

CUSTODIAL DEATH Family being pushed for out-of- court settlement

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The brother of Golam Rabbani, whose body was found hanging at Baniachong Police Station in Habiganj on Tuesday night, alleged yesterday that he is being asked to settle the matter rather than file a case.

"Two days ago, an unknown person called me and asked me to meet with some policemen over this incident," Rabbani's brother Moin Uddin told The Daily Star last night.

Moin recounted, "The caller said if the matter cannot be settled, you can go to court. I instantly rejected his proposal."

The caller did not give his identity, he added.

Moin yesterday said he would file a murder case against the sub-inspector who apprehended Rabbani, four constables, and the officer-in-charge of Baniachong Police Station.

He also said he went to the police station yesterday to collect the inquest report but was not provided the report.

Habiganj Superintendent of Police Akter Hossain said if the victim's family submits an application seeking the inquest report, he will take the necessary measures.

Meanwhile, Sub-Inspector Monirul Islam, allegedly involved in the incident, was withdrawn from Baniachong Police Station and attached to Habiganj Police Lines on Thursday.

The family members claim that Rabbani, aged 17 according to them but stated as 25 by the police, was tortured to death and then hanged.

Rabbani had been apprehended on suspicion of theft by a police team led by SI Monirul Islam. His lifeless body was discovered hours after his detention.

Three migrants found dead off Canary Islands

15 rescued

AFP, Madrid

Three people were found dead in a canoe full of migrants that was rescued Saturday off the Canary Islands, Spanish maritime rescue officials said.

Lifeguards managed to take 15 survivors off the boat found late afternoon some 314 kilometres (195 miles) south of the island of El Hierro, a spokesperson for the Spanish emergency services told AFP.



REMEMBERING election days of the past

RBR

National election days of the past were fun. The extra holiday added to the joy. The frenzied frolic surrounding the polling date was unmatched. The candidates in crisp, white panjabis coming to visit the centres, volunteers chorusing slogans, polling agents looking for your name in the list — all these brought a sense of wonderment, laced with patriotism in me. It has always been this way for me since childhood.

Before election day, posters and festoons of candidates were hung all around the city, lending a hand to the festivities. There was a mad rush in the air. My grandma's old two-storied house was right in front of a girl's college that was always a polling centre. Our entire house was abuzz with activities even days before the elections.

My aunts would make haleem and snacks to sell to voters. Small stalls, in gazabo styles, were put up with saris and set up in the long veranda leading to the porch and garden. Like us,

the small-scale vendors, like fuchkachotpoti, badam and jhalmuri wallas were happy with the brisk business they did centring the voting booths.

Volunteers were extra obliging to help you find your way. One of my uncles was a serious political person and would be a polling agent or volunteer; he made sure everyone voted and was the only nervous

person that day while the rest of us were busy merrymaking.

When I came of age, the euphoria of exercising my political franchise was a coveted feeling. Entering the polling booth gave me a sense of importance; my voice that I chose to seal within a few seconds would count to determine the country's collective future. Goosebumps!

When the counting began in the evening, we were all glued to BTV (Bangladesh Television), for the special national election programmes. The big stage with manually operated boards putting up tallies was the major attraction.

Bangladesh Television in those

days had the best news anchors, females and males. As they came in, our favourite news persons relayed the results in their baritone voices. They were impeccably dressed, had polished pronunciations, and could speak intelligently.

We used to stay up late into the night to know the outcome. And food spread that night was as varied and huge as our young minds could imagine; sheek kabab rolls from nearby hotels, puris, patties, cream rolls, candies, and fizzy drinks! We were in total bliss because that night our parents too gave us a free hand and there was no curfew for bedtime.

I still remember those fun elections and to date, I try to replicate the excitement. Unfortunately, I could never hook a soul to my enthusiasm. Having said that, the most important job of that day, for me, is to get the ink mark on my thumb, saying that I exercised my right to vote.

I think I need to give a small correction, in today's time the fun lies in Facebook posts, where they declare they voted. The ink blot becomes the most Instagrammable post on election day; maybe only second to the victory sign shown by the candidates.



Farm-friendly policies working wonders

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production, with a production of 526,819 tonnes in 2022, also behind China and India.

The country secured third position in sugar crop yield, with a total production of 215,065 tonnes, behind Myanmar, according to Bangladesh Sugarcrop Research Institute (BSRI).

Bangladesh stands fourth in the production of spice and aromatic crops, with the harvest reaching 48.755 lakh tonnes in 2022, according to FAO data.

Spice export fetched \$42.38 million for the country in 2022, according to EPB data.

The country holds fifth position in producing berry-like fruits, with a production of 83,570 tonnes, and also in onion production, with a yield of 2,517,070 tonnes last year.

With a yield of 618,542 tonnes last year, Bangladesh is the world's sixth eggplant grower.

The country secured seventh position in production of tropical fruits, including jackfruits, liches, and others, with a total yield of 1,171,142 tonnes in 2022. It also holds the same position in potato production. Last year, Bangladesh produced 10,144,835 of the vegetables, FAO data shows.

Bangladesh also secured eighth position in producing mangoes, guavas, and mangosteens, having

a total production of 1,452,303 tonnes, and in dry lentils yield with a 190,743-tonne harvest last year.

With a total production of 718,629 tonnes of pumpkins, squash, and gourds last year, the country maintains the same eighth position.

Additionally, it produced 440,000 tonnes of tea leaves in 2022, maintaining the same position and earning \$2.34 million from exporting tea.

The country also ranks eighth in growing other pulse-family items, having a total production of 147,755 tonnes last year. The country also holds the same position as it grew 342,306 tonnes of cauliflower and broccoli last year.

Besides, according to FAO data, Bangladesh secured 15th position in coconut production, and ranked 16th having grown 16,67,193 tonnes of other fresh vegetables.

Agricultural Minister Abdur Razzaque attributes the success to the government's farm-friendly policies.

For example, the current Awami League government's first cabinet meeting on January 7, 2009, just a day after the AL-led grand alliance assumed office, made a crucial decision.

At the meeting, the government decided to reduce prices of Diammonium Phosphate (DAP) to Tk

25 from Tk 90, TSP to Tk 22 from Tk 82, Potassium to Tk 15 from Tk 60, and Uria to Tk 16 from Tk 20, the minister added.

He also said the government expanded agricultural research over the last one decade.

"All of these have led to the success of the agricultural sector," he told The Daily Star.

The government will now focus on transforming traditional agriculture to modern and commercial agriculture.

"For this transition, we have placed the highest importance on agro-processing and agro-farming. Additionally, the government is working to increase cold storage and multi-cold storage facilities in the country," he said.

But despite the many advancements in farm production, Bangladesh faces two challenges, said Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) Emeritus Professor MA Sattar Mandal.

"The first challenge is maintaining the prices of agricultural products at a reasonably competitive level, and the second challenge is ensuring the profitability of agricultural products. If we can address these two challenges, the country's agriculture sector will be more advanced in the future," said Prof Sattar, also a former vice-chancellor of BAU.

Country risks isolation if polls aren't free, fair

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world is watching us. If we can't make this election acceptable, our future would be uncertain.

"There is a possibility that Bangladesh may be isolated," he said, adding, "The election must be held in a free, fair and acceptable manner at any cost. And we have no shortage of initiatives to ensure that."

Anisur made the comments at a time when many foreign countries and organisations are showing interest in the January 7 polls.

A total of 1,943 candidates, either independent or from one of the 28 participating political parties, are expected to contest.

Sixteen political parties, including the major opposition BNP and its allies, are boycotting the polls, saying that a free and fair election is not possible under the current AL government.

Meanwhile, the US and some other countries have been stressing the need for a free and fair election.

On May 24, the US imposed visa restrictions on Bangladeshis who undermine the democratic election process.

The European Union exploratory mission visited the country from July 6 to July 22 while the US joint mission of the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) toured

Bangladesh from October 8 to 11 to observe the pre-polls atmosphere.

Based on the exploratory mission's report, the EU decided not to send a full-fledged observer team. It later said it would send a four-member team to monitor the polls.

About violations of the electoral code of conduct by candidates and their supporters, Anisur said, "Although we hope not to see any violations, there were some. However, there were fewer than past elections."

He added that incidents of violence centring the polls were also less compared to earlier polls. "In some cases, the incidents were not related to polling matters at all."

Brick kiln worker chained, tortured to death

STAR DIGITAL REPORT

A brick kiln worker in Barguna's Amtali upazila was chained and allegedly tortured to death for quitting work after taking wages in advance.

Informed, police recovered the body of Anis Gazi, 50, from the brick kiln at Kalibari village around 11:00am yesterday with one of his legs still chained and injury marks on his back.

Kazi Shakhawat Hossain, officer-in-charge of Amtali Police Station, said the body was sent to Barguna General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Police and locals said Anis, of Dalachara village, used to work as a labourer at the "Islam and Sons" brick kiln.

Two months ago, he took Tk 40,000 from kiln manager Salam Chowkidar as advance wage, but he stopped going to work on December 21.

Salam Chowkidar later picked up Anis from his home on Thursday night. He was then held captive at the brick kiln with chains and tortured.

"Salam and his associate Khalek tortured my husband, leading to his death. I want justice," Anis's wife Feroza Begum said.

According to locals, all kiln workers fled after this incident.

Regarding the death of the labourer, Farooq Gazi, the owner of Islam and Sons Brick Kiln, said, "I heard that a worker died due to illness."

Meanwhile, OC Shakhawat said they were yet to receive any written complaint. "Necessary action will be taken subject to investigation."

Arsa's 'logistic chief', 2 others arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested the logistic chief of Arsa, a Myanmar-based armed group, and two of its members in Cox's Bazar town yesterday.

Lt Col HM Sajjad Hossain, commanding officer of Rab-15, said the arrestees are Hafiz Rahamat Ullah, Arsa's logistic chief, and Manjur Alam and Nurul Islam.

Rahamat is a resident of camp 3 of Kutupalong Rohingya refugee camp. Manjur and Nurul are from camp 5 of the camp, he said in a press briefing.

Rab also recovered 4.9kg of explosives, 15 crude bombs, ID card manufacturing equipment, 1.5kg mercury, one walkie talkie, 53 circuits, and nine bundles of fabric of military uniform from a house in Kolatoli area of Cox's Bazar town, he said.

Acting on a tip-off, the Rab members cordoned off the house, which was being used as a den by the Arsa logistic chief, from yesterday morning, said the Rab official.

The drive ended around 9:00am yesterday, he added.

The Rab official said Rahamat, who is proficient in six languages, including Burmese, Rohingya, Bengali, English, Urdu, and Arabic, entered Bangladesh illegally in 2,000 and started living in Shah Parir Dwp in Teknaf.

After selling his properties, he moved to Myanmar from Bangladesh in 2014 and later went to Malaysia via Thailand.

Rahmat again came back to Bangladesh in 2018 and started living in Rohingya camps. At one point during his stay in Bangladesh, Hafiz Rahamat joined Arsa through Moulvi Rafiq, second-in-command of Arsa Gun Group Commander Master Younus, said Lt Colonel Sazzad.

BB gives 7 banks Tk 22,000cr

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"Providing loans against demand promissory note is a normal practice," said BB spokesman Md Mezbaul Haque.

Banks can borrow from the central bank against the promissory note for 180 days at most, he added.

However, the BB officials said the extraordinary facility was extended to help the banks meet the shortfall in their mandatory cash and liquidity holdings and show a tidy balance sheet for the year.

If the banks show a shortfall in their regulatory cash and liquidity holdings in their balance sheets at the year-end, the depositors' confidence in them will take a big hit, the officials said.

Padma Bank, formerly known as Farmers Bank, took the emergency loans from the central bank on Thursday to meet the shortfall in regulatory cash holdings, said its

managing director Tarek Reaz Khan.

The bank has taken the fund for three days, he added.

The emergency liquidity support provided to the Shariah-based banks — where Chatogram-based conglomerate S Alam Group holds significant stakes — is not for meeting their current account deficits with the central bank, according to the BB officials.

The current accounts of Islami Bank, Social Islami Bank, First Security Islami Bank, Union Bank and Global Islami Bank have been in deficit for a long time, according to a BB letter sent to the lenders' managing directors on November 28.

The banks were given 20 working days to clear their deficits.

Now, only First Security Islami Bank is in the deficit and the central bank has given the bank three months to settle the negative balance, the BB

officials said.

Zafar Alam, managing director of Social Islami Bank, declined to comment about the central bank's extraordinary lending support but said the bank's current account with the BB is no longer in the deficit.

The banks' boards should be reformed before giving any liquidity support, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

On December 21, BB reconstituted the board of the National Bank.

"Those banks are in need of that extraordinary liquidity support now because of the lack of accountability. If the banking regulator wants to rescue the banks, it has to protect the depositors' interests first. The Bangladesh Bank cannot give away people's money like this," said Mansur, also a former chairman of BRAC Bank.

BNP's Alal, 109 others sentenced

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Magistrate Mohammad Jasim delivered the verdict.

Jamaat's Dhaka city (south) secretary Dr Shafiqul Islam Masud, Chhatra Dal's former president Abdul Kader Bhuiyan Jewel and former organising secretary Obaidul Haque, and its Dhaka University unit's former president Shahidul Islam Hira are among the convicts.

During the trial, six prosecution witnesses testified before the court. According to the case documents, a group of leaders and activists of BNP-Jamaat torched a bus on the street in front of United International University in Dhanmondi during a blockade called by the 18-party alliance on December 1, 2013.

On the same day, sub-inspector Abdullah Al Mamun Farazy filed a case. Also yesterday, 26 BNP members were jailed for nine months for political violence in Paltan in December 2012.

No convicts were present in the courtroom when Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Saddam Hossain delivered the verdict.

Five prosecution witnesses testified before the court.

According to the case statement, on December 13, 2012, a group of leaders

and activists of BNP and its front organisations illegally gathered on the streets before their party office and adjacent areas during a hartal called by an 18-party alliance.

They blasted crude bombs, threw brickbats at police, and obstructed them from discharging duties.

Following the incident, SI Khondaker Jahangir Hossain filed a case with Paltan Model Police Station that day.

Another Dhaka court yesterday sentenced 12 BNP men to 54 months imprisonment each over political violence in the Kamrangirchar area in September 2018.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Rajesh pronounced the judgement in their absence.

Four prosecution witnesses testified before the court.

The case statement said a group of BNP members illegally gathered on the street in front of Kurarghat Hospital in Kamrangirchar on September 12, 2018.

They then vandalised vehicles, threw brickbats at policemen, and obstructed them from discharging their duties during a protest demanding the release of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

SI Tofazzal Hossain filed a case with Kamrangirchar Police Station in this regard.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Mainul Islam sentenced nine BNP men to 24 months imprisonment for obstructing law enforcers from discharging duties in a case filed with Kotwali Police Station on September 12, 2018.

The court recorded statements of five prosecution witnesses.

Yesterday, the same magistrate also sentenced 10 BNP men to 24 months imprisonment over political violence in the case filed with Khilkhet Police Station on January 15, 2015.

Four prosecution witnesses testified before the court.

In addition, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Mehedi Hasan sentenced 22 Jamaat men to 36 months imprisonment for illegal gathering and barring law enforcers from discharging their duties in Hazaribagh area on June 29, 2010.

Yesterday, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Jaki-Al-Farabi sentenced five BNP activists to six months in prison for illegal gathering in Shahjahanpur in May 2017.

Also yesterday, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Begum Shanta Akter sentenced 18 BNP men to different jail terms over political violence in Motijheel area in July 2012.