



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a meeting with Spanish Ambassador Gabriel Maria Sistiaga Ochoa de Chinchetru at Gono Bhaban yesterday. At the meeting, the premier stressed the need for robust trade and commerce between Bangladesh and Spain for mutual benefits.

RAFIUL ISLAM

At least 41 people were killed in incidents of political violence in the first six months of 2024, which is three times higher than first six months of 2023, according to rights body Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK).

Fourteen people were killed and 2,422 were injured between January and June last year. The number of deaths rose to 45 by December last year.

ASK prepared the report on information based on news reports published in national dailies, alongside its own findings.

The rights body said the killings in political violence increased this year centring the general election on January 7, city corporation elections, and upazila polls held in four phases across the country.

Many opposition parties, including BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, boycotted the polls.

So, the killings mostly took place among supporters of Awami League candidates and independent AL candidates during national polls, while during local elections, they took place among supporters of candidates affiliated with AL.

Besides, the deaths in custody of police and Rab have doubled between January and June this year, compared to the same period in 2023, it also said.

At least eight individuals, including two women, died in custody. One of the victims, Afroza Begum, 40, died in police custody in Jashore's Abhaynagar, hours

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after she was picked up from her residence on June 2.

Family members alleged that police first implicated Afroza in a false drug case and tortured her to death for money. Police, however, denied the allegations.

Thirteen people were killed and 11

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'Happy that I was not put in a cage'

Bail of Prof Yunus extended till Aug 14

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka tribunal yesterday extended bail of Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus and three directors of Grameen Telecom till August 14 in a labour law violation case.

MA Awal, chairman (in-charge) of Labour Appellate Tribunal, passed the order, Khaja Tanvir Ahmed, a lawyer for Yunus, told The Daily Star.

Around 11:00am, Yunus, chairman of Grameen Telecom, along with his three colleagues appeared before the tribunal and filed a petition, the lawyer said.

Talking to journalists afterwards, Yunus said, "The complaints against me are that I laundered money, set up many companies abroad, evaded taxes etc. These are matters for investigation, not for debate. It is a judicial matter... I think I have nothing to say about it."

"The things she [PM] raises as complaints, we have answered those many times... we made a list of 29 Grameen Bank questions and answers

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## One murder, too many questions

3 out of 6 retract confessions; family yet to get authorisation for DNA test; probe into gold smuggling link stalled

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

The detectives have come up with multiple theories since Jhenaidah-4 MP Anwarul Azim Ansar was killed over a month ago.

Initially, law enforcement officials said the MP was killed due to a gold smuggling related feud, placing suspicion on a fellow lawmaker and a powerful businessman -- both allegedly part of the same syndicate as Azim.

The probe into the gold smuggling issue remained stalled. The investigation has taken so many twists and turns since then that it has raised some doubts and confusion in the public mind.

Suddenly, political rivalry came into the mix as a possible reason for the murder following the arrest and confession of Kazi Kamal Ahmed Babu, relief and social welfare affairs secretary of the Jhenaidah Awami League. Suspects appeared and were held from far-flung corners of the country, each with a purported motive for the MP's demise.

Adding to the confusion is the mystery surrounding the remains found in a Kolkata apartment. Though suspected to be Azim's, his family is yet to get the green light to visit Kolkata for DNA tests.

Abdur Rauf, a personal assistant of Azim, told The Daily Star, "We were supposed to go Kolkata on July 3, but we did not get any authorisation. We do not

know when the authorisation will come."

Further complicating matters, three individuals who initially confessed to the crime, yesterday recanted their statements, claiming they were coerced in custody.

Was Azim eliminated in a gold-smuggling power struggle? Was he killed by his political rivals? Or is there something more sinister at play? -- these questions now surround the murder mystery.

**MP AZIM MURDER**

Babu yesterday applied to a Dhaka court to withdraw his confessional statement. He was coerced, he claimed.

Two others, including the alleged killing mission coordinator Amanullah alias Shihul Bhuiyan and his cousin Tanvir Bhuiyan also applied to withdraw their confessional statements over similar reason.

Their confessional statements were pre-written by the cops, they just put their signatures on them due to torture, the three said.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Mahbubul Haque ordered the applications to be kept on record.

Abdul Ahad, deputy commissioner of (Wari division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star that he is unaware of the matter.

Meanwhile, Mustafizur Rahman Fakir and Foysal Ali Sahabi have given confessional statements in the court on Tuesday and Wednesday.

In addition to arranging for their visa, passports and travel arrangements, Aktaruzzaman, one of the masterminds behind the murder, also provided the two with chloroform and other weapons used for the murder through his personal assistant Siam.

The two also cleaned the flat after murdering the MP, said Harun Or Rashid, additional commissioner (Detective Branch) of DMP.

Drives are underway to arrest more suspects whose names are emerging from the investigation, he added.

Azim went to Kolkata on May 12 and stayed at a friend's house overnight. He left the house the next day saying he would visit a doctor.

On May 22, police from India and Bangladesh said Azim was killed in a Kolkata flat.

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## Biman only profits from 11 out of 21 int'l destinations

Reports national flag carrier to JS body

RASHIDUL HASAN

The national flag carrier is only earning profits in 11 of its 21 international routes.

They are: London, Toronto, Dubai, Jeddah, Madina, Riyadh, Dammam, Bangkok, Kathmandu, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines is incurring operational losses in six international destinations -- namely Manchester, Kuwait, Delhi, Kolkata, Guangzhou and Narita.

The other four international routes -- Abu Dhabi, Muscat, Doha and Sharjah -- are gradually turning profitable by reducing the load penalty through coordination of excess baggage weight with airfare.

The airline placed the information before a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on civil aviation ministry yesterday.

Awami League MP and chief of the parliamentary watchdog Sajjadul Hassan chaired the meeting.

Efforts to increase profitability including optimising revenue per passenger, improving on-time performance, and



minimising operational costs were discussed at the meeting.

Besides, how to maximise and utilise newly acquired Boeing aircraft and enhancing passenger service quality were also discussed.

The lawmakers expressed concerns over service quality, flight punctuality issues, and technical faults affecting schedules. They urged Biman management to address these promptly.

Looking forward, Biman aims to expand its network with new international routes to destinations like Male, Sydney, and Seoul, alongside efforts to resume the Dhaka-New York route.

Domestically, plans are underway to introduce new flights connecting major cities including Chattogram, Sylhet, and Cox's Bazar.

Civil Aviation Minister Muhammad Faruk Khan, alongside committee members and Biman officials, emphasised the need for stringent supervision to tackle challenges and optimise operational efficiency.

Discussions also focused on manpower structure and recruitment processes to streamline operations further.

FIRST 6 MONTHS OF 2023, 2024

## Political killings tripled, custodial deaths doubled

Shows ASK report

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## Relatives of MPs dominated UZ polls: Shujan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Wealthy individuals and businessmen with close ties to the members of parliament govern the majority of upazila parishes across the country, said speakers at a press conference yesterday.

This raises concerns about huge power being concentrated in the hands of a few people, they added.

Sushashoner Jonno Nagarik held the event at Jatiya Press Club, presenting an analysis of the sixth upazila parishad election.

They examined data obtained from 470 elected upazila chairmen. It showed 360 (76.6 percent) are businessmen, followed by 48 agriculturists, 19 lawyers, and 15 teachers.



**Out of 470 elected upazila chairmen, 360 (76.6 percent) are businessmen, followed by 48 agriculturists, 19 lawyers, and 15 teachers.**

Additionally, 42 of these chairmen have an annual income exceeding Tk 1 crore.

Shujan highlighted that lower-income candidates had a significantly lower chance of winning, while higher-income candidates had double the success rate. The report also pointed out that the elections were neither participatory nor competitive, with voter apathy being a major issue.

The results might lead to internal conflicts within the Awami League, as around 90 percent of the winning chairmen are from the ruling party.

The report said 114 of the elected chairmen currently face cases, 182 had cases in the past, and 75 have both past and current cases.

Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar expressed concerns about the large amounts of money spent illegally in elections.

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Hundreds of university students thronged the Shahbagh intersection in the capital for the third consecutive day yesterday, protesting the reinstatement of the quota system in government jobs.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON