

'At least 13 of our leaders died in custody'

Alleges Rizvi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday



alleged that at least 13 party leaders and activists have died in jail due to torture over the last three months.

"Each of these deaths is a premeditated killing," Rizvi claimed at a press conference at the party's Naya Paltan central office.

"The news of the deaths of BNP leaders or activists due to brutal torture in custody has been coming regularly," said Rizvi.

"In every jail, BNP leaders and activists are being deprived of facilities and privileges provided under prison regulations. They are being subjected to heinous oppression," he said.

"Accessing food is being made difficult for them. Medical treatment is being denied," he added.

Citing the case of Monowar Islam, Lakkhitari union BNP's joint organising secretary in Gangachara upazila, who died in Rangpur jail recently, Rizvi said police had arrested a healthy Monowar on January 13 and subjected him to "inhuman torture" at the police station without producing him in court that day.

"Marks of injuries were seen all over Monowar's body, feet, back, and head," Rizvi said, alleging police had tortured him to death.

Rizvi demanded international probes into all custodial deaths, including that of Monowar.

He also said the current AL government is unable to protect independence and sovereignty of the country as it was not formed with public support.

"It is now visible. In the age of technology, every person is now watching how the mortar shells are coming (from Myanmar), killing the people of Bangladesh. But the government is silent. It even can't give a statement (protesting the border incidents)."

BNP also claimed that 11 party leaders and activists were detained, and one case was filed against 85 named and many unidentified party activists in the 24 hours preceding yesterday morning.



A trawler plies the dark waters of Turag river in Basila. The white foam left in its wake is a clear indicator of high levels of pollution, caused by discharge of residential sewage and industrial waste. This pollution poses significant health risks to both aquatic life and humans. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Building an empire on smuggled gold

CID moves to seize property worth Tk 7cr of 'Bhai-Bhai' syndicate

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Land sprawling across acres, mansions fit for royalty, and a fleet of gleaming cars -- the "brothers in crime" of the "Bhai-Bhai" syndicate have built an empire by smuggling gold through the Benapole border.

The kingpins own land properties worth over Tk 7 crore. Not to mention the luxury apartments and posh cars they had. Financial Crime Squad of the Organised Crime Unit of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) got a trace of their spoils after a nine-month-long investigation.

On February 4, the CID team applied to Jashore Senior Special Judge Court to confiscate the property. It also requested to freeze transactions of 46 bank accounts maintained by nine members of the syndicate.

Following the application, the court had already taken steps to seize the property and freeze accounts.

"We have got a trace of the property and bank account details while investigating a money laundering case filed against the gold smuggling syndicate," Md Moniruzzaman, an inspector of the financial crime squad of CID, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The accused will not be able to enjoy or transfer these properties." On June 22 last year, The Daily Star published a report about the syndicate's activities with the

headline "Brothers in Crime."

The money laundering case was filed on June 15 of last year against the syndicate members.

The syndicate members are -- Oliyur Rahman and Nasir Uddin, two brothers at Sharsha upazila of Jashore; Ramzan Ali and Selim

Anisur Rahman, a resident of Cumilla's Daudkandi.

According to investigators, they are members of an international racket involved in smuggling gold from Dubai to Dhaka and Chattogram. Then the gold was smuggled to India again via Benapole border.

An Indian national, Goutam, maintains the syndicate activities in India, they said.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the CID's investigation report that described the details of the property.

Syndicate member Nasir Uddin owns approximately 261 decimal land across various areas of Jashore districts valued at over Tk 5.51 crore while his wife Bilkis possesses 25 decimal land in another area of Jashore worth about Tk 49 lakh. Nasir's brother Oliyur owns property worth Tk 65,000.

Rezaul owns approximately 7.50 decimal land across various areas of Cumilla, valued at around Tk 4.80 lakh, while his brother Ruhul possesses a private car worth approximately Tk 30 lakh.

Ramzan owns 14 decimal land and property in Jashore and Gazipur valued at around Tk 1.65 crore, along with a private car worth approximately Tk 30 lakh, while his brother Selim possesses 15 decimal land and properties in another area of Jashore, as well as a private car of similar value.

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Hossain, two brothers from the same area; and Ruhul Amin and Rezaul Karim, two brothers from Cumilla's Daudkandi.

Besides the six brothers from three families, CID also found the involvement of Nasir Uddin's wife Bilkis Khatun; and their associates -- Nazmul Hossain, a resident of Sharsha upazila of Jashore; and

BNP has to pay for its mistake
Says Quader

BSS, Dhaka

A w a m i League General Secretary O b a i d u l Q u a d e r yesterday

said BNP will have to pay for the mistake it made by not joining the January 7 polls.

He said this while speaking at a press conference at the AL president's Dhanmondi office. About the AL's special extended meeting to be held today, he said the implementation of the AL's election manifesto requires strong unity in the party.

Upazila, mayoral, and union parishad elections will be held gradually, and all party men should remain united so that no conflict arises, he also said.

Regarding Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, the AL leader said, "As far as I know, he has been granted bail in many cases. A case for attack on the chief justice's residence caused a little difficulty for him. He may be granted bail at any time."

Regarding Khaleda Zia's medical treatment abroad, Quader said, "Let her family submit an application, and then it can be said whether she can go abroad. It depends on how the home and law ministries recommend to this end."



Conspirators couldn't stop war crimes trial
Chief justice tells discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There have been several attempts to obstruct the trial proceedings of war crimes through domestic and international conspiracies, but those have failed, said Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan yesterday.



He said this while speaking as chief guest at a discussion titled "Trial of the 71 Genocides at the International Crimes Tribunal: Success and Challenge" in Dhaka.

Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee organised the event at the National Museum on the occasion of birth anniversary of late National Professor Kabir Chowdhury, a renowned educationist, author and a pioneer in the movement against fundamentalism.

"Trials of the war criminals have been held in independent Bangladesh. A total of 55 war crimes related cases have been disposed of at two international crimes tribunals. Thirty other cases are pending. Punishment for those found guilty have been ensured," he said.

Hassan said the collaborators of Pakistani occupation forces have not stopped as they are trying to save the war criminals and spread propaganda.

He also said the fifth amendment of the constitution, which had hurt the spirit of the Liberation War, has been scrapped and thus the constitution of 1972 has been restored to a large extent, he said.

Nirmul Committee President Shahriar Kabir presided over the event where eminent thespian Ramendu Majumdar, educationist Shahidjaya Shyamoli Nasrin Chowdhury, historian Prof Muntassir Mamoon, and ICT prosecutor Tapas Kanti Baul also spoke. They demanded setting up more tribunals to speed up the trial of pending cases.



Devotees performing Juma prayers beside the Ijtema ground yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Second phase of Ijtema begins

AGENCIES

The second phase of the Biswa Ijtema began on the bank of the Turag in Tongi yesterday.

Usually, the Ijtema begins with "Aam Bayan" (general sermons) by noted Islamic scholars after Fazr prayers and ends with Akheri Munajat (final prayers).

With the participation of the supporters of Maulana Saad Kandhalvi, the second phase of the Ijtema will end on February 11, reports BSS.

The government has taken security measures centring the second phase of Biswa Ijtema.

Meanwhile, thousands of pilgrims boarding buses, trucks and pick-ups from different parts of the country have arrived on the Ijtema ground, reports UNB.

The first phase of Biswa Ijtema ended on February 4 at the same venue. It had started on February 2.

Religious Affairs Minister Faridul Haque Khan on Thursday inspected the Ijtema ground and talked to second phase Ijtema-organisers.

Faridul said a discussion is going on to bring Maulana Saad to the country.

Protect Chunati sanctuary

Demands rights organisation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government must protect Chunati, a sanctuary for wild animals in Chattogram, taking integrated short, mid and long-term plans along with proper implementation, demanded Dhoritri Rokhaya Amra (DHORA) yesterday.

DHORA also demanded punishment for those involved in selling thousands of acres of forest land.

In a media release, DHORA said the natural balance of Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary, an area of Bashkhali, Lohagora and Satkania upazilas of Chattogram and Chakoria in Cox's Bazar, is at risk due to mindless hill cutting, killing wildlife and activities of unapproved brick fields.

Meanwhile, a team of DHORA led by Sultana Kamal, president of its advisory committee, visited different areas of the sanctuary and talked to locals and planted Hartaki saplings on January 26.

After the visit, they observed that this forest has turned into a safe haven for robbers, and drug traders.

Miscreants cut hills and trees, and illegally lift sand from evening to dawn. The areas do not have proper protection. The artificial lake called "Hatimara Krittim Rad", was cut on February 4 after DHORA's visit, the press release added.

Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary was declared a sanctuary on March of 1986. It encompasses 7,764 hectares.

Once this sanctuary held extensive tropical mixed evergreen forest, but most of this has been cleared since the 1980s. This forest is the breeding grounds for a rare variety of Asian elephant and is home to a variety of animals and rare trees, DHORA said.

Enlightening generations for 45 years

Bishwo Shahitto Kendro celebrates anniversary

STAR REPORT

Forty-five years ago, Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed laid the foundation of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro. Starting with only 15 members, the institution embarked on its journey. Today, the institution has over 32 lakh members.

Its journey began on December 17, 1978, with the slogan "We want enlightened human beings".

Marking its 45th anniversary, a day-long celebration was organised yesterday at Banglamotor where the institution is located.

People from all walks of life including educators, politicians, poets, writers, and social and cultural figures were present at the grand event.

At the inaugural ceremony, former advisor to a caretaker government

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Members of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro march the streets, carrying cutouts of doyles (magpie robins) yesterday. The rally was part of the celebrations marking 45 years of the institution. The procession was brought out from the National Museum in Shahbagh to Banglamotor.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON