

Gun-toting man in front of AL procession in Nandail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A man holding what looks like a rifle was seen at the front of an Awami League procession alongside an ex-MP in Mymensingh's Nandail upazila yesterday.

The activists were marching to protest a news report about Major General (retd) Abdus Salam, an AL leader and ex-MP from Nandail.

Contacted, Salam's son in law Zeid Hussain said the man holding the firearm was his bodyguard named Kamruzzaman. He added that the weapon was a shotgun.

Zeid and his wife Waheeda Hussain led the procession in the afternoon.

Local AL men first gathered at the Nandail Shaheed Smriti Adarsha College premises and marched to Nandail Upazila AL office around 1:00pm.

Zeid, the managing director of Noble House Group of Companies, said, "I always have a gunman around me. The gun is licensed. When I was asked to join the procession, my gunman followed me. I did not notice him."

"The police were there and they had not done anything either."

Rasheduzzaman, officer-in-charge of Nandail Police Station, said the firearm was licensed.

Aminul Islam Sahan, secretary of Nandail Upazila AL, said openly carrying the firearm in the procession was a serious mistake.

Three Russian officers killed in Melitopol blast says Ukraine

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine said yesterday a blast triggered by "local resistance movements" in the Moscow-controlled Ukrainian city of Melitopol the previous day killed Russian military officers at a headquarters of the occupation authorities.

Melitopol, with a pre-war population of around 150,000 people, was captured early after Russia invaded Ukraine in February last year and now lies some dozens of miles behind the frontline further north.

Timely delivery of goods a concern for int'l retailers

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"If the workers of the shuttered factories come and join work shunning the demonstrations, the owners will reopen the factories," Faruque said.

According to police, factory owners have filed 12 cases with Ashulia Police Station over the last few days accusing around 3,500 mostly unnamed people.

In one of the cases, 16 workers were named as accused, said Shahidul Islam, additional superintendent of police in Dhaka district, adding that five workers were arrested this week.

"We are collecting CCTV footage to identify the real criminals," he told our correspondent in Savar.

Garment factory workers have been demonstrating for better wages for nearly two weeks.

So far, three workers, including a woman, were shot dead as police used firearms during clashes between demonstrators and law enforcers.

At yesterday's BGMEA press conference, Faruque said 25 units have been vandalised so far.

The BGMEA chief then asked the workers to return to work and urged the authorities to protect the factories from vandals.

Amid widespread protests, the minimum wage board for garment workers recently raised the starting monthly salary from Tk 8,000 to Tk 12,500. Unions have rejected the new wage and continued protesting.

The board yesterday published a gazette on the new salary, stating that of Tk 12,500 salary, Tk 6,700 is basic, Tk 3,350 rent, Tk 750 medical allowance, Tk 450 conveyance, and Tk 1,250 food allowance.

Meanwhile, Mojuri Briddhite Garment Sramik Andolan, an alliance of 11 labour organisations, yesterday wrote to Monnujan Sufian, the state minister for labour, notifying her that they reject the salary of Tk 12,500 and demand Tk 25,000, of which the basic salary should be 65 percent.

The workers yesterday demonstrated at different places for better wages.

Contacted, Sarwar Hossain, general secretary of Garments Sramik Unity League, said workers should be protected from harassment during legal proceedings.

Officials said teams of police, border guards, and Rab were on high alert in the industrial areas.



A man holding a firearm walks in front of an Awami League procession. The photo was taken in Nandail town of Mymensingh yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF PROTHOM ALO

FIRST DAY OF 48-HOUR BLOCKADE

6 buses torched, 365 arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 365 people were arrested, and 13 cases were filed yesterday -- the first day of a 48-hour nationwide blockade called by BNP and like-minded parties.

On the day, seven buses were also torched; however, no major clashes were reported in the country.

The opposition parties, who have enforced seven days of blockade since October 31, called this fresh bout of blockade on roads, rail, and waterways demanding the resignation of the government and the upcoming general election under a non-party interim administration.

ARRESTS GO ON

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, at a virtual press conference yesterday, said that since October 28, law enforcement agencies have arrested 10,770 party leaders and activists, including the 365 yesterday.

With the 13 new cases filed yesterday, the total number of cases against BNP men since October 28 stands at 233, he added.

Between October 28 and yesterday, Rab picked up 377 people from across the country over violence and sabotage.

ARSON TOO

Yesterday, seven buses were set on fire -- four in the capital's Mirpur 10, Sutrapur, Rupnagar, and Nabisco, and one each in Barishal, Savar, and Narayanganj, said Talha Bin Zasim, an officer at the Fire Service Media Cell.

No casualties were reported.

At least 160 vehicles were torched across the country between October 28 and yesterday, according to police and firefighters.

BUS COUNTERS SHUT

Although the capital experienced a significant increase in vehicular traffic yesterday, compared to other days during the blockade, only a few inter-district buses

left Dhaka due to a lack of passengers.

While visiting the Gabtoli, Sayedabad, and Mohakhali bus terminals, The Daily Star found that almost all of the ticket counters closed with the staff idle. Only a few buses left Gabtoli in the evening.

Seven buses from BMF Paribahan and Dola Paribahan departed from the Sayedabad terminal by 11:00am, according to bus service staff members.

Shovon, a manager of Dola Paribahan, said three of their buses left Sayedabad for Barishal's Morrelganj with a good number of passengers.

Sohorab Hossain, counter manager of Unique Paribahan at the Sayedabad Bus Terminal, told The Daily Star that they could not operate any buses due to a scarcity of passengers.

Md Alamgir Hossain, in charge of Hanif Paribahan at the terminal, said they would operate buses only if they got enough passengers.

Penalised for going by the book

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the technical evaluation committee.

Chowdhury subsequently did not sign off on the technical evaluation report, which would have allowed the tender process to move to the next stage. He instead called for a fresh tender.

This was brought up at a meeting of the posts and telecommunications division chaired by Telecom Minister Mustafa Jabbar on June 19, where the approval for the fresh tender was given.

And this is when Zaman, secretary to the posts and telecommunications division, waded into the scene -- an undertaking that falls outside his jurisdiction.

The first unwarranted intervention occurred when Md Taibur Rahman, a joint secretary at the ministry, asked the project director for all tender documents citing a verbal order from the secretary.

The following day, the posts and telecommunications division issued two separate letters: one to submit the latest status report on the tender at the next BTCL board meeting and the other to send all information for the Central Procurement Technical Unit's (CPTU) opinion. This violates the law.

On the other hand, ZTE also complained to the minister that its technology is superior to the other bidders -- information that the Chinese company was not supposed to know. Jabbar forwarded this letter to Chowdhury.

Asked if it was an attempt to interfere with the tender process, Jabbar said he hadn't said anything to Chowdhury that could be construed as interference.

"However, my sole concern was ensuring proper technology for the betterment of the country," he told The Daily Star.

In both cases, the cited reasons for the complaint do not match with any of the reasons allowed by the law. Besides the law and rules specify to whom to address the first complaint.

Sending such letters to the MD, secretary, minister or director general of the CPTU for non-allowable reasons violates the public procurement rules.

Chowdhury viewed both the letters, which contained ill-gotten information breaching secrecy, as an attempt to influence the decision.

On August 27, he rejected both ZTE and Huawei as the first step towards punishing the two as per the laws of the land.

The following day, Huawei served a legal notice that was replied to by BTCL's lawyer. Huawei was informed that the unauthorised acts may lead to debarment.

Huawei made three consecutive administrative complaints and finally appealed to the review panel on October 2.

In the legal notice as well as all complaints and appeals, Huawei admitted that their letters do not constitute a valid "complaint" as per laws but opposed the actions taken by the BTCL MD.

The additional equipment will

expire long before they can be used as their standard economic life is seven years. This would cause a huge financial loss to the government.

Meanwhile, Huawei on April 16 complained about the delay in approval of a technical evaluation report, pointing fingers at Chowdhury.

The letters, which were sent to the secretary and director general of the CPTU, mentioned the date on which the technical evaluation report was handed to Chowdhury -- a piece of information that Huawei was not supposed to know.

Using Huawei's letter, the ministry on May 25 showed cause for Chowdhury over the delay, in yet another violation of the law.

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BCB cannot just sit on

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including the board president has to take responsibility for the debacle.

We do not know whether the disaster was in the making since Tamim Iqbal's emotional retirement in July and his subsequent return following the intervention of the Prime Minister. A lot of incidents happened after that, including the last-minute drama over the selection of the World Cup squad.

We do not know whether those off-the-field incidents adversely affected the performance of the team in the World Cup. We also do not know how professionally the board handled those situations.

What we do know is that this World Cup was not just a debacle, instead it has put our cricket at a crossroads. What we do realise is that it is time to take a decision on whether we are ready for a retrospective instead of finding scapegoats which had been the case so

The review panel then went on to clear all three bidders for the next stage of the tender, which is beyond the scope of a review application.

The review panel's overreach did not end there. Although it has no jurisdiction to punish anybody, it ordered punishment against Chowdhury.

Taking advantage of this unprecedented review panel decision on October 17, Zaman convened a board meeting of the BTCL the following day.

In one day, he prepared and signed 31 pages of minutes, ordered all bidders eligible for the next stage and removed Chowdhury from the post of MD.

BTCL also reciprocated by executing all the orders on the same day.

Chowdhury subsequently filed a writ petition to the court challenging his removal. The court gave a stay order.

On November 7, the ministry temporarily suspended Chowdhury from his job, with the gazette signed by Zaman himself.

Zaman declined to comment, saying that the matter is now in the court.

Asked why the ministry interfered despite the decision to retender, Chowdhury said he was not aware of any of the developments after the meeting on June 19. All decisions were taken by the secretary, he said.

Chowdhury said he followed all the public procurement rules at every step when rejecting the technical evaluation committee's report.

Contacted, Huawei referred The Daily Star to the CPTU's review panel's report.

Since none of the bidders' proposals matched the requirements, there should be a retendering, said Abu Saeed Khan, a senior policy fellow at LIRNEAsia.

"It's imperative that the Anti-Corruption Commission investigates this as soon as possible."

"My husband was a supervisor. He didn't join the protests; neither was he a labour leader. Why did they shoot