

BNP leader ‘beaten to death’ in Gazipur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Gazipur*

A BNP leader of Gazipur's Kaliganj upazila was beaten to death yesterday.

Deceased Emdadul Haque Aklu served as the president of BNP's ward -6 unit in Muktarpur union under the upazila, reports our correspondent.

At least four people were also injured in the incident.

According to locals, a factional clash between two rival BNP groups broke out in Nashu Market area around noon during which Aklu was killed.

However, Bablu Mia, general secretary of Kaliganj upazila BNP, said Awami League members were responsible for the killing.

He claimed that local AL men in July had abducted Aklu.

"When he was going to a shop, 10 to 15 Awami League men assaulted him and beat him to death," Bablu said.

Kaliganj Police Station Inspector (investigations) Maruf Hossain said the body was sent to Kaliganj Upazila Health Complex.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Garbage collected from homes in Dhaka's Kamrangirchar area is being dumped along the Adi (old) channel of the Buriganga, polluting both the river and the surrounding environment. The photo was taken yesterday in Kamrangirchar's Koylarchat area.

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Flagging drives letting Aedes bite

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HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, said since mid-August, more patients were coming with dengue.

He added that delayed hospitalisation increased the risks.

In Sri Lanka, the case fatality rate was .04 percent in July, thanks to the country's systematic methods and modern health management.

Immediately after detecting a dengue patient, health workers in Sri Lanka update their national data. Actions are taken based on the data.

"Public health teams go to the patient's house, check the

surroundings for Aedes breeding grounds, and destroy if they find any. They also look for other infected people," he said.

The teams also create awareness about how stagnant clear water can be a perfect breeding place for dengue larvae. The teams make a followup visit after a week and take legal action against residents if they find Aedes breeding places again, Nazmul said.

The chief of head of Sri Lanka's dengue management committee is the president and the army chief, ministers and top law enforcement members are also involved, he added. Bangladesh's anti-mosquito

programmes are not coordinated like theirs, he said.

Prof Tahmina Shirin, director of Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control And Research, urged people to consult a doctor if they have a temperature.

Administrator of Dhaka South City Corporation Sher Ali on Wednesday told reporters that larvae-killing drives were conducted regularly.

DSCC teams visit the patients' houses as part of the anti-mosquito programme, he said.

DNCC officials said 10 teams were formed on September 2 to raise awareness and monitor the anti-mosquito drives.

Won't tolerate river pollution

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"We have to set examples and so, we're thinking if we can free one river in each of the eight divisions from pollution and encroachment.

"Whoever works on the issue in future can follow the model. But it doesn't mean we're neglecting other rivers," she said.

The adviser mentioned that the High Court had earlier ordered the authorities concerned to evict 66,000 grabbers.

"We're asking eight divisional commissioners to submit their plans on freeing all those rivers from encroachment."

Asked how the government is going to clean the Buriganga, one of the most polluted rivers in the world, she said, "It's very challenging to make this river pollution-free. I said it earlier as well. It will take a long time to make the river water free from chromium. But we can start the process."

Apart from the Buriganga, many rivers like the Labandaha in Gazipur, the Sutang in Habiganj, and the Hari-dhoya in Narsingdi, are polluted by industrial waste.

To free these rivers from pollution, Rizwana said, they will identify the factories responsible for it and engage locals to protect the rivers.

"I think this is going to be easier for us because there are young generations in all districts who can engage in the process."

If the government officially authorises the organisations that

work voluntarily to save rivers, they will feel empowered and show interest in working on the issue, said the adviser.

So, involving the local community in protecting rivers, like giving responsibility to a group to monitor two kilometres of a certain river, and engaging students in this process will be part of the plan to save rivers, said Rizwana.

She also instructed the Department of Environment to conduct drives against the factories responsible for pollution.

Rizwana said owners of many industries make excuses for not operating effluent treatment plants (ETPs) even if they have ETPs. Sometimes, they run the ETPs the whole day but release polluted water into rivers at night.

"We need some suggestions on how to monitor and stop these ill attempts. I don't think it is impossible to detect and stop them," the adviser said and suggested using separate meters for biological ETPs to detect pollution.

For example, she said it cannot be confirmed without tests whether the Hari-dhoya River in Narsingdi is being polluted as industries are far from the riverbanks.

If the government can provide a meter, it will be possible to find out easily if the ETPs are functional in a particular period.

Rizwana encouraged good businesspersons to lead the next generation by example in refraining

from releasing industrial waste into rivers. "We will welcome them in our initiative."

She said her ministry would sit with the industries ministry to discuss the issue of the Central Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) not functioning properly at Savar Tannery Industrial Estate.

The adviser said she has been vocal from the very beginning that the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation is not the proper authority to monitor the CETP.

"We have to form an expert committee who will work to make the CETP functional," she said, emphasising cooperation between the two ministries.

About blackwater pollution of the rivers, Rizwana said the DoE made a list in 2017 that shows most of the rivers were polluted by sewage. "We cannot stop blackwater pollution within a very short period this government would get. Maybe we'll be able to prepare a plan."

Asked about the priorities and challenges of her work, the environment adviser said this government, unlike an elected administration, would get a short time to address many big environmental issues.

Another big challenge will be to turn the environmental administration to a people-oriented one. "It never took people's views before taking any development project."

Ex-minister Shajahan held, placed on remand

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in Dhanmondi early yesterday.

On August 26, Abdul Motin, father of Motaleb, lodged the murder case with Dhanmondi Police Station against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, Shajahan, and 174 others.

Shajahan is the president of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation, an umbrella organisation of more than 200 unions of road transport workers across the country.

He had a strong hold on the country's road transport sector and played a very crucial role to keep transport services functional amid strike called by the

BNP-led opposition in early 2015. In many cases, the government could not implement its decision to bring discipline and curb road crashes in face of their obstruction, according to media reports.

Shajahan, also the executive president of Bangladesh Sramik Federation, was the lawmaker from Madaripur-2. He was first elected MP as an independent candidate in 1986. From the same parliamentary seat, he was elected lawmaker in the national elections of 1991, 1996, 2001, 2008, 2014, 2018, and 2024 with AL tickets.

The country's transport sector is

allegedly hostage to Shajahan and his activities in this sector posed a threat to road safety and public interest, the media reported on different occasions.

He and his wife's wealth have increased significantly over the last 15 years. His income has also increased.

As per his affidavits along with nomination papers submitted before the Election Commission in 2008, his annual income was Tk 6.85 lakh.

Before the 2024 national election, ex-minister showed his annual income was Tk 2.21 crore, which is almost 32 times higher than that of 2008.

Protests, departures cripple services

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was taken to the DMCH by his family on Sept 1 amid the strike. They had to leave without getting any treatment. "What could be more unfortunate than something like this? The patients and their families suffer ultimately," Dulaf's son-in-law Md Mohsin told The Daily Star.

This reporter's repeated attempts to reach Health Adviser Nurjahan Begum for comments on the current state of the country's health sector after the political changeover via mobile phone calls and messages failed. After the doctors launched the strike, she visited DMCH and promised stern action against those involved in the attack.

At the DGHS, Professor Robed Amin replaced Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, appointed by the previous regime at the height of the coronavirus pandemic amid allegations of widespread corruption in the sector, as acting director general on August 18.

Officials and employees, however, have been demonstrating in front of the DGHS offices in Dhaka's Mohakhali almost every day demanding his removal.

During a visit to the DGHS last week, three banners were seen hanging at the main gate, each reading, "We want the removal of all corrupt officials, including new DG."

On the first floor, seven rooms of top officials were locked. They have been absent since the ouster of the AL government on August 5, said two staffers who were playing ludo on a mobile phone.

"I haven't been able to get into my office yet. I'm doing some work from home. However, not everything can be done from home. Activities of the DGHS are being severely disrupted. We can't do all the hospital-related work," Prof Amin told The Daily Star.

"I'm barred from office even amid the flood situation. I've tried several times but a section of the officers and employees are obstructing me. I'm a victim of injustice."

More than 60 percent of the officials are unable to go to the DGHS, which is hampering services at the hospitals and medical institutions, he said. "This is unfortunate."

Following protests at the National Institute of Preventive and Social Medicine (NIPSOM), the interim government on August 22 replaced its director Dr Md Shamiul Islam with Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, a DGHS additional director who became a household name in the early days of the pandemic with her daily briefings.

Prof Sabrina, too, has been unable to perform her duties at NIPSOM and DGHS since protesting officials and employees declared her persona non grata, accusing her of collaborating with the previous government.

She did not respond to our calls and text messages for comments.

Prof Ahmedul Kabir, additional director general of DGHS, has not been able to enter the Institute of Public Health since becoming its director on August 22.

Prof MA Mannan said he resigned as executive director of the Institute of Child & Mother Hospital at Matuail as he could not enter his office.

Abdul Kader resigned as the principal of Mymensingh Medical College on August 20 amid protests by students and staffers. Prof Md Abdul Khalek was forced to resign as the principal of Rajshahi Medical College on August 12.

Such removals and voluntary and forced resignations of health officials one after another are hampering the healthcare and medical education sector, reducing the activities of hospitals and government health offices by 50 percent, said Bayezid Khurshid Riaz, who was himself forced to resign as the additional DG of medical education.

Public health expert Abu Jamil Faisal said protests and resignations will not solve the problems in the sector.

The protesters should find an alternative method of demonstration

and qualified people for replacements.

"Otherwise, these institutions will not be functional in the absence of guardians," he said and suggested forming a search committee to find suitable people for the sector.

At Dhaka Medical College, principal Md Shafiqul Alam Chowdhury and vice-principal Debesh Chandra Talukdar resigned on August 22 after two-and-a-hour confinement by protesting students to their offices.

The protesters also demanded the removal of pro-AL teachers and officials but later withdrew the demand. Three professors confirmed the matter to this correspondent. Ex-principal Shafiqul, without giving details, said he was forced to resign that day.

Seeking anonymity, an administrative official of DMCH told The Daily Star that they saw the facility being occupied by groups that had been inactive for the last 15 years. "Mostly officials and employees with less political involvement are now at risk."

DAB REPLACING SWACHIP?

The pro-AL doctors' organisation Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad (Swachip) controlled the health sector with great force over the past 15 years. Swachip leaders used to influence recruitments and transfers, apart from doing health-related businesses.

Previously, during the BNP government's tenure, the Doctors Association of Bangladesh (DAB), backed by the party, had similar control over the sector.

On August 8, BSMMU promoted 173 medical officers known as BNP-Jamaat loyalists to assistant professors after their promotion had been held up for years during the previous government's tenure. They are among 213 recently promoted assistant professors. In addition, 31 have become professors and 23 have been appointed and promoted to other posts.

"The Awami League deprived the pro-BNP physicians of promotion.

They have been promoted now without any interview and syndicate approval," said a doctor at BSMMU who sought anonymity.

"This deprivation will not go away. This process is not right. Questions will arise again," he added.

The then BSMMU registrar Prof ABM Abdul Hannan signed the orders on the promotions on behalf of former vice-chancellor Deen Md Noorul Huq. Both were forced to resign, along with pro-VCs Mohammed Atiqur Rahman and Md Moniruzzaman Khan, on August 18.

Asked how the promotions took place without any interview and syndicate approval, Prof Hannan said, "We had to do it under a situation. It had the consent of the VC and pro-VC."

Public health expert Jamil told The Daily Star that partisan politics was prevalent in medical institutions under the guise of professional politics for a long time.

"It won't be possible to reform the sector by keeping Swachip and DAB active," said Jamil, president of the Public Health Association of Bangladesh.

DAB, however, has tried to distance itself from the incidents in the aftermath of the AL government's ouster. The association suspended its BSMMU unit on August 27 "to prevent chaos".

DAB President Prof Harun-Al Rashid told The Daily Star that discrimination had prevailed at BSMMU for a long time. "It has been unfair to those deprived for so many years. Reforms are now underway there," he said.

"A new VC has been appointed at BSMMU. New officers and employees will be appointed too. The DAB committee at the university has been suspended so that no one can create any chaos at this time," he said.

"Politicisation and partisanship are never good. But the previous government did these openly and secretly," said the DAB president.

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water-sharing treaty, which has been in limbo since 2011.

"By sitting over this issue [water sharing], it is not serving any purpose. If I know how much water I will get, even if I am not happy and sign it, it would be better. This issue has to be resolved."

Asked about the interim government's stance on fast-tracking the Teesta treaty, Yunus clarified, "Push is a strong word. I wouldn't say we will push, but we will pursue it. Both sides need to sit down and settle it."

The Teesta water-sharing agreement has faced opposition from West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who has cited water shortages in her state's northern region.

Yunus acknowledged the complexity of the situation, noting that while the Indian central government was prepared to finalise the deal, the state government's resistance has held it back. "This issue predates Bangladesh's independence. It's time to finalise it."

He proposed a humanitarian approach to manage flood crises, even in the absence of a formal treaty between Bangladesh and India.

"When the Indian high commissioner met with me, I suggested better coordination to control flood situations. This can be done on humanitarian grounds, without needing a treaty. Such cooperation would ease the suffering of the people," the chief adviser said.

On the contentious issue of border killings, Yunus strongly condemned the deaths of Bangladeshi citizens along the India-Bangladesh border.

"Killing is not a solution. There are legal avenues for dealing with border issues. Those being shot are not invaders but couriers. This is sheer callousness, and it must stop."

'WILL TRY TO MEET MODI'

Yunus said he will try to meet Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session in New York later this month.

He also revealed his plans to gather the heads of the SAARC nations for a symbolic photo opportunity.

"SAARC was formed for a great cause. It now exists only on paper and is not functioning. We have forgotten the name of SAARC; I am trying to revive the spirit of SAARC."

The chief adviser said South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has not held a summit for a long time, and pointed out the potential benefits of renewed cooperation among the member countries.

"The SAARC summit has not taken place for quite a long time. If we come together, a lot of problems will be resolved," he said.

Modi is expected to address the UNGA on September 26, according to a provisional list of speakers issued by the UN.

Yunus emphasised the need to revive the "spirit of SAARC", stating that the eight-member bloc holds the potential to address many of the region's pressing issues.

SAARC comprises Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Drawing a comparison with the European Union, Yunus noted, "The European countries have achieved a lot through the European Union. We have to ensure that SAARC works.... If there is a problem regarding Pakistan, other ways can be worked out. But the functioning of SAARC must not stop."

On the Rohingya crisis, the chief adviser called for assistance from India and China in convincing Myanmar to repatriate the displaced population.