

2018 VIOLENCE CASE 16 BNP leaders, activists jailed for 30 months

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced 16 BNP leaders and activists to 30 months imprisonment in a 2018 violence case.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Jashim handed down the sentence with two accused at the dock, said court sources.

The magistrate also fined the convicts Tk 5,000 each, in default of which, they will have to serve three more months in jail.

Sarker Rafiqul Islam Bukul, Ahsan Habib Mollah, Rustam Ali, Raihanul Baset, Anwar Hossain Sarker, Arif Uddin Enamul, and Ismail Hossain are among the 16 convicts.

Of them, Baset and Anwar are behind bars, while the rest are on the run.

The magistrate issued warrants against the fugitives, saying that their punishment would be effective after their arrest or surrender before the court.

Six witnesses testified before the court during the trial, said the prosecution.

Govt targeting opposition activists ahead of polls: HRW

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) has said Bangladesh authorities are targeting opposition leaders and supporters ahead of the general election slated for January 7.

In a statement yesterday, HRW said the authorities should impartially investigate all instances of violence, including cases in which each side has blamed the other.

Almost 10,000 opposition activists have been arrested since a planned rally by BNP on October 28, while at least 16 people have been killed during ongoing violence, including two police officers. Over 5,500 people have been injured, it said.

“The government is claiming to commit to free and fair elections with diplomatic partners while the state authorities are simultaneously filling prisons with the ruling Awami League’s political opponents,” said Julia Bleckner, senior Asia researcher at HRW.

“Diplomatic partners should make clear that the government’s autocratic crackdown will jeopardize future economic cooperation.”



Exploring the street BREAKFAST CULTURE

RBR

Breakfast on the go has a different meaning for the toiling masses of Dhaka. Rickshaw pullers doing early shifts to cash in on school rides, night guards before hitting the beds, street sweepers – all opt for a quick street breakfast, which is spread out by 6:00am for business.

Chomping down an egg roll or parata-halwa from makeshift eateries and carts, and chugging it down with a cup of steaming milk tea, these early birds are all charged to begin the day. Come winter, the addition of traditional pithas makes winter breakfast by the roadside as sweet as the palm sugar in them.

Coconut shaving filled with palm jaggery in a bhapa pitha puts you in a cheery mood and this is exactly the sweet kickstart you need in a moderately chilly morning.

Different makeshift food stalls, carts, and women sitting on bricks steaming rice cakes make for this very affordable breakfast by the roadside. Men and women while shopping for fresh morning vegetables after their morning walks join the fun at times.

Even mothers in a rush pick up an egg roll or a sweet pitha for their children’s tiffin.

Hasan, a house guard, accompanied by his buddies (drivers and house guards of houses nearby), have their morning meals from the roadside stalls and vans selling semolina-halwa and



parata by the kilos. This two-wheeled cart sells hot paratas and semolina halwas; these are a hit with early birds going to work.

Tk 50 worth halwa and parata can feed two people, according to Hasan. This unique cart breakfast goes a long way in time and they have a mahajan or merchant who runs five to six such carts in community-based specific

areas. Fifty kilogrammes of flour and five kilogrammes of semolina give them enough financial incentive to cook this simple breakfast every morning for the working people of Dhaka.

Hasan’s favourite spot is the “picchir dokan”, a small tin shack with tools as seats that serves an assortment of affordable, tasty morning meals. A small boy runs the show and the speed with which he works is as close to any acrobatic feat.

Parata, ruti, and daal for Tk 40. Plain khichuri for Tk 30 and if you want to add an omelette with it, the khichuri platter is Tk 50. Egg rolls are Tk 30; milk tea is Tk 8 and sweetened black tea, with a hint of lemon and cloves is Tk 5. Regulars like Hasan spend Tk 30 every day to have breakfast and that brings his total breakfast expenditure to Tk 900 monthly.

After 11 o’clock these eateries shift to a lunch menu of curries and rice, and puri-shingaras in the evening as snacks. The street corners in every locality or paras, as we know, have their own brand of magic going. They are always abuzz with people from all walks of life to enjoy these casual and affordable meals.

Bangladeshi man found dead near India border

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenaidah

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) yesterday recovered the body of a Bangladeshi man near the India border in Jhenaidah.

The victim Rakibul Islam, 35, from Jadabpur village in Moheshpur upazila, was a mason by profession.

His body was found abandoned on the bank of Ichamati river in the upazila’s Chapatala village, where he lived with his uncle, said locals.

Rakib trespassed into Indian territory with others on Sunday morning and did not return home that night, they added.

The next morning, villagers spotted his body and informed the BGB.

Hafizur Rahman, a local UP member from Chapatala village, said, “Rakib sometimes helped cattle rustlers bring in cows from across the border. We think that he was caught by the BSF on Sunday. His body bore bullet wounds.”

BGB 58 Commanding Officer Lt Col Masud Parvez said the victim’s body, found inside Bangladesh territory, bore bullet wounds.

“However, the BGB has not heard any sound of gunshots near the border in the last few days. At this moment, we are uncertain as to why he crossed the border illegally. Police are investigating the matter,” he added.

Rohingya man killed in ‘gunfight’ between two armed groups

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox’s Bazar

A Rohingya man was shot dead during an alleged gunfight between the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) at a refugee camp in Ukhiya upazila of Cox’s Bazar yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Mohammad Yunus, of Block E/15 of Camp-4 in Kutupalong, said police. Five more people were also injured in the incident.

The gunfight took place around 3:00pm in Block D of Camp-3 in Madhichara, said Shamim Hossain, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Ukhiya Police Station.

“Yunus received shots to the head and back during the gunfight between armed members of ARSA and RSO. He was taken to the IOM hospital in the camp, where the duty doctors declared him dead.”

The body was sent to Cox’s Bazar General Hospital for autopsy, he added.

3-yr-old drowns in pond

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Shariatpur

A three-year-old child drowned in a pond in Madaripur’s Kalkini upazila yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Amir Fatema, daughter of Al Amin Sardar of Enayetnagar union.

Quoting locals, Nazmul Hasan, officer-in-charge (OC) Kalkini Police Station, said the child left the house around noon and fell into a pond next to the house while playing when no one was watching.

Not seeing Fatema for a long time, her mother Sonia Begum started looking for her. Later, a neighbour spotted Fatema’s body floating in the pond, the OC said.

Tainted, yet given AL ticket

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beat up the local correspondent of Bangla daily Jugantor for penning a report on his alleged accumulation of illegal wealth in Canada and Natore.

In 2022, Shimul, being an MP, violated the electoral code of conduct by visiting a polling station during the zila parishad elections.

Earlier, he had violated the code in 2016 by meeting representatives of the local government and urging them to ensure the victory of AL nominees in the zila parishad polls.

In Rajshahi-1, AL lawmaker Omor Faruk Chowdhury, also a former state minister, drew flak for assaulting Salim Reza, principal of Rajbari Degree College, in Godagari upazila in July.

In February 2019, the Election Commission ordered Faruk to leave the upazila for allegedly threatening a chairman candidate before the Godagari upazila parishad polls.

In February this year, he made headlines for asking a group of AL grassroots leaders to vow, touching the holy Quran, to support him in the next national polls.

On November 22, the EC warned him for violating the electoral code of conduct. He held a public meeting on a school ground on November 17, two days after the polls schedule was announced.

Last year, the Anti-Corruption Commission launched a probe into his alleged embezzlement of government funds and irregularities in leasing out government land, recruiting teachers for schools and colleges, and picking fertiliser dealers.

The AL also picked lawmaker Abdus Sobhan Miah Golap of Madaripur-3 even though the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project found that he is an American citizen and he hid the fact from the EC.

The organisation, in its report published earlier this year, said he lied in his affidavit submitted to the EC before the 2018 polls.

According to the report, Golap owns nine properties in New York,

and he bought those between 2014 and 2019.

The High Court in February directed the ACC to enquire into the allegations.

In March this year, an allegation was raised against him for not paying the toll for Padma Bridge.

AL nominee Dipu Moni, the education minister and incumbent of Chandpur-3, also caused controversies.

Earlier this year, an investigative report of this newspaper found that Dipu Moni wrote at least 15 times to different government offices to allow a sand lifter to illegally extract sand from the Meghna.

On September 24, the then chairman of the National River Conservation Commission alleged that the people illegally extracting sand from the Meghna have links with a female minister from Chandpur.

He did not name Dipu Moni but she is the lone female minister from Chandpur.

In January this year, Bangla daily Prothom Alo ran a report that some influential people with close ties to Dipu Moni inflated the price of 62.5 acres of land in Chandpur’s Laxmipur union earmarked for setting up Chandpur Science and Technology University.

In Chattogram-16, lawmaker Mustafizur Rahman Chowdhury got the AL ticket again even though he was seen brandishing a firearm in Banshkhalhi upazila during a procession on May 22.

In January, freedom fighter Salimul Haque Chowdhury of Banshkhalhi accused Mustafizur’s men of attacking him.

Mustafizur was accused in a case filed over the assault on upazila election officer Zahidul Islam on June 1, 2016. Mustafizur allegedly wanted his men appointed as polling officials for the upazila parishad elections.

Shahin Chaklader of Jeshore-6 has been embroiled in multiple controversies.

On September 25, he reportedly threatened BNP leaders and activists

that he would not allow them to return to the district if they joined a BNP programme in Dhaka.

In January 2021, a phone conversation between purportedly Shahin and a police official was leaked. In the audio clip, the police official was asked to bomb a police station and frame a lawyer for it.

On April 28, 2022, Shahin had a heated exchange of words with a judge at a public event in Jashore Circuit House. He criticised the judge for not granting bail for a Chhatra League leader accused of murder.

In Lalmonirhat-2, Social Welfare Minister Nuruzzaman Ahmed came under fire for laying the foundation stone for the expansion of a building, which encroached on railway land in his village.

His son, Rakibuzzaman Ahmed, allegedly turned 36 acres of leased railway land into a park and built a swimming pool despite opposition from railway authorities.

The minister and his family had allegedly racked up around Tk 9 lakh in unpaid power bills between September 2020 and July of this year, reported a Bangla daily.

The office of a power company official who was quoted by the newspaper was vandalised.

Fahmi Gulandaz Babel from Mymensingh-10 is accused of torturing BNP leaders and rivals in his own party, according to media reports.

Many leaders of the AL and its associate bodies were forced to leave their locality, the reports claimed.

In June 2022, his associates assaulted two teachers of Gafargaon Government College after demanding extortion money, the reports said, adding that his associates also confined 40 teachers for 10 hours for protesting the assault.

All the lawmakers mentioned refuted the allegations against them when the controversies made headlines.

The Daily Star yesterday tried to reach several top leaders of the AL. Only one picked up the phone but refused to comment on the matter.

Not quite independent

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in intra-party feuds across the country, something that created tensions during the recent union parishad elections where multiple AL candidates fought it out between themselves.

Talking to reporters at the party’s Dhanmondi office yesterday, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader said willing party leaders can contest the national polls as independent candidates.

“For tactical reasons, party leaders are being allowed to run as independents,” he said.

He also cited AL President Sheikh Hasina’s decision in this regard, saying there is no bar to contest the polls in line with Hasina’s guidelines.

Speaking to the party leaders about this later in the day, he made it clear that anyone willing to run as independents must secure permission from the party first, sources said.

Many AL nomination-seekers and sitting MPs who failed to get party tickets have already announced their potential candidacy as independents. Many have even started collecting signatures of 1 percent voters of their constituencies, which is mandatory to submit nomination papers as independent candidates, according to the sources.

Among the AL’s alternative candidates, former state minister and sitting MP from Jamalpur-4 Murad Hasan will vie for the same seat, former deputy minister Arif Khan Joy for Netrakona-2, Misbah Uddin Siraj, former organising secretary of AL central committee, for Sylhet-1, Canada chapter of AL president and Sylhet district AL member Sarwar Hossain for Sylhet-6, AL leader and Barrister Syed Sayedul Haque Sumon for Habiganj-4, sitting AL MP Mouazzam Hossain Ratan for Sunamganj-1, sitting AL MP Monsur Rahaman for Rajshahi-5, former AL lawmaker Raihanul Haque Raihan for Rajshahi-6, incumbent AL lawmaker Nazim Uddin Ahmed for Mymensingh-3, independent lawmaker Mujibur Rahman Chowdhury Nixon for Faridpur-4, Rangpur district AL leader Sirajul Islam for Rangpur-6, AL leader Shahbuddin Ahmed Chanchal

for Manikganj-2, Durgapur Upazila Parishad Chairman Jannatul Ferdous Jhuma for Netrakona-1, former AL lawmaker Shamsul Haque Bhuiyan for Chandpur-3 and 4, former AL lawmaker Monirul Islam Monir for Jashore-2, Keraniganj Upazila Parishad Chairman Shaheen Ahmed for Dhaka-2, and President of Jashore district AL Shahidul Islam for Jashore-3.

They announced their candidacy as independents yesterday.

According to AL sources, such a large number of independent candidates might create a big challenge for many party-nominated candidates. This may also result in infighting at the grassroots.

Many AL nomination-seekers who topped in various surveys done by different government agencies but did not get party tickets may pose a big challenge for the AL picks. On the other hand, many sitting MPs who lost popularity in the last five years for their controversial activities but still got nomination may find it difficult to secure an easy win, sources said.

Asked, AL Joint General Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim said his party is capable of controlling the independent candidates.

“We allowed independent candidates to make the election more participatory and to make it festive. More candidates mean higher voter turnout; it is also on our mind. But as a disciplined party, Awami League will control the independent candidates when required,” he added.

Meanwhile, uncertainty looms over seat-sharing with the 14-party alliance partners after the ruling party gave nomination to its candidates in some of the seats that currently belong to its allies.

Quader’s recent remarks questioning the necessity of an alliance created further confusion about the matter.

On Saturday, Quader said if the opposition does not form a coalition, the AL will not form an alliance since there is no strategic reason for that.

Yesterday, Quader and party’s Joint General Secretary Hasan Mahmud came up with conflicting statements

over forging an alliance.

In the morning, Quader said AL does not need to search for partners. Later in the day, Hasan said his party will adjust seats with the partners of the alliance like it did in the past, although it has announced its contenders in 298 of the 300 parliamentary seats.

It is not clear why the ruling party did not nominate anyone in the rest 2 constituencies.

Amid the confusions, AL-led 14-party coordinator and veteran AL leader Amir Hossain Amu assured the alliance partners that AL will run under the banner of the 14-party alliance. He also requested them to file nomination papers.

But sources said Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon told his colleagues at the party office that he is unwilling to be in the race on account of his advanced age.

AL nominated its Joint General Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim in Dhaka-8, where Menon is the sitting MP.

Contacted, Workers Party politburo member Anisur Rahman Mallik said Obaidul Quader’s remarks have created confusion among alliance partners.

“We will discuss the matter in our politburo and then decide whether to contest the election under the banner of 14-party or with our own electoral symbol, hammer,” he said.

Sources said Hasina expressed her resentment over the alliance partners demanding more seats than they currently hold.

Talking to the AL nomination-seekers at the Gono Bhaban on Sunday, Hasina said partners of the 14-party should create their own ground, said sources.

“I gave them chances over the last 15 years. They should have stood on their feet and created their own ground by now. Let them learn to stand on their own feet and walk,” a nomination-seeker present at the Gono Bhaban quoted Hasina as saying.

AL sources said this time the ruling party will offer the alliance partners fewer seats than the 11 that they got in the last election.