

17 houses of Tripura community ‘torched’

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bandarban*

Seventeen houses of the Tripura community in Bandarban were burnt down in an alleged arson attack early yesterday.

According to the victims, unidentified miscreants fled after setting fire to the houses at Notun Tonghiri Tripura Para in Sarai union of Lama upazila at around 12:30am on Wednesday.

The attack occurred when the residents had gone to another village for prayers and Christmas celebrations, since there was no church in their area.

The Chief Adviser's Press Wing "strongly condemned" the arson attack on the homes of the Tripura community.

Locals said 17 of the 19 houses of the Christian Tripura community were burnt to ashes.

They said the area had been inhabited by the Tripura community for a long time. But they were forcibly evicted a few years ago by people claiming the area had been leased out to the wife of a police official during the Awami League regime. Those people then planted trees in the village.

Notun Tonghiri Para's headman Paisapru Tripura said, "We've been living here for three to four generations. A group of people introducing themselves as 'the SP's men' evicted us four to five years ago."

The "SP's men" told the locals that Benazir Ahmed, who was the inspector general of police at that time, had leased the area in the name of his wife.

The residents came back and started living in newly built houses there following the fall of the AL regime, the locals said.

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Victims looking for what they could collect from the ashes after criminals torched 17 houses of the Tripura community in Bandarban's Lama upazila early yesterday. According to the victims, the houses were set on fire when the residents went to a church in another village for prayers and Christmas celebrations.

PHOTO: MONG SING HAI MARMA

ACC overhaul

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Other recommendations may include proper implementation of the provisions of the ACC act, which stipulate the functioning of its prosecution team, repealing the controversial Section 54 of the ACC employees (service) rules, and limiting the absolute authority of the ACC secretary to transfer investigation officers, said multiple commission members.

ACC officials and employees have expressed concerns about Section 54 (2) of the service rules, which permits dismissal of employees with three months' pay without a prior notice. Employees argue that this provision undermines their ability to conduct independent and impartial investigations.

Additionally, the reform commission is considering a proposal to establish integrated ACC district offices in all 64 districts, up from the current 36.

It will also make specific recommendations on enhancing the skills of the ACC officials and employees to strengthen the organisation's capacity and efficiency.

Iftekharuzzaman, chairman of the reform commission, said they are on track to submit the report by the deadline.

"We have made significant progress in preparing the report, which will include recommendations for amending laws and regulations to enhance the ACC's effectiveness. The scope of the commission's activities may be expanded as part of these reforms," he told The Daily Star.

He said issues such as the commission's appointment process, the number of commissioners, and related matters are likely to be central to their recommendations.

"There should be a complete overhaul of the ACC, from top to bottom. The reform commission is struggling with the stranglehold of the bureaucracy; institutional capacity; internal governance, including ethical conduct and accountability of the commission ...," said Iftekharuzzaman, also the executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB).

He said the issues of coordination and information sharing between relevant institutions, especially on the high-level corruption and money laundering, remain a priority.

Above all, like any other country, the ACC cannot carry out its duties all by itself. That is why the reform commission is likely to address the question of transformative changes that are needed in the relevant state and non-state institutions in the national integrity system, he added.

38 die in Kazakhstan

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route crashed near the city of Aktau. It belongs to Azerbaijan Airlines," the Kazakh transport ministry said on Telegram.

Azerbaijan Airlines, the country's flag carrier, said the plane "made an emergency landing" around three kilometres (1.9 miles) from Aktau.

The Kazakh ministry said its staff put out a fire which broke out when the plane crashed.

It said 150 emergency workers were at the scene.

Kazakhstan said it had opened an investigation into the cause of the crash, which was not immediately clear.

Azerbaijan Airlines initially said the plane flew through a flock of birds before withdrawing the statement.

"We cannot disclose any investigation results at this time," the office of Azerbaijan's prosecutor general said in a statement.

"All possible scenarios are being examined, and the necessary expert analyses are underway," it added.

Rab claims a coworker killed 7 crew members

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To avoid being caught, Akash hacked his seven other colleagues indiscriminately with the same axe, Major Sakib Hossain, a deputy commander of Rab-II, told a press conference at his office in Cumilla.

The Rapid Action Battalion arrested Akash, 26, who also goes by the alias Irfan, from Bagerhat's Chitalmari on Tuesday night.

The Rab said it recovered a glove, a bag, empty blister packs of sleeping pills, a pair of jeans with blood stains, and seven mobile phones – five of the victims and two of Akash – during the arrest.

In a press release, the Rab said Akash claimed he had acted alone, but the matter could be confirmed after further investigation.

Besides Kibria, 56, the master of the ship, engine operator Salahuddin Mia, 41, helmsman Aminur Munsif, 42, and crew members Sajibul Islam, 29, Majedul Islam Mojib, 16, Sabui, 27, and Rana were killed in the attack. Another victim, helmsman Jewel, 23, survived with critical injuries.

The ship carrying 720 tonnes of urea fertiliser started for Sirajganj's Baghabari from Chattogram on Sunday morning. The killings occurred in the Meghna river when they reached Chandpur.

Akash told Rab officials during primary interrogation that he had purchased three blister packs

containing 30 sleeping pills five days earlier.

Everyone except Jewel fell asleep after having dinner laced with the sedatives on Sunday night. Around 2:00am on Monday, Jewel and Akash anchored the vessel next to eight to 10 other vessels in the Sahara Beacon area of Chandpur.

After Jewel had his dinner and fell asleep, Akash fist hacked Kibria to death around 3:30am, the Rab said.

He later decided to kill the others, fearing he might get caught if they informed the law enforcers about him, Rab said.

When all other anchored ships left for their destinations around 5:30am, Akash started up Al-Bakhera but he lost control of the vessel and at one point it ran aground in the Majhichar area. Akash then stopped a trawler and fled the ship.

Akash had been working in Al-Bakhera for about eight months. The employees of the ship had no leaves and there were delays in their payments, Akash told Rab.

Master Kibria used to embezzle their bills as well, he alleged. The ship's master also used to get angry with crew members without any reason and sack them when he was displeased with anyone.

Akash told Rab that he had asked everyone on the ship to protest, but no one responded to his call. Then he decided to teach the master a lesson,

claimed Rab.

Major Sakib said they were investigating whether there are other reasons or anyone else involved in the incident, reports our Cumilla correspondent.

Responding to a 999 call, a team of river police went to the vessel around 3:00pm on Monday and recovered five bodies from crew quarters and three other wounded crew members, two of whom died later.

Lone survivor Jewel was transferred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. His throat was slit.

Our correspondent from Chandpur adds, Mahbub Morshed Diplu, a partner of the vessel's owner Brishti Enterprise, filed a case with Haimchar Police Station on Tuesday night in connection with the incident.

In the case statement, Mahabub mentioned that Jewel was unable to speak since he had severe injuries in his throat. Jewel, however, was able to write and through writing, he revealed that the ship had nine people on board, including Akash alias Irfan, not eight as reported earlier.

After the incident, police inspected the ship and seized a bloodstained fire axe, a knife, two smartphones, two feature phones, a wallet, Tk 8,000 in cash, a notebook, headphones, and a tablespoonful of curry, among other items, as mentioned in the case statement.

Mahbub told The Daily Star last night that the owners were unaware of how many people were onboard since the master usually hires crew members as per need.

lid on the matter, the dispute got reignited after deputy secretaries and above were given vehicle benefits in 2017.

The Hasina-led government at the time started giving interest-free car loans of up to Tk 30 lakh to each of them. They also received Tk 50,000 per month for vehicle maintenance and were required to repay about half the loan amount.

This benefit, however, was not extended to officials of other cadres.

Officials from the other 25 cadres also demanded similar benefits, but were denied. As a result, they moved their focus to increasing the ratio for promotion to deputy secretary.

After the fall of the Hasina-led government on August 5 and the subsequent formation of the reform commission, officials of the 25 cadres have organised rallies in divisional cities, and held press conferences, roundtable discussions and other programmes to press home their demands.

An official of the information cadre told The Daily Star that the administration cadres not only receive car benefits but also enjoy promotions even when there are no vacant posts.

"Such privileges are unimaginable for officers of other cadres," he said. An agriculture cadre official said after Hasina's fall, there were promotions en masse to the ranks of deputy secretary, joint secretary, additional secretary, and secretary.

Even officers convicted in departmental cases got promotions. "Are the administration cadre officials only ones doing the government's work?" the officer said. An education cadre officer added that 764 former administration cadre officers are likely to get promoted so that they get financial benefits and some of them could get contract-based appointments.

"How do you expect officers of other cadres to remain restrained?"

ACC can't deliver

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the Anti-Corruption Commission, prosecutors, lawyers and judges involved in anti-corruption activities. We are consulting representatives of the civil society, students, teachers and professionals.

We are trying to understand the challenges first. We sought suggestions from people through different channels – the response is very encouraging. We are hopeful that we will be able to complete our work within the stipulated time and submit our report to the government.

DS: When do you plan to submit the report?

Iftekharuzzaman: The stipulated timeframe is January 7. We must submit the report before that. We are currently working on drafting the recommendations. At the same time, we are gathering suggestions from various sources – a process that will continue until next week.

DS: You have often described the ACC as a "toothless tiger". What recommendations would you make to change this?

Iftekharuzzaman: We already knew why the ACC is a toothless tiger. It became even clearer while working on the reform commission. We will recommend how to overcome this situation.

We observed that appointments to the ACC's top positions have been politically influenced from the very beginning.

Subsequent appointments are made through deputation from the bureaucracy, primarily from the administration cadre.

As a result, the ACC's upper tier remains hostage to politicians and bureaucrats.

The extent of mismanagement, inequality and corruption within the ACC is quite severe. These issues won't be resolved overnight, but we will propose some strong recommendations to address these issues.

Furthermore, we are scrutinising the weaknesses in the ACC's laws. When it comes to addressing high-level corruption, particularly money laundering, the ACC alone cannot play an effective role.

Institutions like Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit, the National Board of Revenue, the

Four journos of a newspaper injured in attack

UNB, Dhaka

Four journalists, including the editor and managing editor of the Janabani newspaper, were injured in an attack by criminals near their office in the capital's Banglamotor area yesterday afternoon.

The incident took place around 4:30pm when the journalists were on their way to the office.

The injured include Shafiqul Islam, editor and publisher of Janabani, Managing Editor Raju Ahmed Shah, Special Correspondent Bashir Hossain Khan, and online editor Ataur Hossain.

According to Bashir Hossain, a group of 20-22 men ambushed them.

"At first, we could not comprehend the situation. It appeared to be a pre-planned attack. We did not recognise any of them," he said.

He further mentioned that earlier a person named Ramzan had come to the Janabani office and threatened the staff.

The attackers reportedly first inquired about their names before launching the assault. "The way they came at us suggested that someone had directed them to attack us," Bashir added.

Criminal Investigation Department and the Attorney General's Office are supposed to collaborate and coordinate efforts. However, this hasn't been the case. Instead, unhealthy competition has persisted.

DS: All ruling parties have used the ACC as their tool. How do you think you will address this?

Iftekharuzzaman: Corruption on a large scale happens due to the collusion between political parties, bureaucrats and business interests. This collusion must be dismantled.

While the ACC act allows such dismantling, it is not enforced – we will recommend steps to ensure the enforcement. Additionally, we need to ensure not only the ACC's complete independence but also its accountability and transparency.

Currently, the ACC submits an annual report to the president, which serves as little more than a collection of statistics.

There is no clear explanation of the types of complaints the ACC receives and why some complaints are rejected or why others are accepted. We will address these issues as well.

DS: After the 1990s and again during 2007-08, we saw many reform proposals. How confident are you that your recommendations will be implemented?

Iftekharuzzaman: When we took this responsibility, this was the exact question the entire commission and I had: will our recommendations remain merely paper documents?

If our recommendations lead to the establishment of a legally empowered ACC that adheres to ideal and global standards, then I can be optimistic.

However, for this to happen, positive changes must occur in politics, bureaucracy and business sectors. Without such changes, we cannot achieve an ideal ACC. Even an ideal ACC cannot deliver without changes in political and bureaucratic culture.

That being said, I am hopeful about positive outcomes.

The momentum created by the movement against inequality has provided us with a unique opportunity, which makes me optimistic.

But once again, breaking the collusion among these three sectors is crucial.

Pak air strikes kill 46

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condition of anonymity.

A Taliban defence ministry statement late yesterday condemned the strikes, calling them "barbaric" and a "clear aggression".

"The Islamic Emirate will not leave this cowardly act unanswered, but rather considers the defence of its territory and sovereignty to be its inalienable right," the statement said, using the Taliban authorities' name for the government.

Skirmishes on the frontier followed deadly air strikes in March by Pakistan's military in the border regions of Afghanistan, which Taliban authorities said killed eight civilians.

A Barmal resident, Maleel, told AFP yesterday's strikes killed 18 members of one family.

"The bombardment hit two or three houses, in one house, 18 people were killed, the whole family lost their lives," he said.

He said a strike killed three people in another house and wounded several others, who were taken to hospital.

Taliban officials said the dead were local residents and people who had fled over the Pakistan border from the