

Another Rohingya man killed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Another Rohingya man was killed by armed criminals roughly 14 hours after a person was murdered at a refugee camp in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar on Sunday morning.

The victim in the latest incident was identified as Zafar Ahmad, 42, a resident of G-9 block of Madhurchhara (Camp-4) refugee camp.

Police said Zafar was an active member of the armed group Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) and that he was killed by members of another armed group Arkan Salvation Army (Arsa).

The incident took place near a hill at S-4B block of Hakimpura (Camp-20) refugee camp around 7:30am on Sunday.

Earlier in the day, Noor Kamal, 29, was murdered at the Balukhali (Camp-18) refugee camp around 5:30am. Sources said he was also a member of the RSO.

With two murders taking place within a 14-hour window, Rohingya people living at the refugee camps in Ukhiya are worried about further gang violence.

Ukhiya Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Shamim Hossain said armed groups Arsa and RSO were fighting to establish dominance in the camps.

As part of that conflict, 10 to 12 Arsa members picked up Zafar from his home house and shot him around 7:30pm.

"Zafar was shot and later attacked with a sharp weapon, killing him on the spot," he added.

His body was recovered and sent to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Police said they were conducting raids at the camps to arrest the criminals.

Sources at the camp said Zafar was associated with Arsa for two years. He left Arsa and joined RSO six to seven months ago. Recently, Zafar has been cooperating with law enforcement agencies and tipping them off about the criminal activities of Arsa.



Displaced Palestinians in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip pack their belongings following an evacuation order by the Israeli army yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Putin orders nuke drills near Ukraine to deter the West

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered nuclear weapons drills near Ukraine, Moscow said yesterday, in response to "threats" from Western officials to deploy Nato troops to Ukraine.

The announcement came as Russian forces said they captured two villages in the war-battered regions of Donetsk and Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine, where outgunned and outmanned Ukrainian troops have struggled to hold the line.

Russian officials in the border region of Belgorod meanwhile announced that Ukrainian attack drones had killed six people and wounded over 30, including several children.

Putin has upped his nuclear rhetoric

since ordering his army into Ukraine in 2022, warning in February there was a "real" risk of nuclear war.

The defence ministry gave no date for the drills, but said they would involve the air force, navy and troops stationed near Ukraine.

It said they were aimed at ensuring Russian territorial integrity in the face of Western "threats."

The Kremlin specified that the exercises were a response to statements by French President Emmanuel Macron and British officials.

"We do not see anything new here," said Andriy Yusov, a spokesperson for Ukrainian military intelligence. "Nuclear blackmail is a constant practice of Putin's regime."

Russia has in recent days hit out at Macron for telling The Economist magazine he was "not ruling anything out" in the West's response to the conflict in Ukraine, including sending troops to the country.

It has also blasted UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron for saying Kyiv has the right to strike targets inside Russia.

"They are talking about the readiness and even the intention of sending armed contingents to Ukraine – that is, in fact, to put Nato soldiers in front of the Russian military," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"This is a completely new round of escalating tensions. It is unprecedented and requires special measures," he added.

SC allows BNP leader Aman to go abroad for treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday allowed convicted BNP leader Aman Ullah Aman to go abroad for treatment.

The apex court ordered Aman to come back to the country and to submit a compliance report before this court by June 9.

A four-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan passed the order following a petition filed by Aman seeking its permission to go abroad for treatment.

AMM Mahbub Uddin Khokon appeared for Aman during the hearing of the petition.

Aman, who has been sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment in a corruption case, in March submitted the petition to the Appellate Division through a lawyer praying to this court to allow him to go to Singapore for treatment at Mount Elizabeth Hospital.

On March 20, the Appellate Division granted bail to Aman in the case in which he was sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment in 2007.

He must however take permission from the court to go abroad, the apex court said in the order.

Later on, Aman got released from jail following the SC order of bail.

HC stays by-election to Jhenaidah-1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday stayed for 21 days the process of holding the by-polls to Jhenaidah-1 constituency, which was scheduled to be held on June 5.

The HC bench of Justice Md Zakir Hossain passed the order following a petition filed by Nazrul Islam Dulal Biswas, an independent candidate who got the second highest votes in January 7 national election, seeking necessary directives.

In the January 7 election, Awami League candidate Md Abdul Hye was declared elected as lawmaker for the constituency. The constituency felt vacant after his death in March.

On April 23, the Election Commission declared a schedule for holding the by-election in this constituency on June 5.

The HC bench has now passed the stay order on the ground that an election petition has been pending with this court, his lawyer Syed Mamun Mahbub told The Daily Star.

He said the HC may hold hearing on the election petition on May 12.

All fires in 23yrs were confined

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fish hidden in the mud were key reasons for the fires in the forest's east division.

They added that influential people control the fisheries in the east division, and some channels and canals are being used for freshwater fish farming.

Locals and some honey collectors, who are often blamed as they make fires to smoke out bees, said the forest in the east division had very little honey and that most of the honey is collected from the west division, which had no fires in the last 23 years.

Abdullah Harun Chowdhury, a

professor at Khulna University, said all the fires occurred particularly between April and May and in a certain area.

The fire-prone area is close to settlements and easily accessible to the people, he said.

"During high tide, water enters the forest along with fish, especially freshwater fish. And in the mangrove forest, one cannot fish with nets. So, they set fire to bushes on the edge of channels and canals and clear the land to collect the fish from the mud."

He added that the forest department can easily prevent such

activities as they can control people's access to the forest there.

Doe, however, said fishermen setting bushes on fire was rather rare.

"They fish along the entire Sundarbans, but the fires don't occur everywhere, only in five percent area of the forest."

Meanwhile, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday informed the cabinet that the recent fire at Sundarbans's east division, which broke out on Saturday afternoon, remains under control. He, however, did not say it was completely doused.

Goods worth Tk 16k imported at Tk 2.63 crore

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The company also said the average import price was within the limit of the purchase agreement.

Mongla Customs House Commissioner AKM Mahbubur Rahman told The Daily Star that the consignment was held as PGCBL failed to give a satisfactory reply regarding the inflated price and submit relevant documents such as LCs and invoices of two previous consignments.

Having failed to have the items released in various ways, the power supplier is now seeking to send back (re-export) the goods on the pretext of a human error in the paperwork, customs officials say.

Mahbubur said they sought NBR's opinion in this regard and are awaiting the regulator's response.

PGCBL signed an agreement with the Chinese company on June 23, 2022, to supply 178.87 tonnes of tower bolts, nuts and washers. Subsequently, the Indian supplier and the Chinese importer fixed the price at \$2.176 per kg, documents show.

Skipper Limited, the Indian supplier, did not respond to our email.

Phone number and email ID of the Chinese firm was not available. This correspondent visited the Dhaka office of the Chinese firm yesterday, but was not allowed in. One staffer at the front desk said they had no comment.

DAMAGE CONTROL?

According to Mongla customs sources, PGCBL applied for re-exporting the goods on March 10 this year after failing to have the shipment released.

The application, signed by Project Director and Chief Engineer of PGCBL

Md Shahadat Hossain, said, "No payment was made to the contractor TBEA Co Ltd for this shipment."

The application also maintains that the goods were imported "by mistake".

However, a customs official said the company has long been trying to get customs clearance in various ways. The project director even appointed a C&F agent to clear the goods.

"After all the attempts failed, the company now claims that the goods were imported by mistake, which is ridiculous," the official said, asking not to be named as he is not authorised to speak to the press.

Customs documents support his view.

Documents show PGCBL appointed a C&F agent named SI Chowdhury & Co to clear the goods and even permitted the Chinese company to use its own Business Identification Number for the import.

Contradicting the company's claim that it was a mistake, the Mongla Customs commissioner wrote to the NBR for its opinion on April 16 this year.

"The statement of the importer that the consignment was carelessly sent to a wrong destination is untrue," the letter reads.

"An explanation was sought from PGCBL when officials concerned noticed the abnormal prices. But its explanation was not satisfactory because it only submitted a sales contract and the proforma invoice. Moreover, although the sales contract stipulates that 80 percent of the import cost should be paid to the exporter through LC, the importer did not file any copy of the LC," it adds.

Shahadat, the project director, told The Daily Star that they have an

agreement with Chinese company TBEA to purchase the goods. It was up to the company how and at what prices it will import the goods from the Indian company.

"We permitted the Chinese company to use our BIN to import the items as we are the customer of the goods," he said.

He would not comment on the inflated price, and asked The Daily Star to contact PGCBL Executive Engineer Fakhrul Islam.

Fakhrul said the high price was a result of "carelessness" on the part of the Indian company.

"We noticed it later and took the initiative to send the consignment back," he told this newspaper.

Md Mahbubur Rahman, first secretary of NBR, told this correspondent on April 23 that he received the letter from the Mongla Customs commissioner.

For any re-export, they first need to verify if the payment for the consignment has been made through banking or non-banking channels. "We also need to verify the import permission that the importer obtained from the commerce ministry. Until we know all these, we cannot determine if the items will be allowed to re-export."

Dr Moinul Islam, a former professor at Chattogram University, said corruption like these are meant for money laundering.

"It's easier to launder money through project contractors than through LCs with banks. There is little accountability, and hardly anyone is held responsible even after getting caught," the economist said.

"Project officials dare to go for purchase of even some tower bolts and nuts at inflated prices since the ruling class itself is involved in corruption," he said.

Sikder family loses grip on Nat'l Bank

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Company. He is the only director in the new board with links to the Sikder Group.

The new board of directors called a press conference yesterday at the NBL head office. All NBL board members were present.

Chairman Khalilur, also the chairman of Chattogram-based KDS group, told journalists that Tk 1,000 crore would be injected into the bank through the shareholders, and the bank would collect Tk 3,000 crore more by launching a campaign urging people to deposit money.

He claimed that the two steps would end the bank's liquidity crisis.

Replying to a question about the merger with UCB, Khalilur said the

board decided not to merge with any bank and also informed the central bank that it would improve its financial health within a short time.

Central bank officials, during a meeting with the UCB chairman on April 9, had decided to merge the UCB and the NBL.

In reply to a question, the new chairman said the bank has not been taken over by any business group, and that they were appointed by the central bank.

Citing an appointment with the BB governor, Khalilur left the head office in a hurry without answering many of the journalists' questions.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director at the Policy Research

Institute Bangladesh, said a new board of directors should not include anyone from the previous board.

The people in the new board should have the money to meet the capital deficit, he added.

At yesterday's press conference, bank officials gave journalists boxes of snacks. A few journalists found envelopes with Tk 5,000 inside each box.

A group of journalists refused to take the boxes and left the NBL office.

One of them told The Daily Star that it was extremely very embarrassing that a bank offered journalists money.

Contacted, NBL Managing Director Md Touhidul Alam Khan refused to comment.

Astronomical rise in incumbents' income

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Sarkar, a vice-chairman candidate in Gazipur's Kapasia upazila.

"Her income was Tk 24,000 ahead of the 2014 upazila polls. It increased to Tk 2,80,000 ahead of the 2019 polls and soared to Tk 44 lakh ahead of this year's election," said a TIB source.

He said the incomes of eight other candidates saw a growth of 1,065-10,074 percent.

According to the report, the income growth of upazila parishad representatives in 10 years was also up to 18,233 percent. It was similar to the increase rate of an MP's income in 15 years, which is up to 20,192 percent.

TIB officials added that moveable assets of upazila representatives rose up to 4,251 percent in five years – higher than the growth rate of an MP's moveable properties [3,065 percent] in the stipulated time frame.

TK ICR ASSETS
TIB Director Mohammad Tauhidul Islam, while presenting the findings, said that in the first phase of this year's polls, a whopping 117 candidates – 94 for chairman posts, 17 for vice-chairman posts, and six for vice-chairman posts reserved for women – have moveable assets worth at least Tk 1 crore.

In the 2019 polls of the same upazilas, 45 candidates owned moveable or liquid assets worth Tk 1 crore or more. The number was 34 in the 2014 polls.

Kamruzzaman Bhuiyan, a chairman candidate of Gopalganj Sadar, has moveable assets worth Tk 25.24 crore – the highest. Meanwhile,

Anwarul Islam, chairman candidate of Rangpur's Kaunia upazila, comes in second with Tk 20.30 crore.

"In our country, politics and public representation are power-oriented. Personal gain often takes priority over public welfare" Ittekkharuzzaman said.

"The pursuit of political power is seen as a pathway to unlimited wealth expansion, resulting in unhealthy competition. Of concern is whether businessmen entering politics are following proper procedures and engaging in fair competition.

"Those who still aspire to promote a healthy, people-oriented political culture are now nearly extinct or marginalised in the face of power politics."

BUSINESSPERSON

CANDIDATES RISING

According to the report, 56 percent of candidates for chairman, vice-chairman and for vice-chairman posts reserved for women in the first phase of the upazila polls are businesspeople, the report said.

The number of businesspersons contesting the 2019 polls in the same upazilas was 53 percent. In 2014, it was 48 percent.

The report said there were 1,723 candidates in the 2014 polls, 1,467 candidates in the 2019 polls, and 1,606 candidates this year.

TIB said businesspersons made up 70 percent of chairman candidates for the first phase of this year's upazila polls; 69 percent of vice-chairman candidates; and 24 percent of candidates for the vice-chairman posts reserved for women.

LAND BEYOND LEGAL LIMIT

Iftekharuzzaman said that according to the law, a citizen can own a maximum of 100 bighas or 33 acres of land.

However, at least 10 candidates have land beyond that limit.

AKM Jahangir, chairman candidate in Bandarban Sadar upazila, has 74.27 acres of land, while Ariful Alam Chowdhury, chairman candidate in Chattogram's Situkunda upazila, has 40.1 acres of land. Six others candidates have land between 40 acres and 51.76 acres.

Yemen rebels dismantle US-Israeli 'spy' network

AFP, Dubai

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels said yesterday they had exposed a "spy" network aiding the United States and Israel and arrested suspected members of it.

The Houthi-run Saba news agency published footage of the detained men, describing them as "spies recruited to collect information and monitor sites operated by the Yemeni (Houthi) armed forces on Yemen's western coast for the benefit of the American and Israeli enemy".

According to Saba, the group had been recruited after the Houthis in November began targeting vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, disrupting global trade in a campaign they say is in solidarity with Palestinians amid the Israel-Hamas war.