

'Commander of ARSA' killed in 'gunfight' with APBn

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A suspected commander of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) was killed during a "gunfight" between police and armed criminals at Camp 17 of Ukhiya upazila, Cox's Bazar yesterday.

The deceased identified as Noor Hossain Majhi, 40, was one of the top leaders of the armed militant outfit ARSA, said Syed Harun Or Rashid, additional deputy inspector general of Armed Police Battalion 14.

Criminal activities were carried out under his leadership at seven to eight Rohingya refugee camps, the official claimed.

"Police conducted a special drive at Camp 8 early today [Monday], where six Rohingyas were killed on Friday. At that time, law enforcers received a tip-off that 20-30 armed criminals were approaching them from Camp 17. After getting the tip-off, APBn men started heading towards Camp 17," the Addl DIG said.

Around 5:00am, the police team came face to face with the criminals, who opened fire at them at Camp 17,

So far, at least 58 Rohingya refugees have been killed in clashes and gun violence in the camps in the last six months, police said.

he added.

Police also returned fire in retaliation, and the gunfight continued for two hours, the police official said.

The criminals fled the area after 7:00am and later the body of Hossain Majhi was recovered from the spot, he added.

He also added that legal steps were being taken in connection with this incident.

On Friday morning, five Rohingya men were shot dead in what police said was a gunfight between two armed gangs at a refugee camp in Ukhiya.

Later in the evening of the same day, the body of another ARSA member was found near the camp.

The day prior to the incident, a Rohingya community leader was stabbed to death in a nearby camp.

So far, at least 58 Rohingya refugees have been killed in clashes and gun violence in the camps in the last six months, police said.

Around 1.2 million Rohingyas are living in 33 refugee camps in Ukhiya and Teknaf upazilas of Cox's Bazar. Most of them came here fleeing a military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine State in 2017.



A view shows a building destroyed by a Russian air strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Orikhiv, Zaporizhzhia region, Ukraine yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Erdogan links Sweden's Nato bid with Turkey's EU accession

REUTERS, Istanbul

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, in an unexpected move, said yesterday the European Union should open the way for Ankara's accession to the bloc before Turkey's parliament approves Sweden's bid to join the Nato military alliance.

Turkey's bid to join the EU has been frozen for years after membership talks were launched in 2005 under Erdogan's first term as prime minister.

The ties between Ankara and members of the bloc soured several years ago, especially after a 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey, but have since improved. The bloc depends on the help of Nato ally Ankara, particularly on migration.

In a surprise change of tack, Erdogan yesterday linked Ankara's approval of Sweden's Nato bid to Turkey finally joining the EU.

"I am calling from here on these countries that are making Turkey wait at the door of the European Union for more than 50 years," Erdogan said, speaking ahead of his departure for the Nato summit in Vilnius.

"First, come and open the way for Turkey at the European Union and then we will

open the way for Sweden, just as we did for Finland," he said, adding that he would repeat his call during the summit.

A European Commission spokesperson said Nato and EU enlargement were "separate processes."

"The accession process for each candidate country is based on the merits of each country," the spokesperson said, adding that the two processes cannot be linked.

Asked about Erdogan's comments, Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said while he backs Ankara's membership of the EU, as far as he was concerned Sweden had already met the conditions required to join Nato.

"It is still possible to have a positive decision on Sweden in Vilnius," Stoltenberg told a news conference.

Sweden and Finland applied for Nato membership last year, abandoning policies of military non-alignment that had lasted through the decades of the Cold War in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

While Finland's Nato membership was green-lighted in April, Turkey and Hungary have yet to clear Sweden's bid. Stockholm has been working to join the bloc at the summit in Vilnius.

CITIZENS' DATA LEAK ICT Division forms probe committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ICT Division yesterday formed a committee to investigate the incident of leaking sensitive personal information of millions of citizens from the website of a government organisation.

ICT State Minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak announced the development with journalists after holding an emergency meeting with the representatives of the 29 critical information infrastructures at ICT Tower.

The committee will be headed by the Director General of the Digital Security Agency and it will submit the probe report within the next seven days.

Besides, a standing committee will be constituted which will regularly monitor cyber incidents.

The state minister's comment comes after reports that a security exploit in a government website has resulted in the exposure of sensitive personal information belonging to millions of citizens on the internet.

The leaked data includes names, birth dates, and national identification (NID) numbers of over five crore users which was allegedly easily accessible through a simple Google search.

US under secy flies in today

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that its government would be conducting the polls as in 2014 and 2018.

Washington has been critical of the elections in 2014 and 2018 for alleged irregularities and did not invite Bangladesh to its Summit for Democracy for two years in a row.

With the view to ensuring that the 2024 general elections are free and fair, the US on May 24 announced a visa policy for Bangladesh restricting visas for those who will be involved in vote rigging and intimidation.

Zeya, who would be arriving from India, will be accompanied by Donald Lu, the assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia, and Anjali Kaur, the deputy assistant administrator of the USAID Asia Bureau.

The delegation is likely to hold meetings with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her Private Sector Industry and Investment Adviser Salman F Rahman, Law Minister Anisul Huq, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan and Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen. She will also engage with civil society organisations.

"I think Uzra Zeya would focus on the next elections, and may ask if there is any solution to the stalemate," said M Humayun Kabir, president of the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute.

She might also discuss freedom of expression, political and civilian rights, an amendment to the Digital Security

Don't publish

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distributing cheques of financial assistance worth about Tk 3.41 crore to 438 ailing, insolvent and injured journalists and their family members at her office.

Her government believes in freedom of speech.

"The journalist community did not enjoy such freedom that they enjoyed in the last 14 years of the Awami League government," she said, adding that the freedom that has been given to the media will

Act and labour rights.

"We should find a solution for our own sake, for our constitutional mandate to democracy and human rights – instead of depending on others. Bangladesh can have better deals with other countries when it has democracy."

But relations can worsen with democratic backsliding, said Kabir, a former ambassador.

The erosion of democracy, the lack of transparency and the rule of law limit the US's ability to cooperate with any country, including trade and investment, said Derek Chollet, the US State Department counsellor, during his visit to Dhaka in February.

The US is Bangladesh's single-largest export destination, with annual exports of about \$11 billion, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau.

It is also Bangladesh's largest foreign direct investor, with a total investment of about \$4.3 billion. It was also the largest donor of Covid vaccines.

But labour rights have been a sore point in bilateral relations.

Following the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, the US suspended the Generalised System of Preferences facility in Bangladesh, and it is yet to be restored.

Washington continues to raise concerns over the lack of fair labour practices, barriers to freedom of expression, the minimum wage and discrimination in EPZ Labour Act and

further flourish once the country becomes digital.

The media will definitely criticise the government but that should be done responsibly.

"I want that the advancement of Bangladesh is not hampered anymore due to irresponsible journalism."

The premier said her government is going to bring employees of private television channels under the wage board.

Hasina recalled that journalists were inhumanly tortured during the

Labour Act.

Presently, the export processing zones (EPZ) are governed by the EPZ Labour Act and not the Bangladesh Labour Act. The EPZ Labour Act does not allow trade unions.

Though Bangladesh has made much progress in the aspect of labour safety since Rana Plaza, the recent murder of union leader Shahidul Islam in Gazipur has triggered new questions.

Because of concerns about labour rights violations, Bangladesh cannot avail funds from the International Development Finance Corporation, the US government agency that invests in development projects primarily in lower and middle-income countries, said Isobel Coleman, the USAID's deputy administrator, during her visit last year.

The US considers Bangladesh a more important country now than before because of its economic progress and geostrategic location in the Indo-Pacific, which is a region of great power competition, according to foreign policy analysts.

"Washington does not want Dhaka to tilt towards China," said a foreign policy analyst preferring not to be named.

If Bangladesh can fix its challenges with democracy, human rights and good governance, it can have a strong economy and better balance in the diplomatic relations with other countries, he added.

BNP Jamaat government.

She also called upon the media owners to donate money to the Bangladesh Journalist Welfare Trust.

The PM said her government can arrange a piece of land as journalists wanted to build houses for themselves or give them flats taking payment in instalments.

Hasan Mahmud, the information and broadcasting minister, and Humayun Kabir Khandaker, the ministry's secretary, also spoke on the occasion.

RPO changes won't curtail EC powers

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hypothetical. I'm not going to reply. We will decide after seeing what kind of environment prevails....

"You are saying there is no scope [in the law to stop polls]. Where is it? If such a situation arises, why won't the commission be able to stop polling?"

The EC even has inherited powers to make decisions on issues that are not covered by the law, he said.

Besides, a provision to punish individuals who create obstacles to journalists and election observers has

been added to the law.

Those who prevent people from casting their votes, obstruct candidates from filing nomination papers, and put pressure on a candidate for withdrawal of candidacy will face punishment.

Presiding officers of polling centres will be able to stop voting if they do not get the assistance of election officials and law enforcers.

Election officials will now have to put their seal and signature on the backside of ballot papers, and this was done to prevent vote rigging,

Habibul said.

EC STATEMENT

Hours after the press conference, the commission issued a statement saying that the use of the word polling in place of election was not "an amendment". It was a correction.

"The comment that the government has revised the RPO to take control of the election is wrong," it said.

The government and parliament made the amendment based on the recommendations from the commission.

DMP in overdrive

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leaders were filed with police stations under the DMP area.

Biplob Bijoy Talukder, joint commissioner (Crime) of DMP, said, "We have taken an initiative to activate the cases that are currently stayed by the High Court. In addition, some investigations have stalled over the years. We have decided to revive them as well."

Talking to The Daily Star, he said this is an official procedure and has nothing to do with the current political situation.

Khaleda Zia, who has stayed indoors since 2020 following an executive order by the government, is named in two of these cases.

Khaleda is implicated in as many as 36 cases, of which 28 have been stayed.

Mirza Fakhrul is accused in six of the cases that the DMP aims to revive. Around 92 cases were filed against Fakhrul across the country in the last 10 years.

Mirza Abbas is accused in six of these cases while Gayeshwar is accused in four.

One of the cases was filed against 16 BNP leaders by Ramna Police Station under the explosives act on March 3, 2013. The accused included Mirza Fakhrul and Gayeshwar.

Just the day before, on March 2, street violence killed five people and the Silk City express train between Dhaka and Rajshahi was set ablaze. Meanwhile, police clashed with a procession led by Mirza Fakhrul in Dhaka on the same day and four vehicles were torched in the violence that ensued.

The day the Ramna Police filed the case, a cop was brutally attacked in Jhenidah. His eyes were gouged out before he was hacked to death.

Two of these cases, filed on January 24, 2013 under the explosives act by Jatrabari Police Station, names 90 people with Khaleda Zia as the prime accused.

The day before, on January 23, a bus was torched using petrol bombs in Jatrabari. The arson attack left 28 civilians with severe burns. Several of them succumbed to their injuries a few days later.

This was on the 18th day of the indefinite blockade enforced by the BNP-led alliance.

Another case was filed on March 2, 2013, against the top leaders of BNP for "destroying law and order".

The day before, on March 1, the International Crimes Tribunal had delivered its maiden verdict by sentencing Jamaat leader Delawar

Three killed in clash over jackfruit

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Three people were killed and some 30 others injured in a clash between two groups of villagers over a dispute regarding the sale of a jackfruit that was donated to a local mosque in Sunamganj's Shantiganj upazila yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Nurul Haque, 45 Babul Miah, 50, and Shahjahan Miah, 55. They were all from the upazila's Hasnabaz village.

Khaled Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of Shantiganj Police Station, said a man from Hasnabaz village donated a jackfruit to a local mosque, reports UNB.

Quoting locals, he said two groups of villagers locked into an altercation over who would sell the jackfruit.

Of the groups, one was led by Sunu Miah and Jonab Ali, and the other by Din Islam.

They attacked each other with sharp weapons, leaving two dead on the spot and 21 others injured. Of the injured, Shahjahan died on the way to the hospital.

On information, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control. Police also detained three people on the spot.

3 die in Madaripur boat capsizes

2 more drown in Mymensingh

STAR REPORT

Three workers died as a sand-laden cargo vessel capsized in the Arial Kha river in Shibchar upazila of Madaripur yesterday.

On information, a team of river police rushed to the spot and recovered the bodies from Char Kamarkandi area of the river.

The identities of the deceased could not be known immediately, reports UNB.

Md Masum Alam Khan, superintendent of Madaripur Police, said the vessel sank in the river around 4:00pm. "Three more workers on board went missing during the incident."

Meanwhile, in Mymensingh, a woman and her granddaughter drowned in local pond water in Ishwarganj upazila in the morning.

Sahera Khatun, 65, and her four-year-old granddaughter Jannat Akter, of Buniadpur village, had gone to take a bath in the pond next to their house, said Omar Faruq, sub-inspector of Ishwarganj Police Station.

4kg 'ice' seized in Cox's Bazar

UNB, Dhaka

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) seized 4.229kg of crystal methamphetamine, commonly known as crystal meth or ice, in Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar early yesterday.

A team of BGB-2 conducted a drive in Naitongpara Borokol area after being informed that a consignment of drugs would be smuggled into Bangladesh from Myanmar through the border, said a media release signed by Lt Col Md Mohiuddin Ahmed, commander of the unit.

Around 12:30am, they spotted two people trespassing into Bangladesh territory from Myanmar with a bag. However, seeing the law enforcers, they abandoned the bag and fled, it said.