

Bangladeshi teen ‘shot by Indian Khasias’ dies

STAR REPORT

A 16-year-old Bangladeshi teenager died yesterday after being shot allegedly by members of India’s Khasia community along the Bangladesh-India border near Jaintiapur upazila of Sylhet.

The incident occurred around 12:30pm near the upazila’s Minatila area.

The victim was identified as Md Maruf Mia, son of Md Shahabuddin of Jhingabari village in Jaintiapur upazila.

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB 48) Sylhet Battalion confirmed the matter at a press brief following the incident, reports Prothom Alo.

According to the BGB, Maruf was shot by the Khasia people while he, along with several others, attempted to cross the border illegally into India in the afternoon.

He was later rescued and taken to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College, where he died from his injuries around 3:00pm, reports UNB.



Ignoring the nearby footbridge, jaywalkers cross the busy Satmasjid Road in the capital’s Dhanmondi, putting themselves and other road users at risk. The photo was taken on Tuesday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Four held over arson attack on houses of Tripura community

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested four people over the incident of arson, in which houses of Tripura community in Bandarban’s Lama were torched early Wednesday.

The arrestees are Stephen Tripura, Joachim Tripura, Mong She Ma Tripura, and Md Ibrahim, said Shahidullah Kawser, superintendent of Bandarban police.

An elderly person of the Tripura community filed a first information report (FIR) accusing six rival Tripura Christian community members and a Bangalee over the incident, said a press release of the Chief Adviser Office’s press wing.

Preliminary police investigations have found that the arson could be linked to a long-running rivalry between two groups of Tripura community members, the release said.

Police are seriously probing the incident and have stepped up efforts to arrest the culprits, it said.

CHT Affairs Adviser Supradip Chakma is scheduled to visit the affected community in Notun Tongjhiri Tripura Paratoday.

The district authorities have provided immediate food and relief materials to the families. They said the affected families have permanent homes in a nearby village in Lama upazila, and the torched homes were their makeshift “Tong” homes, said the CA press wing.

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Govt issues

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gather around the Kakrail Mosque today (Friday).

The home ministry has issued two gazette notifications to that end, both signed by Deputy Secretary Israt Jahan.

According to the gazettes, the instructions are aimed at maintaining peace and security at the Kakrail Mosque, the centre of Tabligh activities in Bangladesh.

Kazi Mohammad Saiful Islam, joint secretary (political-2 branch) of the Public Security Division of the home ministry, told The Daily Star, “The restrictions have been issued only centring the Kakrail Mosque.”

Earlier on Tuesday, Zubair followers announced they would hold an indefinite sit-in in Kakrail area from yesterday to press home three demands, including a ban on Tabligh activities by Saad followers. They also announced they would not allow Saad followers to carry out any activities at the Tongi Jitema ground and the Kakrail Mosque.

Tension has been brewing since three people were killed in a clash between the two factions of Tabligh Jamaat in Tongi on December 18.

That day, Home Adviser Lt Gen (retired) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury held separate meetings with the leaders from both groups. The Saad group was led by Reza Arif and several others, while the Zubair followers were led by Mamunul Haque, secretary general of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis.

This year, the first phase of the Biswa Jitema is set to be held from January 31 to February 2, and the second phase from February 7 to 9.

State intelligence agency

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Rizvi said former prime minister Sheikh Hasina used intelligence agencies to intimidate opposition figures from the grassroots to the national level.

“She tried to eliminate the BNP from politics to pave the way for forming another political party. For 16-17 years, Sheikh Hasina used intelligence agencies to weaken and break the BNP.”

The senior BNP leader also raised concerns about the recently passed Cyber Security Ordinance 2024, viewing it as an extension of the controversial Digital Security Act.

He criticised the law for granting excessive powers to law enforcement agencies, posing a significant threat to freedom of speech.

Senior BNP leader Nazrul Islam Khan expressed his displeasure with the interim government’s criticism of political parties.

He questioned the legitimacy of such criticism from individuals who are not actively involved in politics.

Rizvi also raised concerns about a fire that broke out at the Secretariat while the government was seeking documents related to former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her associates.

He suggested that the fire was suspicious and may have been an attempt to destroy evidence.

In a separate statement, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir expressed deep concern over the Secretariat fire and demanded a thorough investigation to bring the culprits to justice.

He emphasised the importance of compensating the families of the deceased and injured in the incident.

Draft fails to shake off ghosts of the past

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harmful speech against religion. Hate speech must be well-defined in the law so that it does not get combined with any other issues, and it does not get abused.”

The draft also enables a supervisory body, National Security Agency, to block any content that poses a threat to national solidarity, the nation’s economic activities, national security, defence, religious values, public order, or incites racial hatred or animosity.

Law enforcers can also request the agency to block such information.

Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory officer at Robi Axiata Ltd, said, “It is unfortunate to observe that several recommendations from the industry stakeholders have not been accommodated in the draft. Expanding the capacity of content blocking through organisations under the ICT division will create the scope for misuse of power.”

Under the proposed law, a National Cyber Security Council led by the chief of the government is to be formed. The council will include relevant ministers and law enforcement agency heads as its members.

The council can directly issue instructions to the agency to take action.

Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, the policy adviser of the Information Technology Division, and one of the authors of the ordinance, said, “The risk of such clauses being misused or abused remains.

“It is very important for the political

settlement to be such that the implementation of the law happens based on civility and human rights.”

Sabhanaz Rashid Diya, executive director of Tech Global Institute, said, “... These provisions legitimise surveillance and transnational repression, both of which were disproportionately abused by the Awami League government for extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.

“The ordinance fails to address any structural issues around censorship, surveillance, consolidation of state powers, and discretionary powers given to law enforcement and intelligence agencies.”

Taiyeb argues that the draft includes checks and balances to ensure that overreaches are challenged. “The ordinance allows search and arrests without warrants, but they [accused] have to be produced before a court within 24 hours. This is to protect against enforced disappearance.”

As per the draft, the accused can go to court and declare their lack of trust or confidence in an investigating officer.

In addition, the draft mandates that it is up to a magistrate to decide if a case has the merit for a judicial process.

This is a departure from the previous two laws under which cases could be filed against individuals and arrests made without the involvement of a magistrate, and all cases would end up at court.

The draft recognises that women and children are particularly vulnerable in cyberspace and proposes

harsh penalties for those perpetrating crimes against them.

Sexual harassment in cyberspace now carries a jail term of three years and a fine of Tk 20 lakh.

Taiyeb said, “We have also included a provision allowing aggrieved persons to seek compensation from the person who has harmed them. There is no upper ceiling on the compensation that can be sought, and the cyber tribunal can decide on the amount depending on the severity of the harm caused.”

The draft includes a section that penalises e-commerce websites for extorting money from customers and defrauding them. This offence is non-bailable.

Bail would be denied in cases filed in connection with hacking, data theft, or destroying critical infrastructure.

The draft ordinance defines “cyber-terrorism” as illegal access to any system that threatens the country’s diplomatic relations with another state, acts intended for espionage or for serving the interests of any particular group or individual.

This offence is non-bailable.

Cryptocurrencies remain outlawed.

Critics pointed out that no real stakeholder engagement happened before this draft was approved.

Sabhanaz said that allowing only three days to comment on the draft, not holding any meaningful dialogue with stakeholders, and not ensuring transparency on decision-making reflect poorly on the government the mandate of which is to make critical reforms.

Documents of 5 ministries, divisions burned

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units started arriving. We also saw flames in the electric cable duct,” one of them said.

Before daybreak, 19 fire engines rushed to the spot, but only 10 could work simultaneously because the remaining trucks could not enter the premises.

The blazes were put out around 11:45am, officials said.

Firefighters who visited the building later in the day said water and ash were everywhere.

Most rooms on the top four floors had been fully or partially destroyed, said several officers who are not authorised to talk to reporters.

Everything inside most of the rooms has been reduced to ashes, and in places, wall plasters had come off.

Ministries and divisions on the five bottom floors were partially damaged only by the water sprayed by firefighters, not the fire itself.

Director General of Fire Service and Civil Defence Brigadier General Muhammad Jahed Kamal told reporters at the scene that most of the rooms were locked, making the firefighters’ job harder.

The fire service had earlier urged the authorities to widen the entrance

to the Secretariat complex, said an official, adding that the plea fell on deaf ears.

Four firefighters were injured at the scene, officials said.

Many officials and employees of the Secretariat arrived early in the morning after learning about the fires.

Most of them left after 12:30pm. Only Gate-5 was opened for them.

“There is no electricity in most of the buildings. Although the work hours have not ended, we are leaving,” said an officer of the disaster management ministry.

Home Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said the cause of the fire can be confirmed after probes are done.

PROBE BODIES

A seven-member committee headed by Mohammad Khaled Rahim, additional secretary (district administration) of the Cabinet Division, was formed to find the cause of the fires, whether anyone was responsible, assess the damage, and make recommendations to prevent future incidents.

The committee has been asked to come up with a report in seven days.

Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan told a press conference at Foreign Service Academy that another high-powered committee,

headed by the home secretary, had been asked to investigate and make a primary report in three days.

The final report will be made public, she said, “We will have to wait for the probe report to know whether it was a human made disaster or not.”

Home Adviser Jahangir said around 560 people, including law enforcers, work in shifts to ensure security at the precinct.

Several advisers visited the building. Students Against Discrimination, a platform that spearheaded the July mass uprising, termed the fires an act of sabotage orchestrated by corrupt bureaucrats who are allies of the previous regime.

This was an attempt to undermine the goals of the uprising and stall ongoing reforms, it said in a statement.

Bangladesh Administrative Service Association called the fire an act of unprecedented arson.

Supporters of Sheikh Hasina’s regime still work at the Secretariat. An investigation should be undertaken to find out if they were involved in any way, said a press release from the association.

It must be investigated whether the fires were caused by those trying to destabilise the government.

In the second case, Nasrul’s wife, Seema Hamid, is accused of possessing illegal assets worth Tk 6.99 crore and conducting unusual and suspicious transactions of Tk 12.78 crore via 20 bank accounts.

In the third case, his son, Zareef Hamid, possessed assets worth Tk 20.88 crore that is inconsistent with his declared sources of income. Additionally, suspicious transactions of Tk 27.71 crore were discovered through 20 bank accounts under Zareef’s name during the ACC investigation.

The ACC launched its inquiry against Nasrul on August 22. Nasrul went into hiding after August 5.

Firefighter Nayan, a family’s only hope, gone too soon

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Since the news of her son’s death reached her ears, Nargis has been inconsolable, unable to come to terms with the loss of her only son.

In their village too, a pall of gloom had taken over.

Local Union Parishad Member Ziaul Haque Jewel told The Daily Star, “They [Nayan’s family] had little to their name after losing their home to river erosion. With great difficulty, they supported Nayan’s education. His job had brought a glimmer of hope, but it didn’t last long.”

Tarikul Islam Sarkar, chairman of the parishad, said Nayan’s death has devastated the family. “They are very poor. I strongly urge the government to extend all possible support to them in this time of need.”

On duty to extinguish the fire at the Secretariat, Nayan, a firefighter of the special team of Teigaon Fire Station, was crossing the road to connect a water pipe to a pump when the speeding truck hit him from behind. He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

After attending Nayan’s funeral at the Fire Service and Civil Defence Headquarters in the capital’s Bangabazar area yesterday afternoon, Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said Nayan was

transferred to Dhaka from Sylhet’s Bishwanath Fire Station because of his exceptional skills.

“Allah will grant him the status of a martyr. He was an outstanding firefighter, which is why he was selected for the special team in Dhaka. Let us pray for him.”

Before the ceremony, the advisor and fire service officials placed floral wreaths on Nayan’s coffin.

After the fire broke out at the Secretariat, traffic on adjacent roads was halted and law enforcers were stationed. The truck, however, managed to access the area and sped through the road, fatally injuring Nayan in the process.

“That the truck was there at that time was a failure on our part. It shouldn’t have been allowed on that road,” Jahangir said.

The driver, Belal Hossain Suman, 35, and his assistant, Farhad, 20, were apprehended by locals and handed over to police. A case has been filed under the Road Transport Act in this regard.

The adviser promised justice and support for Nayan’s family.

“One of our own men has died. This is indeed my failure. Many may forget this incident, but his parents never will. We’ll ensure they are looked after and given support in this difficult time.”

Manmohan Singh no more

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to a statement by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

Singh was twice prime minister in the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government from 2004 to 2014.

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and her mother Sonia Gandhi reached the hospital soon after the news of Singh’s hospitalisation broke.

Singh, who was the finance minister under the then prime minister PV Narasimha Rao, was the architect and the brainchild of economic reforms in 1991 that pulled India from the brink of bankruptcy and ushered in an era of economic liberalisation that is widely believed to have changed the course of India’s economic trajectory.

Singh is credited with having overseen an economic boom in Asia’s fourth-largest economy in his first term, although slowing growth in later years marred his second stint.

Born in 1932 in the mud-house village of Gah in what is now Pakistan, Singh studied economics to find a way to eradicate poverty in the vast nation and never held elected office before taking the nation’s highest office.

His life was a testament to service, scholarship, and leadership.

He earned a Master’s degree in Economics from Panjab University, Chandigarh, and obtained a doctorate from the University of Oxford.

Singh’s village, where he was born, lacked a school, healthcare, and electricity, forcing him to walk miles to an Urdu-medium school and study by kerosene lamp at night.

He attributed his rise to the “system of scholarships” for poor students that existed at the time.

Singh worked in a string of senior civil posts, served as a central bank governor and also held various jobs with global agencies such as the United Nations.

Amid one of the worst financial crisis in India’s modern history,

Congress PM Narasimha Rao appointed him as finance minister to pull the country back from the brink. And he did exactly that.

Later, in his first term as PM, Singh steered the economy through a period of nine-percent growth, lending the country the international clout it had long sought.

He also sealed a landmark nuclear deal with the US that he said would help India meet its growing energy needs.

Known as “Mr Clean”, Singh nonetheless saw his image tarnished during his decade-long tenure when a series of corruption cases became public.

Several months before the 2014 elections, Singh said he would retire after the polls, with Sonia Gandhi’s son Rahul earmarked to take his place if Congress won.

But Congress crashed to its worst-ever result at that time as the Bharatiya Janata Party, led by Modi, won a landslide.

Singh – who said historians would be kinder to him than contemporary detractors – became a vocal critic of Modi’s economic policies, and more recently warned about the risks that rising communal tensions posed to India’s democracy.

Singh paid an official visit to Dhaka in September 2011, a trip that was overshadowed by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s opting out of it at the eleventh hour opposing the Teesta river water-sharing accord which, as a result, could not be signed.

Singh contested Lok Sabha elections only once from the South Delhi constituency in 1999 and suffered defeat. After that, he never again ran for the Lok Sabha poll.

However, Singh has been a member of the Rajya Sabha since 1991, where he was the Leader of the Opposition between 1998 and 2004.

In April this year, he retired from Rajya Sabha, the upper House of parliament.