

DW airs docu on Rab’s ‘inner workings’

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A documentary aired by German broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW) claimed the Rapid Action Battalion is committing extrajudicial killings by staging operations.

Published on Monday, it was based on the ground investigation by DW’s investigative unit and Sweden-based Netra News, accounts of victims and testimony of two Rab insiders-turned-whistleblowers.



The documentary seeks to give some insights into the operations of the force, long accused of kidnap, torture and murder.

According to the two insiders, when a decision is taken to execute a target, a series of carefully prepared steps are put into action.

For conducting an extrajudicial killing, Rab uses civilian black van with tinted windows. Official Rab vans are not used when people are forcefully disappeared, said one of the insiders.

Then the target is shot and left to bleed to death. The scene is set, evidence is planted on the body, depending on the cover story, reports DW.

The investigation team contacted the authorities concerned for comments on the allegations brought in this documentary.

A spokesman for Rab referred to the home ministry, which, in turn, said it had “diligently assessed and scrutinised the issues and found that the issues are overstated, exaggerated, baseless and untrue.”

On Monday, asked by journalists about the documentary, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said it was “a source of fun”.

Regional highways to be tolled roads

UNB, DHAKA

The government has decided to impose toll on regional highways to promote a culture of paying taxes among the people.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked the authorities concerned to take necessary measures to the end.

“The government is developing infrastructures at the cost of thousands of crores. So, arrangements must be made to collect tolls from regional highways at least at a minimum rate,” she explained.

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With the Dhanmondi Road-27 in the capital clogged with traffic, rickshaws get on the footpath. The photo was taken around 1:00pm yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

FINLAND’S NATO MEMBERSHIP Russia warns of ‘countermeasures’

AGENCIES

The Kremlin yesterday branded Finland’s Nato membership an “assault on our security” and said it would take countermeasures.

“The Kremlin believes that this is the latest aggravation of the situation,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. “The expansion of Nato is an assault on our security and Russia’s national interests,” he added.

“And this forces us to take countermeasures... in tactical and strategic terms.” He did not provide further details.

Finland became the 31st member of Nato yesterday, in a historic strategic shift provoked by Moscow’s assault on Ukraine, which doubles the US-led alliance’s border with Russia.

Finland’s Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto formally wrapped up the process by handing Helsinki’s accession papers to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the formal keeper of Nato’s founding treaty.

“With receipt of this instrument of accession, we can now declare that Finland is the 31st member of the North Atlantic Treaty,” Blinken said, at a ceremony in Nato’s

Brussels headquarters.

Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg said that Russian President Vladimir Putin had “wanted to slam Nato’s door shut. Today we show the world that he failed, that aggression and intimidation do not work.”

“Finland now has the strongest friends and allies in the world,” he said.

Joining Nato places Finland under the alliance’s Article Five, the collective defence pledge that an attack on one member “shall be considered an attack against them all”.

This was the guarantee Finnish leaders decided they needed as they watched Putin’s devastating assault on Ukraine. Finnish President Sauli Niinisto said: “It is a great day for Finland and I want to say that it is an important day for Nato.”

US President Joe Biden said he is “proud” to welcome Finland into Nato, reports AFP.

On the battlefield, Ukrainian defence forces destroyed 14 out of 17 Iranian-made Shahed drones Russia launched overnight, Ukraine’s military said yesterday, with 13 drones destroyed over the Odesa region in the country’s southwest.

BNP leader arrested in DSA case

A CORRESPONDENT, Chandpur

ABNP leader of Chandpur’s Haimchar was arrested on Monday under the Digital Security Act on charge of making derogatory comments about Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Facebook.

Mazharul Islam, general secretary of Haimchar Upazila BNP, was detained from his house in the Algi area on Monday evening.

Hours later, a local Jubo League activist named Khademul Islam filed a case against him under the DSA around 10:00pm, said Ashraf Uddin, officer-in-charge of Haimchar Police Station.

Mazharul has been spreading propaganda to undermine the prime minister and the Awami League, said Noor Hossain, general secretary of Haimchar Upazila AL.

Sudipto Roy, additional superintendent of police in Chandpur, said Mazharul’s Facebook posts had also harmed the image of police.

Man found dead in Teknaf

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox’s Bazar

Police recovered the body of a man in Teknaf upazila of Cox’s Bazar on Monday night.

The victim is Masud Rana alias Idris Patwari, 30, of Kalyanpur area in Rajbari’s Alipur union, said Abdul Halim, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station.

He was found dead in a rented house in Ruhullardeba area of Sabrang union in the upazila, he added.

“We have found evidence that indicates Masud might have died from a yaba overdose. The body was found bleeding from the nose and mouth, and fuel papers and banana leaves used to consume and smuggle yaba pills were also found on the spot. However, the exact cause of death can only be determined after the autopsy,” he added.

Police detained Sumon Deb, son of the house owner, for quizzing while the body was sent to Cox’s Bazar Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Woman found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

An elderly woman has been killed at her home at Pakshey union in Pabna’s Ishwardi upazila.

The victim is Hajera Khatun, 76, wife of late Prof Md Habibullah and elder sister of Pakshey union unit AL President and valiant freedom fighter Hobbul Islam Hobbul, said police.

According to Hobbul, his sister was living alone at her home in Baghoil area as her children live in Dhaka and abroad.

On Monday evening, Hobbul went to Hajera’s home as her children could not reach her over the phone. There, he found her body in a pool of blood.

Biplob Kumar Gouswami, additional superintendent of police (Ishwardi circle), said the victim might be hit with something hard and heavy in her head.

Police recovered the body on Monday and sent it to Pabna General Hospital morgue for autopsy yesterday.

OC, SI among 5 sued for ‘torturing trader’

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Five persons, including an inspector and a sub-inspector of police, were sued yesterday for torturing a trader in Natore’s Bagatipara upazila.

Nizam Uddin, a trader in the upazila, filed the case with a Natore court.

Taking the allegations into cognisance, the court directed the Police Bureau of Investigation to probe the matter and submit a report on May 18, the court’s bench assistant Raju Ahmed confirmed.

Two policemen who were accused in the case are Bagatipara Police Station’s OC Inspector Sirajul Islam, and Sub-inspector Rabiul Islam.

Rest of the accused are Shakil Ahmed, assistant sub-inspector Abdul Karim’s wife Anjana Begum and her house caretaker Abul Bashar.

On February 22, the OC and other police officials called Nizam to the police station and held him hostage, demanding extortion, and at one stage beat him up, read the statement.

Dreams, hopes go up in smoke

FROM PAGE 1

BM Habib, office secretary of Bangabazar Shopping Complex Shop Owners Association, said the loss due to the fire could be around Tk 5,000 crore. He also alleged that a vested group might have resorted to arson to occupy the land.

Mohammad Abu Naser, the spokesperson for the Dhaka South City Corporation, which owns the complex, said there were 2,931 shops that mostly sold RMG products. The complex housed Adarsha Market, Mahanagar Complex, Gulistan Market and Bangabazar Market.

LOST EVERYTHING

The Daily Star talked to over a dozen shop owners who said they had invested between Tk 1 crore and Tk 5 crore.

Belayet Hossain and his four brothers had taken out a loan to invest Tk 50 lakh ahead of Eid.

“Starting with one shop, we expanded to five over the last 10 years. We had a business worth Tk 5 crore. Now we have nothing,” Belayet told The Daily Star.

Just two years ago, Md Ibrahim spent Tk 40 lakh to open a shop in Bangabazar in the hopes of having a thriving business in the capital’s iconic clothing market.

For Eid, he stocked up clothes worth more than Tk 20 lakh. “All is lost now,” a sobbing Ibrahim told The Daily Star.

Another shop owner said, “I have been turned into a beggar ... How will I maintain my family?”

Shopkeeper Sirajul Islam rushed to the market hearing the news of the fire.

“I had clothes worth Tk 20 lakh in my shop. I could manage to get almost half of it out but even those got ruined by the water used for

dousing the flames,” he said.

Another trader Rakib said he could not get a single piece of clothing out.

One of the affected businessmen, Didar Hossain, said, “I had a shop with clothes worth Tk 10 lakh. Everything has turned to ashes.”

Trader Awlad Hossain, said, “We have nothing left. The fire has shattered all our hopes.”

The fire has also gutted shops in neighbouring markets.

Roni Hosen, a trader in Bangla Islamic Market, said, “I had goods worth Tk 25 lakh in the shop for Eid and I brought in fresh stock just yesterday.”

“Everything turned into ashes in front of my eyes. I couldn’t retrieve even a single piece of clothing. I still have a debt of Tk 10 lakh, and I don’t know how to repay,” he said in tears.

Shop owners of other markets nearby were seen taking their goods out of the area.

It was a long time coming

FROM PAGE 1

According to fire service’s 2018-19 annual report, several major fire incidents, including those at Churihatta, FR Tower, Gulshan DNCC kitchen market and Khilgaon kitchen market, took place between February and April of 2019.

The fire service department in the same year carried out a survey on 3,786 institutions and establishments across the country and found 541 shopping complexes and markets at high risk of fire.

The department later put up banners in front of those markets and the Bangabazar Shopping Complex was the first.

“We did everything possible on our part. But businesses continued [at the complex] even after that,” he said.

In 1996, the market was burnt to ashes in another fire. Some other major and minor fire incidents were reported at the market in the following years.

Contacted, Chief Estate Officer of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) Russel Sabrin said the market became dilapidated and that’s why the corporation took an initiative to

construct a modern building complex demolishing the existing structure.

“We appointed a contractor for the construction work. But we couldn’t begin the construction as there is a stay order issued by the High Court in this regard following a writ petition filed by businesspeople.

He said the businesspeople wanted to run their businesses as they are doing now.

The DSCC planned a rehabilitation programme for the businesses for the interim period, said Russel.

Visiting the spot yesterday, DSCC Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh said, “It’s [fire] unexpected. We request people not to use the establishments which have been declared risky.

“Those who are using risky establishments are responsible. They should keep the risk factors in mind while using such establishments,” the mayor said.

He said using risky buildings forcefully can turn out to be fatal.

Helal Uddin, president of Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity, said, “There are risks. But what do we do? Should we stop running our businesses? No one came up with

alternatives.”

Asked about the DSCC’s claim of a rehabilitation programme, he said he was not aware of any such rehabilitation plan.

Padma Bridge rail line to open by September

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was Tk 34,702.74 and the deadline was June 2022.

The revised deadline of the entire project was then set for June 2024 but BR wants to open the 82km section from Dhaka to Bhanga in the first phase.

Bhanga is already a part of the country’s railway network.

The overall physical progress of the fast-track project is currently at 74 percent. The Dhaka-Mawa section made 72.50 percent progress while the Mawa-Bhanga section 91 percent and the Bhanga-Jashore section 68 percent, according to project document.

Once the entire line, which will have 20 stations, is opened, the distance from Dhaka to Jashore would decrease by 200km and the travel time would be halved – from 10 hours to five.

The double-decker Padma Bridge – roadway on the top and railway at the

Bangabazar burnt

FROM PAGE 1

Devastating fires gutted the shopping complex in 1995 and 2004.

Yesterday, the first team of firefighters reached the scene at 6:12am. As a morning breeze kept spreading the flames, more fire engines joined the efforts. Luckily, the fire service headquarters is close to the market.

After six and a half hours, the fire was brought under control by 48 fire engines, firefighting units of the army, navy, air force, and BGB.

As their water tanks ran empty, the firefighters pumped water from a pond at Shahidullah hall of Dhaka University while an air force helicopter sprayed water from above.

Fire service Deputy Director Dino Moni Sharma said a five-member probe committee was formed to find out what caused the fire. The committee was asked to submit a report in seven working days.

The city corporation also formed a committee to find the cause and report it in three days.

There were risky electric wires, a transformer on the second floor, and a very large amount of flammable materials, Sharma said, adding that the narrow alleys made the first responders’ jobs harder.

Brig Gen Main Uddin, director

general of fire service, said the crowd of onlookers and thick smoke at the site were an impediment to the firefighting efforts.

Hundreds of people thronged the area after the fire broke out. Many were seen going live on Facebook while others were taking selfies. The nearby streets and Mayor Hanif Floyer from Gulistan to Chankharpool were closed to traffic.

The fire brought down the 999 national emergency service, which has an office in the area, around 10:15am. Officials resumed the service after 7:30pm.

With Eid only two weeks away, Shahadat Hossain, the owner of a shop, said he borrowed Tk 4 lakh and just spent a total of Tk 10 lakh to stock up.

“It all went up in smoke. I have nothing left,” said Shahadat, struggling to hold back his tears.

Only a handful of store owners could partially save their goods. A vast majority of them lost everything.

In the afternoon, Renu Begum, a middle-age woman was seen crying near what used to be the three shops owned by her sons.

She said her family would surely slide into poverty because nothing could be saved from the shops.

[Mohammad Jamil Khan and Refayet Ullah Mirdha contributed to this report.]

with the railways minister; Chief Whip of parliament Noor-e-Alam Chowdhury Lito; and several lawmakers from Madaripur, Shariatpur, Munshiganj and Faridpur, political leaders and journalists on board.

As it moved towards the Padma Bridged, patriotic songs were being played inside the newly imported coaches from China, which also provided loans for the project.

When the train passed the Padma Station at Janjira at 2:35pm, the project workers greeted the passengers by waving small flags of Bangladesh and China.

It entered the lower deck of the bridge at low speed at 2:48pm and took 16 minutes to cross the 6.15km bridge.

The train then reached the Mawa Station at 3:18pm. A BR official said the highest speed that the train was operated at was 25kmph.

The train left the station at 1:22pm