

## AL, BNP test strength at grassroots

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movement to restore democracy in the country by announcing counter programmes.

"You [AL] cannot obstruct our peaceful programme. People took to the streets and proved that it would not be possible to stop the movement by filing false cases and opening fire," said Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, standing committee member of the party.

"By announcing counter programmes, the Awami League is proving that they have become bankrupt as a political party. The situation of the ruling party reached such an extent that they could not attract people by announcing counter programmes. So, they are now trying to obstruct BNP's programmes," he added.

The BNP leader made the

remarks while addressing a human chain programme in front of the National Press Club organised by the Jatiyatabadi Textile Engineers Association of Bangladesh.

"People laughed at AL's counter programmes. It is because you have already been defeated politically. You have no right to announce a political programme. You were defeated as you took a position against the people of the country."

Meanwhile, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said that his party would continue holding programmes until the next election.

"They [BNP] are now walking on a path of conspiracy to oust Sheikh Hasina's government from power. In such a situation, how can we refrain from organising political programmes? We are well aware of

what they can become if they get an opportunity ... There is nothing they are not capable of if they are given an opportunity."

He made the remarks during the meeting between AL's Dhaka city north and south units and different associate bodies at the party's central office in Gulistan.

"They [BNP] have taken to the streets ... we are holding peace rallies fearing they might carry out terror activities. As long as the BNP holds any movement, we will hold a peace rally," said Quader, also the road, transport and bridges minister.

He also announced that the AL would hold divisional rallies in Mymensingh on March 11 and in Barishal on March 18.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the party president, would attend the rallies as chief guest, he further said.

## Solve case or admit failure

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"They [Rab] are actually doing nothing. I have doubts on their sincerity in ensuring justice," said Runi's brother Nowsher Alam Roman, who filed the double murder case with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station.

"There might be an instruction from top bodies of the government not to solve the mystery of the murder. I don't know why," he said.

Roman said investigation officers often contacted him, but they failed to give any answer when asked about the probe progress.

He said they were gradually losing hopes of getting justice.

Sagar Sarowar, news editor at private TV channel Maasranga, and Meherun Runi, a senior reporter at ATN Bangla, were killed in the early hours of February 11, 2012, at their rented flat in the capital's West Rajabazar.

The couple's only child Mahir Sarowar Megh, only five at the time, was in the flat.

Megh, now 16, has started to enquire about the murder of his parents, Roman said.

Megh used to live with his grandmother Nurun Nahar Mirza, but she passed away on January 15 last year, at the age of 64.

After Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station and the Detective Branch of

police failed to solve the case, Rab was tasked with the probe on April 18, 2012.

At least eight suspects, including Rafiqul Islam, Bakul Miah, Masum Mintu, Kamrul Islam alias Arun, Abu Sayeed, two security guards of the couple's house Palash Rudra Paul and Enayet Ahmed, and the couple's "friend" Tanveer Rahman Khan were arrested after the killing.

Tanveer and Palash are now on bail. The rest are behind bars.

Rab IO Khandaker Md Shafiqul Alam is the seventh investigation officer in the case. He was given the job on July 4, 2019.

A Rab source said DNA samples of 25 people were sent to Independent Forensic Service (IFS) in the US, but the test results there failed to come up anything concrete.

Runi's brother Roman said thinks DNA tests are simply an eyewash to waste time.

On January 4 this year, the Rab official once again failed to submit the probe report and then again applied for time extension. The court then set march 5 for the submission.

Earlier, two separate courts expressed dissatisfaction over the probe, and the investigators' failure to unearth the motive behind the murders and arrest the real culprits. Meanwhile, Home Minister

Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal on Thursday said the Rab would be instructed to provide the updates on the probe without any delay.

"We also want the mystery behind the killings to be unravelled as soon as possible," he said while talking to Dhaka Reporters Unity leaders at the Secretariat.

The DRU leaders met him to submit a memorandum, demanding a speedy trial in the killings of the journalist couple.

"We cannot deliver judgment, but we can provide a probe report. We've been attempting for years. We also want this mystery to be solved ... I'm forwarding DRU's message to the Rab DG. I'll give them the order to say something soon," said the minister.

DRU expressed disappointment in the memorandum that the law enforcers could not identify the perpetrators or unearth any motive behind the killings even after 11 years.

It stated that Sagar-Runi's family and the entire journalist community have become outraged for not getting justice.

"As we have seen, law enforcement agencies have uncovered major murder mysteries; criminals have been brought to justice. We don't believe they cannot solve the Sagar-Runi murder case," added the memorandum.

## Newborns at risk of liver cirrhosis, cancer

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should also recommend that every newborn receive the HBV birth shots within 24 hours, as per the World Health Organization guidelines, instead of the current practice of taking it at six weeks.

"But in a country where more than 62 percent of total births take place at home without proper antenatal care, and almost half of the deliveries are done with the help of traditional birth attendants, it's quite difficult to test women during pregnancy or give birth shots and antibody to the neonates."

He added, "Besides, the mothers' knowledge of viral hepatitis and its transmission is also inadequate, while the availability of birth shots, immunoglobulin and testing facility of HBsAg in rural health facilities is also limited."

According to him, if newborns of HBsAg positive mothers are given the birth shot and immunoglobulin within 24 hours of their birth, it reduces the risk of contracting the virus by 90 percent.

Currently, the HBV birth shot costs Tk 400, and the immunoglobulin costs Tk 5,430 and is not available widely.

About the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HBV, high-

risk pregnancy specialist Dr Raunak Jahan said that upon a positive confirmatory test, the expecting mothers are required to perform further viral-load testing.

"The symptomatic mothers -- having nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and jaundice -- are given antivirals if needed, with the collaboration of gynaecologists and hepatologists, to reduce the risk of transmission to the baby, which can occur during pregnancy, childbirth and lactation."

"Even after giving the birth shots and antibody within 24 hours, we need to closely monitor the baby, as symptoms may appear later, and the infection requires long-term treatment."

Sadly, there is no specific data on the prevalence of hepatitis B among pregnant women in Bangladesh, although small-scale data from tertiary hospitals shows the rate is 0.5-3.5 percent, depending on the region.

The Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of Bangladesh (OGSB) has been urging the government to ensure vaccination for those born before 2007, when the HBV vaccine was included countrywide in the Expanded Programme on Immunisation.

"Besides, every couple should go for preconception counselling, while after conceiving, systematic antenatal care should be made mandatory," said Prof Dr Ferdousi Begum, president of OGSB.

"Moreover, in positive cases, the husbands must get vaccinated and use condoms during intercourse to avoid transmission."

Currently, the health directorate's Viral Hepatitis Programme, Communicable Disease Control, Directorate General of Health Services, and icddr,b have been jointly conducting a study to understand the prevalence of HBV infection among pregnant women and children under-five.

"But it's impossible to get the real picture, due to the low ANC [antenatal care, or care during pregnancy] and institutional delivery rates. We can only arrange the tests if they come to the health facility," said Dr Aninda Rahman, deputy manager of the programme.

Asked about the need for the inclusion of HBV birth dose in the EPI schedule, as per WHO guidelines, he said, it is included in next five-year action plan to control HBV.

"The plan is awaiting approval of the ministry," he said.

## Four students 'tortured'

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Any leader of the college unit BCL could not be reached over the mobile phone despite repeated attempts.

However, talking to the media, Avijit Das, a leader of the college unit BCL, denied the allegation of beating the four students, according to a Bangla daily report.

"The four were the activists of Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir ... They were quizzed, not beaten up," he was quoted as saying by the daily.

Contacted, Pranoy Kumar Dutta, associate professor of ICU and anesthesiology at the CMCH, said the students admitted to ICU had multiple injuries in their bodies. So, they were advised for some investigations, he added.

"We are taking care of them intensively. After getting the report of the investigations, we would be ascertained whether they are out of danger or not," he also said.

Manjur Quader, officer-in-charge of Chawkbazar Police Station, said police rushed to the spot when informed of the incident, and talked to the victims, but they did not share any information.

"We are investigating the incident. We will talk to them again once they recover and get released from the hospital," the OC also said.

No case was filed in this connection, he added.

Contacted, CMCH Director Brig Gen Shamim Ahsan said he did not know about the reason behind the torture of the four students.

## Another Islami Bank

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Un Nabi, Golam Sarowar Mia and Mazharul Islam Rasel and some unknown persons.

Police arrested Rasel on December 27 in another DSA case filed by an S Alam Group official with Double Mooring Police Station in Chattogram. Nabi and Mia were accused in this case too.

Kuddus said he found posters demeaning S Alam Group on walls and pillars behind Nafi Tower in Gulshan-1 and its adjacent areas on December 22, according to the case statement.

Founded in 1985 by Muhammad Saiful Alam Masud Chowdhury, S Alam Group is one of the largest conglomerates in Bangladesh.

It has been in the news recently for its alleged borrowing of over Tk 30,000 crore from Islami Bank, where it has 26.73 percent stakes. The amount was way beyond the group's entitled quota, prompting the High Court to order an investigation.



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