

Friends arrested over killing of schoolboy

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Police yesterday recovered the body of a schoolboy who was killed allegedly by his friends for ransom in Natore's Naldanga upazila.



Himel

Himel Hossain, 15, a resident of Piprul village, was a ninth grader at Patul Hampania High School.

Police arrested four, including the boy's two classmates and two neighbourhood friends, for their suspected involvement in the killing.

Quoting the victim's family members, police said one of Himel's classmates Sajal Saha Partha, 18, visited Himel's house Thursday afternoon. Then, Himel went out with

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Partha and did not return.

As night fell, Himel's family members grew worried and his father Faruk Sardar filed a police complaint.

Police traced Partha's phone location and detained him. On information given by Partha, police detained three others from the same area.

The arrestees are—Shariful Islam Sujon, 18, Shimul Islam, 18 and another 17-year-old boy, said police.

During interrogation, they [arrestees] admitted to killing Himel by stabbing, said ATM Mainul Islam, additional superintendent of police in Natore.

With information, police recovered Himel's body from a corn field in the area around 1:00am early yesterday, he said.

The four accused planned to demand ransom from Himel's father. But Himel was trying to flee. At one stage, they killed Himel, said Mainul told Journalists yesterday.

The victim's father filed a murder case accusing the four with Naldanga Police Station.



The Siddehswari Lane in Dhaka has been dug for the construction of a drain by Dhaka South City Corporation, leaving the road almost impassable. Local residents, particularly children and the elderly, are enduring suffering due to such unplanned development work.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Israeli strikes kill 42 in Syria's Aleppo

Six Hezbollah fighters among dead

AFP, Beirut

A war monitor said Israeli air strikes on Syria's north killed 36 soldiers and six Hezbollah fighters yesterday, the latest deadly raid on Iran-backed forces in the country since the Israeli offensive in Gaza began.

Israel has launched hundreds of air strikes in Syria since civil war there broke out in 2011, targeting army positions as well as Iran-backed fighters including Hezbollah, an ally of Damascus and Palestinian group Hamas.

"Israeli strikes" targeted "a rockets depot belonging to Lebanon's Hezbollah" close to Aleppo airport, said the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which has a network of sources inside Syria.

It reported "42 killed, including six from Lebanon's Hezbollah group" and "36

soldiers", the highest Syrian army toll in Israeli strikes since the offensive began.

State news agency SANA, quoting a military source, reported that "at approximately 1:45 am, the Israeli enemy launched an air attack from the direction of Athriya, southeast of Aleppo", adding that "civilians and military personnel" were killed and wounded.

Contacted by AFP from Jerusalem, the Israeli military said it would "not comment on reports in the foreign media".

The Observatory also reported strikes targeting "defence factories" controlled by pro-Iran groups elsewhere in Aleppo province.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said the strikes were a "violation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and are a serious threat to regional and international peace and security".

He called the attacks "a blatant and desperate attempt to continue and expand the crisis in the region".

The attack came just hours after a reported Israeli strike in the Damascus countryside.

Syrian state media said "two civilians" were killed in an "Israeli air attack that targeted a residential building" on Thursday, also reporting material damage.

The Observatory said the Sayyida Zeinab area, a stronghold of pro-Iran armed groups including Hezbollah south of the capital, was targeted.

Israeli raids in Syria also seek to cut off Hezbollah supply routes to neighbouring Lebanon.

Israel has exchanged near-daily cross-border fire with Hamas ally Hezbollah in Lebanon since the Gaza offensive began, sparking fears of a major regional conflagration.

Call 999 to report trouble during Eid holidays: IGP

UNB, Dhaka

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun has advised people to call the National Emergency Hotline "999" if they need the assistance of law enforcement during the Eid holidays in Dhaka.

"Dhaka becomes almost empty during the Eid holidays. So, please let us know through our control room number or call (National Emergency Service-999) if anyone is in trouble."

"We will take action as soon as possible," he told journalists after distributing the prizes of the Kirat, Hamad Naat and Azaan competition to the policemen at the Rajarbagh Central Mosque premises yesterday.

"We will take the same measures that we did in the previous years, taking into account all the issues of an empty Dhaka," he said.

"Do not travel at any risk to your life. Travel so that you don't have to face any kind of risk. This is what I request of all passengers."

He said the Eid holiday may be long this time. Along with various places, we are taking measures to keep in mind the safety of all recreational spots.

Regarding the involvement of shohoz.com with black ticket marketing, the IGP said, "We take action as soon as we receive any specific complaint. No one will be exempted who tries to harass passengers."

Indian navy intercepts fishing vessel near Somalia

AFP, New Delhi

India's navy said yesterday it intercepted a fishing vessel in the Arabian Sea after a suspected hijacking, its latest anti-piracy operation after a spate of regional attacks on shipping.

Two Indian vessels had approached the Iranian-flagged FV Al Kamar 786 around 165 kilometres (100 miles) southwest of the Yemeni island of Socotra, not far from the eastern tip of Somalia.

An operation was "currently underway by the Indian Navy towards rescue of hijacked FV & its crew," the navy said in a statement posted on X, formerly Twitter.

The statement added that nine armed pirates were believed to have taken over the vessel. It did not say how many crew members were aboard.

India's navy has been deployed continuously off Somalia since 2008.

BNP remains split

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BNP leaders said there was no scope of joining the polls as a political party as it would give the ruling AL a weapon to say that the BNP has made a blunder by boycotting the January 7 polls.

They said the AL has taken the strategy of not giving nomination to any candidate for two considerations. One is to bring the BNP into the election, thereby allowing the AL to say that the BNP made a wrong decision by boycotting the national polls. The other consideration is that the BNP candidates participating in the polls may end up winning in only a few upazilas, but not being

Those leaders said if the party boycotts the election, it will lose its festive atmosphere and it would be an intra-party election as the contenders will be only from the ruling party.

successful in most, which would give the ruling party a chance to show that BNP's popularity no longer exists.

The issue of the upazila election was discussed in the BNP's last standing committee meeting on Sunday where leaders gave different opinions.

One group said the party should not take part in the polls and should not allow its leaders to contest the elections as independents.

Those leaders said if the party boycotts the election, it will lose its festive atmosphere and it would be an intra-party election as the contenders will be only from the ruling party.

The other group said the party should not join the polls, but if any leaders take part as independents, they should not be barred.

They added that turnout in the local government elections is always high as upazila chairman and vice-chairman candidates usually maintain regular contacts with locals.

Besides, people also consider many local issues in the local government polls and for this, the BNP will find it difficult to keep people away from casting votes, they opined.

The first phase of the upazila polls will be conducted on May 8.

Gas shortage leaves compressor stations inoperative

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Both the compressors require at least 650 pounds per square inch (psi) at the intakes. The compressors are capable of raising the pressure to 1,000 psi, according to the report submitted to the GTCL in the last week of February.

From May 16, 2016, when the Ashuganj station began operation, to the end of 2022, the most it operated in a year was 94 percent of the time in 2019, and has been declining since.

After the Ashuganj station caters to the huge demand in Dhaka and Gazipur, there is not enough gas left for the Elega station to operate, the report says.

In 2023, the average pressure in Elega was 367 psi. When the facility was commissioned in 2016, the pressure was only 4.13 percent of the requirement of 650 psi, it adds.

According to Petrobangla data, around 2,700 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) of gas is supplied to the national grid against a demand of around 4,000 mmcf.

The shortfall persists thanks to the decline in gas production and inadequate import of LNG amid the foreign currency crunch.

As the compressor stations become a burden, the technical committee recommends the one in Elega be used as a gas metering and flow control facility only.

The committee, formed in October

last year, also recommends relocating the Elega station to a suitable place in the southwestern region, subject to LNG import from India after 2026.

Since modifying the compressors to reduce their intake requirement will cost 7.2 million euros, it is not recommended.

Appointing local engineers to run the facilities would lower the operational and other costs, the report observes.

According to the project document, GTCL was supposed to train 25 of its engineers at the ESD Simulation Training Institute in Scotland.

The company's Managing Director Shahnewaz Parvez told The Daily Star that not all 25 officials received the training. Besides, those who received the training eventually did not work at the compressor stations because of their location in remote areas.

"As the salary is much higher in the power sector than the gas sector, some of them switched jobs," he said.

"If we find enough gas, the stations will run as they are supposed to," he added.

Zanendra Nath Sarker, chairman of Petrobangla, the parent organisation of GTCL, said, "Our primary target is to reduce operational costs of the stations. No decision has been made yet."

Prof M Shamsul Alam, vice-president of Consumers' Association

of Bangladesh, said it seemed to him that the compressor stations were built in the first place to embezzle public money.

"They built these without properly measuring the gas flow. It is like the power plants that only receive capacity payments and do not generate electricity," says Shamsul Alam.

Due to such illogical investments, gas transmission fees increased threefold in the last few years, and the general public are bearing it.

"We have nothing to do but seek justice from the Almighty," Alam said.

Iltekaruzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said building the facilities was an inexcusable wastage of public money.

"Question may be raised if the ADB as the source of the lion's share of the investment in the boneheaded project was motivated more by its own parochial interest in money lending business than value for money for Bangladesh.

"Equally depressing is that the only way the government could have fallen into the trap of the multilateral lender was perhaps because there was a vicious collusion of ADB officials with a section of powers that be. Neither can be absolved of the responsibility for the burden of this white elephant," he said.

Many equations on AL's mind

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In Mymensingh's Trishal municipality, Aminul Islam, former joint convener of BNP's youth front Jubo Dal, became elected mayor, defeating the wife of local independent MP BM Anisuzzaman.

Party sources said the upazila elections will help the AL recognise its popular and future leaders. But the AL high-command will not tolerate any violation of party discipline and any statement against the party and the government by the candidates.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the AL president, has already conveyed this message to the grassroots leaders who met her at the Gono Bhaban recently, according to insiders.

However, nepotism by incumbent MPs has already become evident in two recent elections as they picked candidates like a nomination board does.

For instance, the Cumilla City AL declared Tahseen Bahar as the party candidate for the March 9 mayoral

by-polls to Cumilla City Corporation.

Tahseen is the organising secretary of Cumilla City AL, while his father Bahauddin Bahar is the president of the same unit and also the local MP. Local AL leader Nurur Rahman Mahmud also contested the election throwing a challenge to his fellow party colleague.

Speaking to The Daily Star, AL Joint General Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim recently said, "People will vote for the candidates of their choice. It won't matter who would field whom or whether a candidate is the favorite of an individual. It's not important who has picked an aspirant and how. Voters will decide who will be elected."

He also said there is no problem if the voters and the AL activists jointly extend their support to a particular candidate.

"We will appreciate that. We welcome the candidates who are popular among the voters," he added.

Buet students protest BCL gathering on campus

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Later in the evening, the Buet authorities cancelled the allotment of Imtiaz's seat at Titumir Hall and formed a committee to probe the incident.

During the protest earlier in the day, the students also demanded the resignation of director of the Directorate of Students' Welfare at Buet.

They called for a boycott of all academic activities, including the term finals, today and tomorrow.

They said the Buet authorities must clarify why the BCL activists were allowed to enter the campus.

The demonstrators also expressed concern about their safety as the outsiders entered the campus in the middle of night.

In a written statement, they said that after political activities were banned on the Buet campus, it has become one of the safest campuses in Bangladesh.

The ban came after Abrar was killed by some BCL activists, they said and alleged that those involved in the incident are trying to destroy the congenial atmosphere of the campus.

Asked, BCL General Secretary Sheikh Wali Asif Inan told The Daily Star that there may be restrictions on student politics at Buet. But any programme in the name of Bangabandhu can be held anywhere in the country.

"A group of Buet students organised a Shohri distribution programme for the underprivileged late at night, where some Chhatra League leaders attended," he said.

Meat prices up in city

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On March 15, the government fixed the prices of 29 commodities including broiler chicken, beef, mutton, and potatoes at all levels -- from producers to consumers -- but traders are still selling those at higher prices than fixed.

On September 14 last year, the government also fixed the prices of eggs, onions, and potatoes, but even raids by different government agencies failed to enforce the price caps.

People from limited- and low-income families who are struggling to make ends meet due to the runaway prices of essentials expressed dismay over the government's failures to enforce the price caps.

Buet VC Satya Prasad Majumder and DSW Director Mizanur Rahman did not respond to our calls for comments.

Explosions

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(BGB) Teknaf 2 Battalion, said, "In the morning, a large ship was seen across the Naf river in the waters of Myanmar. It could not be confirmed whether it was a warship or some other ship of the country. But the ship moved there before noon."

"But soon after the ship moved away from the Naf river border, there were intermittent loud explosions coming from the other side of Myanmar opposite to St Martin's Island," he added.

There is no connection between these two incidents and the conflict going on in Myanmar's side is their internal matter. People of Bangladesh should not be worried about this matter, he added.

Myanmar's junta forces have been fighting with the rebel Arakan Army for the past few months. Rebels have already shown some success by occupying several important areas and army posts in Rakhine State.

Infighting in Myanmar is rattling the lives of Bangladesh people living along the border.

Amid the ongoing fighting along the bordering areas, a Bangladeshi woman and a Rohingya man were killed when a mortar shell fired from Myanmar exploded in Bandarban's Ghumdhum union on February 5.

Azhar Mahmud, a staffer at a clothes shop at Bashundhara Shopping Complex, who came to Karwan Bazar to buy daily essentials, said, "I came to buy broiler chicken, which is the only meat I can afford. The government fixed the price at Tk 175 per kg, but I could not buy it below Tk 230 per kg at any of the shops here."

He asked why the government fixes the prices of the commodities if it cannot enforce it.

Rashid Milan, an official of an insurance company, said the prices of vegetables are slightly lower compared to last week.

"But there is no relief in the markets as the prices of lentils, eggs, and meat do not come down," he said.