

UPDF member shot dead in Khagrachhari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

A member of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) was shot dead by unidentified assailants at Santi Bikash Karbaripara in Khagrachhari's Dighinala upazila early yesterday.

The deceased, identified as Junel Chakma, 31, was an organiser of the Tarabunia unit of UPDF (Prasit Group) from Amtoli village in the upazila.

According to Nurul Haque, officer-in-charge of Dighinala Police Station, some three to four unidentified armed assailants broke into the house of Master Lalit Chakma in the Kangarima Chara area early in the morning, where Junel was staying, and killed him.

Upon receiving the information, police recovered the body and sent it to Khagrachhari Sadar Hospital for an autopsy.

"It was not immediately clear who were the persons involved in the killing," said the police official.

Meanwhile, Angya Marma, district organiser of UPDF, accused the reformist Jana Samhati Samity (JSS-MN Larma) and UPDF (Democratic) of being responsible for the killing and demanded justice.

However, both groups refuted the allegation and denied their involvement in the incident.

Junel had recently joined the UPDF from the Democratic Jubo Forum, reports UNB.



With the nine-hour curfew break ending soon, people who've just got off work are in a hurry to return home before the curfew is back on. The result is standstill traffic on the streets, with many opting to go on foot. The photo was taken around 5:00pm in the capital's Panthapath area yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Block raids unnerve city residents

FROM PAGE 1

to identify the troublemakers and trace their whereabouts," an officer said, requesting anonymity.

Law enforcers say these raids are meant to arrest four types of suspects – those who ordered violence, provided funds, supplied firearms and those who took part in the violence.

But locals who witnessed such raids say law enforcers usually look for students, and if they find any, they check their phones, which is a breach of privacy.

"On Friday night, numerous police loaded in five trucks and many police vans and other vehicles cordoned off our area. They ordered students from many buildings to go on to the streets and stand in a single file. The street lights were off, but the headlights of their vehicles were directed at us. They said they would not arrest us this time, but we must leave Dhaka in three days," a student of a top public university said.

As the students said they offered private tuitions to support their education and so they cannot leave Dhaka now, some officers hit them and asked them to "shut up," the student said.

The Daily Star is not naming the student and the area where the raid took place for his safety.

Locals also saw helicopters flying low during these raids in some cases. **'AUXILIARY FORCES'**

On Wednesday night, police arrested Fazlur Rahman, a manager at a courier service, from Manik Nagar during such a raid.

"Police checked Fazlur's cell phone and found a video clip of the clashes. This is why they arrested him," said one of his relatives, on condition of anonymity fearing reprisal.

Biplob Kumar Sarkar, joint commissioner (operation) of the DMP, said they will make sure that no troublemaker can leave Dhaka.

"The miscreants have gone into hiding, but we have been conducting block raids. Besides, police drives are underway day and night in Dhaka. No matter where they flee, we will arrest them," Biplob told a media briefing.

Sources in law enforcement said they already identified several thousand people who joined violence at different points in Dhaka.

A top DMP official said the plan to conduct violence was hatched at least a month ago by opposition party leaders and activists.

For the block raids, areas like

Mohakhali, Mohammadpur, Jatrabari, and Uttara are on top of the list as some of the fiercest clashes took place in these areas.

Left Democratic Alliance (LDA), a platform of eight left-leaning parties; Anti-Fascist Leftist Association, a platform of six parties; and Bangladesh Jasod yesterday said the mass arrest of innocent students and people by flashing searchlights from helicopters during block raids joined in by Chhatra League-Jubo League activists to track down the protesting students and other people brings to mind the activities of Razakar, Al-badr and other collaborators who aided the Pakistani army as auxiliary forces to identify the houses of freedom fighters.

A statement of the platforms demanded "an immediate end to repression, torture and mass arrests, withdrawal of curfew, return of army personnel to barracks and ensure normal environment."

PANIC ALL AROUND

The block raids have created a sense of fear among students and their families in many parts of Dhaka. Many of these families have already left their homes and seeking every opportunity to leave Dhaka, said witnesses.

"Before searching every room, police at first took photos of our rooms and houses and asked us not to talk to anyone about the raids," said Toufiq (not his real name), a university student from Shanir Akhra of Jatrabari.

He said police searched a six-storey building where he lives and vandalised some apartments before leaving the place late on Friday night.

"Many of our neighbours turned off the lights in their rooms so that police believe those flats were vacant," he said.

At one point, police started kicking at the main gate of their building. As the security guard and the houseowner opened the gate, police said they came for two men named Shahjahan and Rezwana, who allegedly attacked cops.

When the houseowner said there were no such people living in the building, several police officers in plainclothes started beating them and hurled abusive language.

"We know you have given them shelter. Tell us where?"

Around 50-60 armed police personnel, some in plainclothes and some wearing DB vests, were there, he said.

"From our balcony we saw some policemen beat up two people for

several minutes, forced them to do sit-ups and made them say they will never participate in protest again," he said.

FEAR OF HELICOPTERS AGAIN

Many families in Jatrabari shared almost similar accounts.

"The local Chhatra League activists also joined the police during the raid and helped them identify houses where protesters live or the houses that provided food and water to them," said a witness to a block raid in Matuail.

A large number of law enforcers carried out raids on different houses in Mirpur 12 DOHS. Many students of different universities located near DOHS live there.

They said that during the raids, they looked for students and police checked their phones.

Witnesses from areas adjacent to ECB Chattar and Matikata area also said law enforcers carried out block raids in their areas too.

Late on Thursday night, a joint operation was conducted in Shaheen Bagh area of the capital. At that time, locals saw helicopters flying low and using searchlights.

"Use of searchlights from helicopters was terrifying," said a witness, recalling the memories of such choppers opening fire on the protesters.

'THIS IS NOT FAIR'

Locals from Bashundhara residential area said law enforcers conducted raids in the posh neighbourhood on Thursday night. Before the raids, police announced that no one should remain out of the house after 5:00pm. As the evening wore on, the presence of law enforcers increased.

A video footage shows members of the law enforcers firing when someone tries to capture the raid from top a building. The video went viral on social media.

In Mohakhali, electricity connection was snapped before a block raid.

Panicked, many families left their homes and took shelter elsewhere for safety.

In Jatrabari for example, The Daily Star found several homes empty.

"Among 22 families living in our building, there are only eight now. All other families have left Dhaka. Those who could not leave are thinking of shifting to someplace else," said a resident in Jatrabari.

"Police are making the common people extremely nervous. This is not fair, and it will not help improve the situation," he said.

provide artificial limbs to those who need them.

During her visit to the Pangu hospital, the PM enquired about the treatment of the injured people.

Nitor Director Kazi Shamim Uzzaman apprised the PM of treatment of the injured.

Health Minister Samanta Lal Sen and State Minister for Health Rokeya Sultana, and former health minister AFM Ruhul Haque were present.

PM VISITS SETU BHABAN

Later in the day, Hasina visited Setu Bhaban to witness the damage caused by the recent violence.

She inspected the vandalised floors and the premises of the building.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader and other senior ministry officials were present.

They briefed the premier about the vandalism and arson attacks that took place on July 18.

Default loans to soar

FROM PAGE 1

However, the actual volume of bad loans is at least three times the central bank figure, according to industry insiders.

Inflation may also increase in the coming days, Bijoy said.

Average inflation overshoot the government's target of 7.5 percent in fiscal 2023-24; it stood at 9.73 percent.

"Not only was infrastructure damaged due to the unrest, but it also damaged the country's image – the country will face a confidence crisis with investors," Bijoy said, adding that the priority now should be to bring the situation back to normal.

The bad loans will increase further as some business people have lost their capacity to repay the bank loans, said Anis A Khan, the former chairman of the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh Ltd (ABB), a platform of banks' chief executive officers and managing directors.

Already, some export orders of the garment sector have been cancelled amid the weeklong unrest, he said.

Banks' profitability will be impact adversely when they will have to keep higher provisioning for the higher bad loans, said Khan, also the former MD of Mutual Trust Bank.

There will be multiple effects on the banking sector and the overall economy because of the ongoing unrest, he said, adding that foreign investors will lose their trust in the country.

"It will be very difficult to rebuild the trust of foreign investors."

The country's economic capacity will be reduced because of infrastructural damage.

"There will be a need for incentive packages for business people but the government is facing a cash crisis of its own. So the overall economic situation is not so good," Khan added.

Borrowers failed to repay the bank loans and other payments amid the internet blackout and curfew, which will adversely affect the banking sector alongside the bank's profitability, said Mohammad Ali, managing director of Pubali Bank.

Last week, Bangladesh Bank

instructed banks and non-bank financial institutions (NBFIS) to refrain from imposing fees or interest on delayed repayment of loan and saving scheme instalments and credit card bills between July 18 and July 25 if they clear their dues by the end of this month.

Banking services were stopped from 9 pm on July 18 for the countrywide internet blackout. From July 24, banking services were resumed on a limited scale, with many banks unable to conduct foreign transactions because of the slow internet.

"There is a lot of uncertainty regarding the economic situation in the coming days because of the recent unrest," said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

There will be a double blow to the economy compared with the Covid-19 pandemic period.

"One will be for the internet shutdown and the other will be for the nationwide curfew. This may adversely impact the country's exports and imports," he added.

2 more in DB custody 'for their security'

FROM PAGE 1

about recent incidents".

This newspaper, however, could not know when and from where the two were picked up.

Earlier on Friday night, Nahid Islam, Asif Mahmud and Abu Baker Majumder – three key organisers of the quota reform movement – were picked up by police from a city hospital, where Nahid and Asif were undergoing treatment.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday claimed they were taken into custody "to find out who were threatening to attack them".

"When we got the news [that they were being threatened] on social media, we took them into custody. We're questioning them to know who were trying to attack them. After questioning, we'll take a decision about them," he told a press briefing at the office of Narayanganj superintendent of police, after visiting the government and private establishments that were set on fire.

About these three also, ADC Junaed said they were taken into custody as "they sought security".

Meanwhile, Harun Or Rashid, additional commissioner of DB, yesterday said Nahid, Asif and Abu Baker will be interrogated.

"We've interrogated Nur [former Ducsu vice president Nurul Haque Nur] and some other leaders after taking them on remand. They told us they had talks with Nahid and other coordinators. We need to know what they talked about," he told reporters at the DB office on the capital's Minto Road on Saturday.

"They [the coordinators] spoke on social media about feeling insecure. One of their fathers too expressed similar feelings. We think it's our responsibility as law enforcers to provide safety and security to those who say they're feeling insecure."

Meanwhile, a delegation of 12

teachers of the University Teachers Networks yesterday went to the DB office to enquire about the three coordinators, but the DB chief did not meet them as "he was busy".

They went there at 4:00pm and waited for around 20 minutes. They left after being told the DB chief was leaving the office.

Speaking to reporters, Professor Gitiara Nasreen of DU's journalism department, said, "When we came here, the head of the office was inside and was also informed. But he didn't meet us. We were asked by others in the office to stop his car when he was leaving and talk to him ... We're university teachers and also the guardians of these students ... Why should we stop someone's car to ask if our students are okay?"

"It's very natural [to expect] that the entire process will be transparent and we'll be told what happened and why. But he didn't speak to us."

She added they went there out of concern for their students after learning from the media that they were picked up from the hospital "for extra security".

Saimum Reza Talukder, a teacher of Brac University's law department, said, "They were picked up on grounds of security issues. But the question is – why should they be in DB's custody? Why were they not returned to their families? A person's safest place is with their family."

"If security is to be provided, then it should be provided around their house and to their families as well."

He added, "We teachers have the right to know where they are now. It's also a matter of accountability to the public. So, the government should open up."

Responding to a question, Samina Lutfa, associate professor of DU's sociology department, said they were concerned about how the students are being treated and their

safety.

"If there was a lack of security, they [the students] could've been handed to us."

About the DB chief not meeting them, she said, "I think it was very rude of him. Twelve teachers were standing and waiting but he didn't get the time. He didn't even tell us himself ... It wasn't right."

FRESH PROGRAMMES

After the five organisers were taken into police custody, three others last night announced fresh protest programmes, including drawing graffiti on walls across the country today.

Coordinators Abdul Hannan Masud, Mahin Sarker and assistant coordinator Rifat Rashid made the announcement in a virtual conference around 9:00pm last night.

They demanded the release of the five organisers currently in DB custody and the withdrawal of the false cases filed against students across the country.

Another demand was "visible action" against those – from ministers to constables – involved in the attacks on students.

They also said a "health force" should be formed in every educational institution at district, upazila and city levels, which will prepare a list of the injured and dead. They must also provide psychological and financial support to the injured and their families.

A legal force should also be formed, they added, to document the many false cases filed across the country and provide legal assistance to those in need.

"If our demands are not met, the anti-discrimination movement [Baishamya Birodhi Andolan] will be compelled to announce a tougher programmes from tomorrow," said Abdul Hannan Masud.