

AUG 21 GRENADE ATTACK Probe, trial 'staged by AL': Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday alleged that the investigation and trial in the August 21 grenade attack case were "staged" by the Awami League.

"The trial proceedings have already been done. What's left? I would call the whole thing staged," he was responding to a query from journalists at a press conference at the party's Nayapaltan office.

He further said, "The venue of the rally was moved from where the rally was supposed to be held. But the authorities concerned were not informed of this development."

He claimed that BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman and other party leaders were falsely implicated in the case due to political vendetta.

Tarique's name was included as an accused much later, but he was never named in the FIR, he said, alleging that, "Tarique Rahman's name was never mentioned in the entire

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Neighbours survey the damage in their homes following Tropical Storm Hilary in Cathedral City, California, US, yesterday. Storm Hilary flooded streets and downed power lines across Southern California and the US Southwest yesterday after unleashing record-breaking downpours overnight, but there were no deaths reported in the United States and fears of widespread damage were dissipating.

PHOTO: REUTERS

MEDICAL COLLEGE EXAM Four more doctors arrested over question leak

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four more doctors have been arrested in Khulna over the leak of question papers of the centralised medical college admission test, said police's Criminal Investigation Department yesterday.

The arrestees are Lewis Sourav Sarkar, 30, Mustahin Hasan Lamia, 25, Sharmistha Mondal, 26, and Nazia Mehzabin Tisha, 24.

Speaking to this newspaper, CID Additional Superintendent of Police (media) Azad Rahman said the four were arrested from different parts of Khulna on Saturday and Sunday.

They were brought to the capital and produced before a Dhaka court yesterday that sent them to jail, he added.

Earlier in the day, their family members at a press briefing in Khulna said that the four doctors were picked up on August 18 by plainclothes men, who identified themselves as CID officers.

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ETHIOPIAN MIGRANTS Saudi border guards killed hundreds since last year

Says HRW report; KSA govt source terms the allegation 'unfounded'

AFP, London

Saudi border guards fired "like rain" on Ethiopian migrants trying to cross through Yemen into the Gulf kingdom, killing hundreds since last year, Human Rights Watch said in a report yesterday.

The allegations, described as "unfounded" by a Saudi government source, point to a significant escalation of abuses along the perilous "Eastern Route" from the Horn of Africa to Saudi Arabia, where hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians live and work.

"Saudi officials are killing hundreds of migrants and asylum seekers in this remote border area out of view of the rest of the world," HRW researcher Nadia Hardman said in a statement.

"Spending billions buying up professional golf, football clubs, and major entertainment events to improve the Saudi image should not deflect attention from these horrendous crimes."

A Saudi government source told AFP: "The allegations included in the Human Rights Watch report about Saudi border guards shooting Ethiopians while they were crossing the Saudi-Yemeni border are unfounded and not based on reliable sources."

The New York-based group has documented abuses against Ethiopian migrants in Saudi Arabia and Yemen for nearly a decade, but the latest killings appear to be "widespread and systematic" and may amount to crimes against humanity, it said.

Last year, UN experts reported "concerning allegations" that "cross-border artillery shelling and small-arms fire by Saudi Arabia security forces killed approximately 430 migrants" in southern Saudi Arabia and northern Yemen during the first four months of 2022.

The HRW report said there was no response to letters it sent to the Saudi interior and defence ministries, the human rights commission and Huthi rebels who control northern Yemen.

Report details alleged attacks using explosive weapons, small arms on KSA- Yemen border.

Imran faces charges over state secrets Says top security source

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistani authorities have opened a criminal investigation against jailed former prime minister Imran Khan on charges of leaking state secrets, after naming him and three aides in a fresh case, a top security source said yesterday.

The matter, currently under investigation, pertains to a classified cable sent to Islamabad by Pakistan's ambassador in Washington early last year, which Khan is alleged to have made public.

The 70-year-old former cricketer has accused that the cable was part of a US conspiracy to push the Pakistani military to oust him in a parliamentary vote of no confidence in 2022 because he had visited Moscow ahead of Russia's attack on Ukraine. Both Washington and the military deny this.



Russian air strikes kill 8 rebels in Syria

AFP, Beirut

At least eight fighters were killed in Russian air strikes early yesterday targeting a rebel base in Syria's northwest, a war monitor said.

"Russian warplanes carried out air strikes on the western outskirts of Idlib city, targeting a military base belonging to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)... killing at least eight fighters," said Rami Abdel Rahman, who heads the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Several other fighters were wounded in the strikes, with some in critical condition, said the Britain-based monitor, which relies on a wide network of sources inside Syria.

Jihadist group HTS, led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate, controls swathes of Idlib province, parts of which form the last bastions of armed opposition to President Bashar al-Assad's rule.

HTS also controls parts of the adjacent Latakia, Hama and Aleppo provinces.

Dhaka to seek greater co-op

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and states will be attending the August 22-24 summit, in which the expansion of BRICS and use of national currencies for trade among the member countries will be the key agendas for discussion.

Russian President Vladimir Putin will not attend in person due to an arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes in Ukraine. He will take part in the summit virtually.

On the sidelines of the summit, Hasina is likely to hold a bilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on August 23.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said if she meets Chinese President Xi Jinping in Johannesburg, the two leaders are likely to discuss loan interest rates, regional peace and stability.

Talking to reporters at the foreign ministry yesterday, he also said, "China is our development partner. Bangladesh signed many MoUs for projects worth \$23 billion with the government and \$13 billion from the private sector. But we got only \$4 billion over the last eight years. Ways to expedite the projects can be a topic of discussion."

Also on August 23, Hasina will also

deliver a speech at the "Bangladesh Trade and Business Summit", to be jointly organised by Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission and Bangladesh Investment Development Authority.

The same day, she will speak at the "Bangladesh Envoys Conference", organised by Bangladeshi ambassadors stationed across Africa.

The PM will also attend a state banquet hosted by the South African President at the Gallagher Estate in Johannesburg.

On August 24, she is expected to meet South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Mozambique President Filipe Nyusi and New Development Bank President Dilma Vana Rousseff.

Hasina will also speak on behalf of Bangladesh as a member of the New Development Bank of BRICS at the "BRICS - Friends of BRICS Leaders Dialogue".

She will attend a meeting of the community leaders that day.

The prime minister is scheduled to depart from OR Tambo International Airport for Dhaka on August 26. She is expected to arrive at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport the next morning.

Dengue cases hit all-time high

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mosquito drives, said Saifur.

When the country first reported the official outbreak of dengue in 2000, the number of deaths was 93 while 5,551 were hospitalised. In the last 22 years, dengue cases peaked in the month of September nine times and in August eight times, according to DGHS data.

This year, August is likely to see the highest number of patients admitted to the hospitals.

DEATHS NEARING 500

August also saw the highest number of deaths - 234 - this year. It was 204 in July.

Doctors attributed this year's unusually high death rate to late hospitalisation, patients getting infected multiple times, co-infections, high risk group patients and the presence of dengue strains Den-2.

HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, said

second-time dengue infection with a different strain is one of the reasons for the increasing number of deaths this year.

He said among those admitted to the hospital, a large number of patients are already suffering from dengue shock - a critical stage of the disease.

There are many who cannot tell that they are having the symptoms and so they do not go to the hospital. These patients are most likely to go into shock, he added.

Death rate is also high among patients of high-risk groups like obese and aged people, pregnant women, and infants and comorbidity patients, he said.

Prof Nazmul said severe stomach aches, breathing difficulties, severe weakness, bleeding from gums or nose, and vomiting are the signs for which a patient needs to be hospitalised immediately.

"If a patient is not hospitalised

within 24 hours, they may go to the stage of dengue shock syndrome," he said.

There are two types of dengue shocks - compensated shocks and decompensated shocks. If a patient is hospitalised immediately after their compensated shock, they don't reach the stage of decompensated shock, where the chance to be cured is only 50 percent, he said.

"The patient's blood pressure may remain normal during a compensated shock, which is why many don't realise it. Some of the signs of compensated shock may include a drop in body temperature, increased heart rate, and rapid breathing," Prof Nazmul added.

There are four types of dengue strains: Den-1, Den-2, Den-3, and Den-4. Of them, Den-2 is mostly active this year and the severity of this type is high. This is also a reason for so many deaths this year, he added.

DU student found dead in dorm room

DU CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka University student was found dead yesterday at the university's Salimullah Muslim (SM) Hall.

Monjurul Islam, a master's student (2016-17 session) in the Bangla Department, was found hanging from the ceiling fan in room 165, said police.

"Informed, police recovered the student's body and collected necessary evidence for an investigation," said Shabagh Police Station Sub-Inspector Tipu Sultan.

"The body was sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy. We can confirm the cause of death after receiving the autopsy report," he added.

Meanwhile, DU Vice-Chancellor Prof Md Akhtaruzzaman expressed deep shock over the premature death of the student.

He said, "This is most unexpected indeed. I'm at a loss for words. We urged the law enforcement agency to investigate the incident."

Biman mechanic held with 68 gold bars

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Airport Armed Police Battalion last night arrested an employee of Biman Bangladesh Airlines with 68 gold bars worth around Tk 7.80 crore from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

The arrestee is Shafiqul Islam, 33, an aircraft mechanic of Biman, said APBn Additional Superintendent of Police Md Ziaul Haque.

"He was arrested from the airport hangar around 10:00pm," he said.

APBn found the gold bars after searching him in the presence of other law enforcers, the ASP said. "During interrogation, he didn't give any clear answer about the source and destination of the gold bars," he added.

The market value of the gold that was recovered is around Tk 7.80 crore, according to the APBn.

In 2013, Shafiqul Islam began working for Biman Bangladesh Airlines as a temporary employee. In 2017, he was made permanent. The APBn official said steps were being taken to file a case against him.

3 children drown

STAR REPORT

Three children, including two cousins, drowned in Sirajganj and Kurigram yesterday.

In Sirajganj, two children drowned in a pond next to their house in the Tati Market area of Belkuchi upazila.

They are Rafi Sarkar, 6, son of Ershad Hossain, and his cousin Sourav Sarkar, 5, son of Hasmat Ali, reports our Pabna correspondent.

Belkuchi Police Station Officer-in-Charge Khairul Bashar said the children were playing next to the pond in the morning and they fell in accidentally.

Locals took them to the Belkuchi Upazila Health Complex, where doctors declared them dead.

In Kurigram, another five-year-old child drowned similarly in the Demnarpur area of Chilmari upazila in the afternoon.

Alamin, 5, son of Bokul Mia, also fell in a pond adjacent to his house, reports UNB.

Chilmari Model Police Station OC Hareshul Islam said locals took Alamin to a local hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

31-40 age group

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"The response so far has been very encouraging - and this came without any publicity about the scheme," Golam Mostofa, member (additional charge) of NPA, told The Daily Star.

Another finance ministry official said two separate funds under the new system will be created. One will be a fund for the pension authority while the other will be created with subscribers' deposited money.

He said the government will allocate money for the authority's fund as overhead costs.

On the other hand, money deposited by the subscribers will be invested in profitable ventures and a set of rules will be formulated soon in this regard, he added.

The much-anticipated scheme was launched by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina virtually from the Gono Bhaban on August 17.

Citizens above the age of 18 can register for the scheme at the dedicated portal www.upension.gov.bd.

People will have to submit an application through the online portal of the pension authority for enrolment.

Upon successful registration, the beneficiaries will be able to pay instalments at a bank branch or through the mobile financial service platform, online bank transfer or a bank card.

Primarily, Sonali Bank has been selected to receive money from subscribers. Later, more banks will be included for this purpose, officials said.

Under the Surokkha scheme, people can deposit Tk 1,000, Tk 2,000, Tk 3,000 or Tk 5,000 in monthly instalments.

The monthly instalment fee under the Somota scheme is Tk 1,000 whereas under the Probash scheme, the monthly fee is Tk 5,000, Tk 7,500 or Tk 10,000.

For the Progoti scheme, monthly instalment options are Tk 2,000, Tk 3,000 and Tk 5,000.

As per the rules, anyone paying monthly instalment fees for 10 consecutive years is eligible to receive the monthly pension.

Khaleda Zia, Tarique were complicit: PM

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been delivered. This verdict should be implemented soon," she said.

The premier was addressing a discussion, organised by Awami League on Bangabandhu Avenue, marking the 19th anniversary of the August 21 grenade attack.

Recalling the memories of the grisly attack, Hasina said Khaleda Zia was the then prime minister and the question arises what role did she play at that time.

She questioned why Khaleda obstructed police (from playing their proper role) and did not take any initiative to preserve the evidence of the attack.

"What does it prove? There is no doubt that Khaleda, Tarique and their men were involved in the grenade attack. It was also revealed in the investigation," said the AL president.

The grenade attack was carried

out on an anti-terrorism rally, organised by the then opposition AL in 2004, in front of its central office on Bangabandhu Avenue.

The attack left 24 people killed and several hundred injured. Hasina, then the opposition leader, narrowly escaped death, but her hearing was impaired by the repeated grenade blasts.

Among the dead was Ivy Rahman, AL's women affairs secretary and wife of late president Zillur Rahman.

A Dhaka court has convicted and sentenced 49 people - 19 of them to death and 19 others to life imprisonment - in the case. Eleven others were sentenced to jail on different terms.

Eighteen of the convicts, including BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, remain fugitives.

Hasina, while presiding over yesterday's discussion, said some convicts are now behind bars, but

the main mastermind stays abroad.

Without mentioning the name of Tarique, the PM said he went abroad after signing a bond. "Why doesn't he return home if he has courage? We have turned the country into Digital Bangladesh. He is now talking big taking its advantages.... The people of Bangladesh will not spare that killer."

A one-minute silence was observed in memory of the victims of the August 15, 1975, carnage, the November 3, 1975, jail killing and the August 21, 2004, grenade attack. Prayers were offered for the salvation of the departed souls.

The PM placed a wreath at the memorial along Bangabandhu Avenue to pay tributes to the victims of the August 21 grenade attack.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader delivered the opening speech.