

2005 UDICHI BLASTS SC upholds death sentence for JMB man

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday upheld the death penalty of an operative of banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) for planning the suicide bomb attacks on the Udichi and Shata Dal Shilpi Goshthi offices in Netrakona in 2005, which killed eight people.

A three-member bench of the Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice Hasan Foez Siddique, dismissed an appeal filed by convict Younus Ali challenging the High Court verdict that had affirmed a trial court judgment sentencing him to death for the killings.

The two other judges of the bench are Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Sarwar Hossain Bappi said the jail authorities, upon receiving the apex court verdict, can now take steps for the execution of the JMB man unless he takes any other legal step.

Younus, now in Dhaka central jail, can seek a review of the SC verdict and ask for presidential mercy, he added.

According to the prosecution, the suicide bomb attacks were carried out on the offices of Udichi and Shata Dal Shilpi Goshthi offices around 10:30am on December 8, 2005, which left eight people dead and 40 others injured.

According to reports, a bomb was discovered in front of the Udichi office. The fire brigade attempted to defuse it, but it went off, injuring three people. After a crowd gathered there, a suicide bomber detonated a second bomb.

The explosives were made by one Arid alias Kafi, who carried out the attack. He died on the spot.

The victims of the blasts are Khawja Haider, Sudipta Paul Shelly, Rani Begum, Joinal, Raisuddin, Yadev Das, Jahanara and Shawkat.

On February 17, 2008, a Dhaka court sentenced three JMB operatives — Salahuddin alias Saleheen, Asaduzzaman Chowdhury alias Panir and Younus Ali — to death for the killings.

The HC in 2014 upheld the death penalties, DAG Sarwar said, adding

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Firefighters clear rubbles from a pavement in Chattogram city's Jamal Khan area yesterday afternoon after a wall of a building collapsed during its demolition. The incident left a demolition worker dead and another man injured.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

WEST BANK RAID Israeli troops kill 10 Palestinians

100 others injured, Palestinian President Abbas condemns

REUTERS, West Bank

Israeli troops killed ten Palestinians, including at least three gunmen and three civilians, and wounded over 100 others during a raid on a flashpoint city in the occupied West Bank yesterday, witnesses and medical officials said.

The Israeli army confirmed it was carrying out an operation in Nablus but did not immediately provide further details.

The Islamic Jihad militant faction said two of its Nablus commanders had been encircled in a house by Israeli troops, triggering a clash that drew in other gunmen. Explosions sounded and local youths pelted armoured troop transports with rocks.

Palestinian sources said the two Islamic Jihad commanders were killed along with another gunman. The fatalities also included at least three civilians, among them a 72-year-old man and a 14-year-old boy. Ninety-seven Palestinians were injured, six of them critically, local medics said.

Nablus and nearby Jenin have been a focus of raids that Israel has intensified over the last year following a spate of lethal Palestinian street attacks in its cities.

At least 57 Palestinians, including gunmen and civilians, have been killed in 2023, the Palestinian health ministry said. Ten Israelis and a Ukrainian tourist were killed in Palestinian attacks, according to Israel's foreign ministry.

"We condemn the occupation's raid

into Nablus and we call for an end to the continued attacks against our people," said Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesperson for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Hamas, another Palestinian militant group that sometimes fights alongside Islamic Jihad, hinted at possible reprisals from the Gaza Strip, a territory that it controls.

"The resistance in Gaza is monitoring the escalating crimes conducted by the enemy against our people in the occupied West Bank and is running out of patience," Abu Ubaida, spokesman for the Hamas armed wing, said on Telegram.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad are sworn to Israel's destruction but have in the past observed Egyptian-mediated truces with it.

Teen killed

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used sharp weapons and sticks, witnesses said.

Caught in the middle of the fight, Rasel suffered stab injuries and was rushed to Laxmipur Sadar Hospital, where on duty doctors declared him dead, said police.

Contacted, Mintu Farazi, chairman of Char Rajbongshi Union Parishad, and Mamunur Rashid, president of Raipur upazila AL, said the clash took place due to the longstanding feud over supremacy.

Shipon Barua, officer in charge of Raipur Police Station, said police rushed to the spot on information and brought the situation under control. Meanwhile, Rasel's body was sent to for autopsy.

Md Mahfuzzaman Ashraf, superintendent of police in Laxmipur, said five people, including Shahjalal Rahul, were arrested in connection with the clash.

A case is being filed in this regard, he added.

Don't use

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In 2021, Rozina, a journalist of Prothom Alo, reported on alleged corruption and mismanagement in the health sector and irregularities in the procurement of emergency medical supplies in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

On May 17 that year, she went to the health and family welfare ministry to meet senior officials. While there she was detained and accused of having used her mobile phone without permission to photograph documents related to government negotiations on the purchase of Covid-19 vaccines.

She was later charged under the Official Secrets Act and the Penal Code, according to the statement.

On July 3, 2022, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police submitted its final report to the court stating that no substantial evidence had been found to support the allegations against Rozina. Seven months later, following a petition by the health ministry in January 2023, the same court ordered the police to carry out further investigations. The next hearing is expected to take place on February 28.

"The protracted nature of Rozina Islam's case reflects a dangerous trend in Bangladesh and beyond to bring serious charges, often on unsubstantiated grounds, against journalists and editors and then leave the cases hanging unresolved in the judicial process as a way of threatening, intimidating, harassing, and silencing them," said the experts.

The experts also noted that women journalists are doubly at risk as they also often face gender-based discrimination, harassment, and violence.

Under strain, govt may go for inclusive polls

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AL leaders regularly branded BNP-Jamaat as the mastermind of the arson attacks in 2013 and made suggestions that the BNP-Jamaat do not have the right to be in politics.

The AL policy and tone now appear to have changed.

After the law minister, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader said if the BNP chief wants to get involved in politics, she must follow the conditions of her release.

Agriculture Minister and AL Presidium Member Abdur Razaque yesterday echoed him and said Khaleda can run her party and direct party activists even from jail.

However, all three ministers have said that she cannot run for office.

The BNP, meanwhile, said ministers' comments were an attempt to weaken its movement. The party said it would not sit for any dialogue unless it was about a poll-time caretaker government.

It maintains fair elections under the current administration are not possible.

"The government will come up with more such comments in the future. We all have to be very careful while reacting to them," a senior BNP leader said after a BNP standing committee meeting on Tuesday.

When asked, AL Presidium Member Kazi Zafarullah told The Daily Star that dialogues are essential in democratic and political processes. When and how the dialogues will be held are determined by time and

situation, he said.

Zafarullah said the AL wants an election in which all political parties will take part. One party cannot hold a dialogue. "You need the other party. If the Awami League initiates a dialogue, the BNP also has to come forward."

WHY AL FACES PRESSURE

The AL government is facing more pressure for holding fair and inclusive polls from the West not only because of the West's stance on the previous two polls but also because of Bangladesh's increasing dependency on western markets and funding, political and diplomatic analysts said.

The government has been under pressure after the US slapped sanctions on the Rab and seven of its officials in 2021, and did not invite Bangladesh to its democracy summit that year.

Meanwhile, the economy started to take a hit due to the fallout of the Russia-Ukraine war as well as weak financial management at home, they said.

Bangladesh is taking out a loan from the IMF, in which western influence is strong.

The US became Bangladesh's top remittance sending country in the last two quarters taking the crown from Saudi Arabia.

"The US is also Bangladesh's largest single RMG buyer, foreign direct investor, and donor for the Rohingya," said a diplomatic source.

Recently, the Office of the US Trade Representative started reviewing

Intellectual Property Rights issues in Bangladesh's RMG sector after the American Apparel and Footwear Association and French Union des Fabricants raised complaints that Bangladesh and some other countries were exporting counterfeit goods of name brands.

If the allegations are proved, Bangladesh's garment industry may face additional tariffs, quotas or even sanctions by the US.

The diplomatic source said the European Union, the largest regional bloc in terms of importing from Bangladesh, usually follows the US.

This means, Bangladesh may face a huge challenge if RMG exports, the major foreign currency earner, decline.

"True, western countries are vocal about democracy, human rights, and media freedom. The diplomats have been talking about these for a year or more. The ruling party did not appear to pay much heed to that," said a high-ranking official at an embassy in Dhaka.

"Now, Bangladesh is heavily dependent on the West, especially given the foreign currency reserve crisis.

"So, the government has fewer tools while bargaining with the western powers."

WESTERN MESSAGE CLEAR

Even Japan raised concerns about Bangladesh's elections. Former Japanese ambassador to Dhaka Ito Naoki in November expressed concerns over election irregularities

in 2018.

Over the last few months, foreign diplomats have held meetings with political parties.

On February 16, a European Union delegation with seven diplomats of member states held a meeting with AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader and some AL leaders.

"They want all parties, including the BNP, to join the next polls," Quader told reporters after the meeting. He reiterated the prime minister's commitment to holding a free, fair and credible election.

Diplomatic sources said there would be more such meetings with political parties in the coming months. The diplomats will also make it clear that they do not want any violence centring the polls.

Even though Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra at his recent meeting with PM Hasina said that his country totally supports her leadership, but it is also for fair and inclusive polls in Bangladesh, a source in an embassy said, adding that India wants a vibrant Sangsad.

Former foreign secretary Touhid Hossain said there is no doubt that the western powers want fair and inclusive polls in Bangladesh because it is their policy and that the last two elections were controversial. Because of the economic condition, the government also feels indirect pressure.

"How much the ruling party will bow to this pressure is yet to be known," he told this paper.

One killed in wall collapse

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A man was killed and another injured when a wall of a two-storey old building collapsed during its demolition in the port city's Jamal Khan area yesterday afternoon.

The deceased was identified as Mohammed Jashim, 40, a demolition worker, said police.

Witnesses said the wall collapsed on a pavement adjacent to the old building around 4:00pm when workers were knocking down the structure without any safety gear.

Police and firefighters later went to the spot and recovered the body of the deceased and rescued the injured person, said Zahidul Kabir, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station.

The body was sent to Chittagong Medical College for an autopsy.

The injured, Ron Bhattacharya, was undergoing treatment at Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Poultry seller dies in Rajshahi road crash

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A poultry seller was killed in a road accident on Rajshahi-Dhaka highway in Rajshahi city's Bhadra area yesterday morning.

The victim, Kamal Hossain, was a resident of Panchubari village in Rajshahi's Durgapur upazila.

Kamal was going to the city with his chickens on his bicycle around 8:30am when a brick-laden power tiller pulling a trailer, an illegal vehicle on highways, rear-ended his bicycle.

He died on the spot, said police quoting witnesses.

On information, police went to the spot, recovered the body and sent it to Rajshahi Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

2 poachers land in jail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A mobile court yesterday sentenced two poachers to one year's rigorous imprisonment for killing more than 600 weavers (Babui birds) in Rajshahi's Charghat upazila.

The court, conducted by Charghat UNOMd Sohrab Hossain, also fined the poachers Tk 1,000 each.

The two suspects — Abu Bakar Siddique, 55, and his son Firoz Hossain, 32, — hail from Madanhat village in Natore's Naldanga upazila.

While visiting Charghat on Tuesday, the two caught more than 600 birds in Kakramari Beel using traps.

Yesterday morning, they slaughtered the birds and packed in bags for selling those to restaurants for Tk 10 each.

Hearing the news, the UNO rushed to Kakramari Beel area and caught the two red handed. The poachers were sent to Rajshahi Central Jail.

No scope

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"How can we forget it? But we didn't go to take revenge. We paid attention to the development of Bangladesh and we worked to develop Bangladesh," she said.

She said though the BNP did it, now the AL does nothing against them. Even after that they are complaining and trying to buy favours at home and abroad, she added.

The PM said the people of Bangladesh are now very conscious as they know much about their country.

"They know our goal. None can deny that we worked for the people. Today, the scenario of Bangladesh has massively changed. We've been able to develop the whole of Bangladesh not only the Dhaka city."

She wondered how the people can forget the arson violence indulged by the BNP and Jamaat. "They played with fire. Does the BNP think once that what would be their condition if now the people play this game of fire against them [BNP]," she said.

Hasina called upon the people to be more alert against these arson terrorists.

She asked her party leaders and activists to raise the misdeeds of the BNP before the people.

She also questioned how those who siphon off money, sell the interest of the country and kill people burning alive now can dream to go to power again.

The premier said her government transformed the country into a developing economy defying natural disasters and manmade disasters, including Covid-19 pandemic and arson violence.

She said only the AL ensured the voting rights of the people. BNP was founded by an illegal power grabber and so, the birth of BNP was illegal.

She asked the people of the country to reject BNP as illegal, saying that they never want the welfare of the people, rather they looted the country, stigmatised the constitution, spoiled the spirit of the Liberation War and did everything to destroy the nation during their regimes.

Noting that now Bangladesh is considered as a role model for development in the world, Hasina said the trend of this development will have to be maintained.

"If you can reach information regarding our development works done in the country and respective areas to every house, we will have no problem with vote and none can snatch power anymore," she said pointing at her party leaders and activists.

Ties reaching 'new milestones'

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partnership", Wang said.

Putin said that "Russian Chinese relations were proceeding as planned" and talked of reaching "new milestones" in areas such as bilateral trade.

The Russian president said he was looking forward to a visit to Moscow by Chinese President Xi Jinping and a deeper partnership.

Xi is expected to make a "peace speech" on Friday. Kyiv says there can be no talk of peace with Russian troops in Ukraine.

"This unprovoked and criminal Russian war against Ukraine, Europe and the democratic world must end with the cleansing of the entire Ukrainian land from Russian occupation and solid guarantees of the long-term security for our

state, the whole of Europe and the entire world," President Volodymyr Zelensky wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

In Warsaw, Biden met leaders of Nato's eastern flank yesterday and reaffirmed US commitment to European security after Moscow suspended a landmark nuclear arms control treaty over strong Western support for Ukraine, reports Reuters.

Biden arrived in the Polish capital Warsaw late on Monday after a surprise visit to Kyiv.

Amid the highest tension between Russia and the West since the Cold War over three decades ago, Biden addressed thousands in downtown Warsaw on Tuesday and said "autocrats" like Putin must be opposed.

Hours earlier, Putin delivered lengthy remarks laden with criticism of Western powers, blaming them for the war in Ukraine. Biden said the West was never plotting to attack Russia and the invasion was Putin's choice.

Putin also backed away from the New START arms control treaty — a 2010 agreement that limits the number of Russian and US deployed strategic nuclear warheads — and warned that Moscow could resume nuclear tests.

"He made a big mistake," Biden said of Putin's decision when asked about it as he joined the meeting with eastern European allies.

"As Nato's eastern flank, you are the frontline of our collective defence," Biden said.

"You know better than anyone

what is at stake in this conflict. Not just for Ukraine, but for the freedom of democracies throughout Europe and around the world."

In the battlefield, Ukraine's military said Bakhmut city, the focus of Russian advances in the eastern region of Donetsk, came under shelling, along with 20 other settlements in the area.

The governor of the neighbouring Luhansk region said Ukraine had repelled intense Russian attacks around the town of Kreminna further north, destroying several of their tanks.

Two civilians were wounded in a Russian missile strike yesterday on industrial facilities in Kharkiv, the biggest city in eastern Ukraine, local officials said.