, "Mominul Islam was away from the press during the raid. But his mobile phone remains switched off since then."

He said Mominul's family members went to Motijheel and Paltan police stations to know about the whereabouts of the two, but nobody said anything.

Masum said they later came to know that a DB team detained the two, but there was no official confirmation.

Rajib Al Masud, deputy commissioner of the Detective Branch (Motijheel Division) of police, yesterday said his team neither detained any such persons nor conducted any raid in Fakirapool on Tuesday.

Mostafizur Rahman, a sub-inspector at Motijheel Police Station, said he visited the press, collected CCTV footage from Aliza Tower, and conducted an investigation into the incident.

Asked if any DB team carried out a raid, he told this newspaper that he would only comment on the issue after having instructions from high officials.

CCTV footage showed that plainclothes men taking away computers from Aliza Tower at 1:20pm on Tuesday.



Ukrainian servicemen stand near a military vehicle with anti-aircraft cannon at their positions near a front line, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Donetsk region yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Myanmar junta extends emergency on coup anniv

Move likely to delay August polls; US, EU, allies call for an end to violence

AGENCIES

Myanmar's junta extended the country's state of emergency by another six months, state media reported yesterday, likely delaying elections the military had pledged to hold by August.

The country has been in turmoil since the army's power grab in 2021, and a subsequent crackdown on dissent has sparked fighting across swathes of the nation while tanking the economy.

On the second anniversary of the putsch, state media reported that the National Defence and Security Council had agreed to junta chief Min Aung Hlaing's request to prolong the state of emergency declared when the generals

toppled Aung San Suu Kyi's government.

The "state of emergency will be extended for another six months starting from February 1", Acting President Myint Swe was quoted as saying. The announcement came as streets emptied and shops closed across Myanmar in protest on the anniversary and Western powers launched a fresh broadside of sanctions against the generals.

International community, in a joint statement yesterday, called on Myanmar to end violence and create space for meaningful and inclusive dialogue to allow for any democratic process to resume, reports UNB.

The joint statement was made by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union, and the foreign ministers of Albania,

Armenia, Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, the Federated States of Micronesia, Georgia, Ghana, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau, Serbia, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Streets in the commercial hub Yangon were largely deserted from late morning, AFP correspondents said, after activists called for people across the country to close businesses and stay indoors.

Roads leading to the famous Shwedagon pagoda -- a Buddhist shrine that dominates Yangon's skyline and is usually thronged by worshippers -- were

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DIGITAL SECURITY ACT

Man lands in jail for 'hurting religious sentiment'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Chattogram court yesterday sent a man to jail in connection with a case filed under the controversial Digital Security Act.

Clinton Ghosh, 29, of Shariatpur, was sued on July 19, 2021, for hurting religious sentiment.

Pradeep Kumar Dutta, member of the board of trustees of Kaibalyadham Trust, filed the case against him with Akbar Shah Police Station.

Police arrested Clinton in Shariatpur's Naria area on Monday and produced him before the court yesterday.

"Clinton and some others posted defamatory comments about the head of Kaibalyadham temple Mohant Maharaj and other members of the board of trustees," said Asif Mohiuddin, additional deputy commissioner (counter-terrorism) of Chattogram Metropolitan Police.

"They used their personal Facebook profiles to spread comments that hurt religious sentiment," he further said, adding that Clinton's mobile phone was also seized.

5 sued over abduction, rape of minor

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Five men were accused early yesterday in a case filed over the abduction and rape of a madrasa girl in Jashore Sadar upazila in December last year.

According to the case statement, Kashem Sardar, Ismail Hossain, Rabiul Islam, Md Ismail, and Habibur Rahman of Kazdia village abducted the 14-year-old on December 28.

Habibur took the girl to his village home and raped her there while the others acted as his accomplice.

She managed to flee from confinement the next day and returned to her family.

On Monday, the girl's father filed a complaint with Jashore Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal, which then ordered for it to be recorded as a case with the local police station.

Following the tribunal's order, the complaint was registered with Jashore Kotwali Police Station in the early hours of Wednesday, said Officer-in-Charge Tamijul Islam.

The girl's father said he had been trying to file the case since the day of the incident but could not as the abductors were influential people.

He was finally able to do so after the tribunal passed the order, he added.

Sattar sails through with

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In yesterday's by-polls to the six constituencies, three AL nominees, two independents with AL support, and a Jatiya Party nominee won.

Voter turnout was poor in all the constituencies and clashes were reported in some places.

In Bogura-4, independent runner Ashraf Hossain Alam, popularly known as Hero Alam, lost to a ruling grand alliance candidate and Jatiya Samantrik Dal leader Rezaul Karim Tansen by 834 votes. The former got 19,871 votes. The voter turnout was 23 percent.

In Thakurgaon-3, Jatiya Party leader Hafiz Uddin Ahmed won with 25,463 votes followed by independent candidate Gopal Chandra Roy's 16,691 and the AL-led grand alliance candidate Yasin Ali's 7,010. Voter turnout was 38 percent.

In Bogura-6 which saw a 22 percent turnout, AL candidate Ragebul Ahsan won with 49,336 votes, defeating the closest rival Abdul Mannan, an independent, who bagged 21,864 votes.

In Chapainawabganj-3, AL candidate Abdul Wadud won by bagging 69,638 votes while his nearest rival Samiul Haq got 55,980. Voter turnout was 29 percent.

In Chapainawabganj-2, AL candidate Ziaur Rahman won with 94,928 votes while his nearest rival independent candidate Mohammad Ali Sarkar bagged 25,399. Voter turnout was 35 percent.

The by-elections were needed as seven BNP lawmakers resigned from parliament as a protest.

After voting was done, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal said, "The by-polls were held peacefully and there were no allegations of vote rigging and other irregularities."

BRAHMANBARIA-2 BY-POLLS

Abu Asif Ahmed, who is running as an independent, has been missing since Friday.

At Sarail Annada Govt High School centre, polling officials and law enforcers were in their designated places by 8:30am. But none of the 4,041 voters turned up until 9:00am.

The first voter to walk in was a man named Ripon Mia. He said he went there mostly because of his curiosity to see the Electronic

Voting Machines.

Presiding Officer Syed Zakir Hossain said, "Maybe the turnout is low because it's a winter morning."

At Sarail Sadar Union Parishad polling centre, the usual queue of voters was not seen at 9:30am. There were 3,687 voters in the centre.

The scenario was similar at almost all the polling centres. The only exception was found in Pak Shimul Union Parishad of Sarail upazila, the ancestral village of Sattar.

Contacted, Returning Officer Shahgir Alam said bringing voters to the polling centres is not the responsibility of the officers. "The weather can be a factor. Besides, the candidates might have failed to motivate the voters," he said.

At Pakshimul Government Primary School and Aruyil Bohumukhi High School centres, Sattar's polling agents were found in the polling booths.

One of them, Bachchu Mia, was found in a booth along with a voter at Aruyil. When Assistant Presiding Officer Joyal Abedin was asked about it, he said, "I just went to the bathroom."

Missing candidate Asif's wife Meherunnisa Meherin did not cast her vote even after going to her designated Shramkalyan Kendra polling centre at noon.

Shimul Mridha, a resident of Talshahar area of Ashuganj, said the ruling party men were desperate to make Sattar win.

Hesaid, "They worked shamelessly for him. Everyone knew what would be the outcome of this election. That's why nobody bothered to go to the polling centre."

Alamgir Hossain, a resident of the same area, said since Asif has been missing, his supporters didn't bother voting.

CHAPAINAWABGANJ-2 and -3

Incidents of violence were reported in Chapainawabganj-3.

Supporters of different candidates chased each other near Adarsha Zila School in the town around 9:00am.

Besides, four crude bombs were detonated near Krisnagovindapur Girls High School around 2:00pm. Polling was suspended at the centre soon afterwards.

Clashes between different groups took place in the Shantimor and Sonarmor areas leaving three people

injured later in the afternoon.

As law enforcers reached the scene, the crowds hurled a crude bomb at Rab men. Officers then fired 30 to 35 blank shots to calm the situation, said Commander Ruh-Fi Tahmin Toukir of Rab 5.

However, by-polls to Chapainawabganj-2 were peaceful. Bogura and Thakurgaon

In Bogura-6, the polling centres were controlled by the ruling party men.

A group of Jubo League men led by Abdul Motin Sarkar, brother of former Jubo League leader Tufan Sarkar was at the Jubli Institution polling centre in Bogura.

Several locals said they were not comfortable going to the centre.

Asked, Motin said he was just helping the voters.

AL men were also seen in Bogura Pre-cadet High School, Thanthania Nurun Ala Nur Fazil Madrasa and some other polling stations.

Independent candidate Abdul Manna Akanda alleged that over 100 centres were occupied by the ruling party men.

Hero Alam said his polling agents were forced to leave the polling stations.

Contacted, the Returning Officer Saiful Islam said, "When we get information of irregularities, we send magistrates to take action."

Three hit

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after repeated attempts over the phone.

Kamal Bashar, resident medical officer of Narsingdi Sadar Hospital, said, three people -- Tofazzal Hossain, Rabiul Miah and Rashed -- were admitted to the hospital with multiple bullet injuries.

Murad Hossain, a sub-inspector of Raipura Police Station, confirmed the incident.

"Police have been conducting drives to bring the situation under control," he said, adding that no one was arrested as of 3:00pm as no complaint was lodged.

Legal actions will be taken against those responsible, the SI added.

Mohammad Azizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Raipura Police Station, also could not be reached over the phone after repeated attempts.

BERC rate just on paper

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Nobin, a retailer in Rajshahi's court station area, was able to get LPG bottles from his wholesaler for Tk 1,550. He is selling those for Tk 1,620 -- Tk 400 more than the government-fixed retail price.

The importers and distributors blamed the higher price on the middlemen as well as an incompatible price method of BERC.

"There was a supply chain disruption as we were unable to open letters of credit and the middlemen exploited the situation," said Jakaria Jalal, head of division at Basundhara LP Gas, the market leader.

But, it is not possible to sell LPG at

the rate fixed by BERC.

"There were lots of problems in the pricing process of BERC. They told us that they will hold a fresh public hearing to form a new formula, but they have not."

In the meantime, the price of LPG increased in the global market in February.

"We have to spend at least Tk 250 more on a cylinder than in January," Jalal added.

Contacted, BERC member (Petroleum) Md Kamruzzaman acknowledged receiving complaints last month of higher prices than the rate fixed.

"We will check and take necessary measures," he said, adding that they will announce the LPG price for February soon.

BERC started pricing LPG in August 2020.

The market for LPG boomed after the government in 2020 decided not to provide fresh gas connections to households.

Bangladesh's annual LPG consumption is about 14.28 lakh metric tonnes, with households accounting for about 84 percent of the consumption.

Around 99 percent of the market is dominated by 29 private companies.

Spot purchase of LNG resumes

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comes on the back of plummeting prices, which have dropped by a third from the record highs of \$70.50 MMBtu in August 2022 since the start of the year on slower demand and high inventory levels in Europe and North Asia.

The development also means the industries, which have been running on a truncated production schedule for want of gas, can brace themselves for uninterrupted supply once again.

To enable the spot purchases, the government last month hiked the

retail price of gas by 14.5 percent to 178.9 percent for industries, power plants and commercial establishments, who together account for 78 percent of gas use in Bangladesh.

"So, supplying uninterrupted gas to them is our first priority now," the Petrobangla official said.

If the LNG price stays at this level, the government will continue to purchase from the spot market, Nasrul Hamid, the state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, told The Daily Star earlier on January 18.

Bangladesh also imports LNG for about \$11 MMBtu through a 10-year import deal with Oman and a 15-year import deal with Qatar, according to Petrobangla officials.

At present, the total gas supply to the national grid is 2,656 million cubic feet per day (mmcf/d), which includes the 401 mmcf/d supplied by Qatar and Oman, shows the daily supply report of Petrobangla.

Once the cargo from the spot market arrives, the supply would increase by another 100 mmcf/d, according to Petrobangla officials.

Families trace missing ones

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Kalam, a resident of Dhaka's Kamrangirchar area, said his son had gone to Dubai in 2018 as a worker.

On November 9, 2021, a woman called Raihan's uncle and told him that Raihan had returned home and was staying at a friend's house in the capital's Badda.

"When I went there to look for him, I was told that Raihan had gone to another friend's house in Cumilla. I went there but found no trace of him. We later reported the matter to law enforcers," Kalam told The Daily Star.

Raihan's father believes his son may have joined the outfit when he was abroad. He requested the law enforcers to rescue his son alive and bring him back home.

Mahmud Dakua, a graduate student at New Model University College in the capital's Shukrabad,

used to run a bookshop at Nilkhet. He lived with his elder brother on Lalit Mohan Das Lane in old Dhaka.

On the afternoon of March 18, 2021, he left the shop and has been missing since.

The following day, his relatives filed a general diary with the New Market Police Station. Posters were also pasted in different parts of the country seeking his whereabouts, but to no avail.

On January 25, the family members identified him in the video and contacted Rab. He was seen in the video thrice.

Mahmud's elder brother Rasel Dakua told The Daily Star that he brought Mahmud to Dhaka from Barishal's Bakerganj in 2016 and admitted him to the college.

A few days before he went missing, Rasel had seen some changes in Mahmud's attitude

towards religion, but he did not suspect anything.

Rasel said a man used to visit him regularly and he suspects that his brother was lured to militancy through that person.

Lt Col Moshir Rahman Jewel, head of Rab's intelligence wing, told The Daily Star that those who were seen in the video are members of the banned militant outfit Jama'atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya.

They were undergoing training there under the supervision of Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF), an armed group of Chattogram Hill Tracts.

Fifty-five members of the newly surfaced Jama'atul Ansar, formed by the leaders of JMB, Ansarullah Al Islam and Huji, took the combat training so far. They were trained in operating firearms and some of them even trained on explosives, Rab said.