

Man lands in jail for vandalising idols, theft

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A man was sent to jail yesterday on charges of vandalising idols and looting money, gold ornaments from the Sri Sri Gauranga Mahaprabhu temple in Moulvibazar's Barlekha.

Suspect Zakir Hossain Tipu, 31, was arrested shortly after the incident, said Barlekha Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Abdul Qayyum.

Kripasindhu Dutta, president of the temple (Sevashram) in the Aditya Mahal area, filed a case with the police station.

The OC said Barlekha police detained the suspect within three hours of the crime. Some of the stolen money and ornaments have been recovered.

Tipu confessed to the crime during initial questioning, the OC said, adding that a court later sent him to jail.

Tipu entered the Sevashram premises during morning prayers. As he attempted to enter the temple, the temple priest, Leela Rani Dutta, stopped him and questioned whether he had bathed according to the temple's protocol.

Tipu then struck Leela on the head and vandalised two idols of Mahaprabhu. He also looted cash from the donation box and gold and silver ornaments from the idols before fleeing on a motorcycle.



Workers unloading goods from a truck blocking the Sadarghat Gabtali Road near Ahsan Manzil. The road sees persistent traffic congestion due to this activity. Additionally, the footpath remains occupied during the loading and unloading process, further hindering pedestrian movement. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

20 migrants missing off Italy's Lampedusa after shipwreck

AFP, Rome

Twenty migrants were missing Tuesday off the coast of Italy's Lampedusa in a shipwreck in which seven people, including an eight-year-old Syrian child, were rescued, news media reported.

Among those missing were five women and three children, Italian news agency ANSA reported, with the mother of the eight-year-old among those unaccounted for.

Searches were under way by the coast guard and police, who were not immediately available for comment.

The boat had departed from Libya and those rescued were two Syrian men, two migrants from Sudan, two from Egypt and the child, according to ANSA.

"They didn't manage to touch the ground," Lampedusa Mayor Filippo Mannino was quoted as saying by ANSA.

"I hope so much, I say it every time, but today, coinciding with the end of the year, it's a very strong hope, that this tragedy will really be the last," Mannino said.

Last month, Italy's government pledged to push ahead with a contested plan to detain asylum seekers in centres built in Albania and said it would work with allies on "innovative" ideas to curb flows of irregular migrants into Europe.

Dhaka-Delhi ties won't get stuck on single issue

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if India refuses to return former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, Touhid said the two countries have many bilateral issues and this is just one of them.

"We have many issues of mutual interest. We will deal with those simultaneously," said the adviser.

On December 23, Dhaka sent a diplomatic letter (note verbale) to Delhi seeking the extradition of Hasina. The interim government is yet to receive a reply from the Indian side.

BILATERAL VISIT TO CHINA

Meanwhile, the foreign adviser said he would pay a visit to China on January 20 to discuss bilateral issues.

"Our relationship with all the three countries [India, China, US] is important. I am going there on China's invitation," he said.

Touhid, however, did not go into details about the issues to be discussed during his visit to China.

He said Foreign Secretary Md Jashim Uddin has convened an inter-ministerial meeting to fix the agenda.

TIES WITH INDIA, CHINA, US

Touhid said maintaining strong ties with India, China and the United States are Bangladesh's priorities.

"We want good relations with our neighbour. We want good relations with the United States. We also want good relations with China," he said, referring to mutual interest Bangladesh shares with these three countries.

Touhid hoped that ties with these countries will improve and strengthen by the end of the year.

Touhid said the country can expect better days as some sort of stability has returned to Bangladesh after the recent turmoil.

He also said things will become smoother in terms of economic and foreign relations.

Touhid said the Rohingya issue will be very challenging considering the ground reality. He said their aim is to make sure the Rohingyas can return to Myanmar with safety and dignity.

ACC seeks info on govt employees

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Banking Companies Act, 1991, according to the letter.

The laws are applicable to all government employees, it said.

Meanwhile, the ACC has found evidence of unexplained wealth amounting to Tk 146 crore belonging to former law minister Anisul Huq.

He acquired the wealth from December 1, 2014, to December 16, 2024, by abusing his power, according to the statement of a case lodged yesterday by ACC Deputy Director Md Jahangir Alam at its integrated district office in Dhaka.

Besides, evidence of suspicious transactions of Tk 665 crore has been uncovered.

He deposited Tk 349.15 crore and withdrew Tk 316.49 crore from 29 bank accounts through shady transactions, according to the case statement.

In another development, the corruption watchdog filed a case against ex-Awami League lawmaker Shahidul Islam Bakul on charges of possessing illegal assets worth Tk 2.27 crore and conducting unusual and suspicious transactions of Tk 29.14 through eight bank accounts.

Gap widening between BNP, interim govt

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unelected government cannot stay for a long time under the pretext of reform," Fakhrul said.

On December 23, Fakhrul at a rally in Thakurgaon said people would have to take to the streets again for the right to food and vote.

BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said, "The most important issue is the upcoming election, but there has been no discussion with us on this matter."

The party also came down heavily on the way the government was handling politically motivated cases.

Several BNP leaders pointed out that cases against Prof Yunus were quickly withdrawn, but those filed against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and acting chairman Tarique Rahman remain unresolved.

Moazzem Hossain Alal, an adviser to the BNP chairperson, claimed that the government positioned itself as pawns in a political game.

The party is also concerned that the interim government may support the formation of a new political party by leaders of the Students Against Discrimination.

BNP Standing Committee Member Salahuddin Ahmed said, "A new political party is always welcome, but it should not be formed with government support."

He said, "Being an adviser you do politics from within the government. And you'll form a party and waste time for the sake of it and keep making excuses until you are ready for elections. People understand what you are doing."

The BNP held discussions with leaders of like-minded parties on December 21 last year and expressed concerns over the government's potential involvement in forming a new political party.

It recently criticised comments of advisers Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan and Syeda Rizwana Hasan. The

two had said that the politicians in the past failed to carry out reforms.

Some demands made by the Students Against Discrimination, like "proclamation of July uprising," banning the Awami League, and removing the president, irked the BNP.

According to party sources, Fakhrul met Prof Yunus on Sunday and warned that making the proclamation without consulting political parties could lead to chaos and instability.

The BNP believes that the label "proclamation" should be avoided in any announcement regarding the mass uprising.

The party's top leaders want such a declaration to acknowledge not only the July uprising but also the struggles and sacrifices made by people over the last 16 years.

According to party leaders, the BNP is determined to ensure that the next election is held this year.

Govt's failure to prioritise reforms

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He explained that reforms are an inevitable and continuous process to make the existing system more relevant and up-to-date. "Similarly, elections are the most important and effective way to make the democratic system sustainable and institutionalised."

He said the opportunity to exercise the right to vote through elections ensures the political power of both the state and the people. "BNP believes that if the political and economic power of the people in the state is not secured, democracy, human rights, or political reforms will ultimately not be sustainable."

Tarique said the important reform initiatives taken by the government are undeniably needed. "But if the daily suffering of the people is ignored under the guise of these reform programmes, the people may be forced to speak out in anger about the government's reform initiatives."

The BNP leader pointed out that people were already questioning what steps the government took to dismantle the market syndicate created during the Awami League regime and bring the prices of essentials within the purchasing capacity of the people.

He also questioned why people still have to crowd the courts daily to deal with the lakhs of cases filed during the previous government's rule.

Mentioning that there is no reason to be worried if a few more political

parties emerge in Bangladesh, Tarique said those who fear the people's verdict are spreading confusion about the next national election.

"More new political parties may emerge in the country, if necessary. This is a democratic practice and there is nothing to be upset about. BNP welcomes all democratic initiatives that serve the needs of the state and politics," he said.

Addressing the discussion at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, Tarique said the BNP has always favoured the practice of multi-party politics and diverse opinions.

"BNP's stance is very clear – the people will give their verdict through the election, determining which party they accept or reject. But those afraid to face this verdict or who have ulterior motives create confusion about the arrangement of election," he observed.

As the "chief of the Awami League's mafia regime" has fled the country, he said, it is now time for every political party to make efforts to transform Bangladesh into a democratic and humane country, free from discrimination, in line with people's desires, Tarique said.

To achieve this goal, the BNP leader said, the political parties must now present their respective political programmes and ideologies to the people, seeking public support in accordance with democratic practice.

The BNP's student front JCD

observed the day with various activities, including placing a wreath at the grave of party founder Ziaur Rahman, organising a blood donation camp at the IEB, and holding an inter-hall badminton competition at Dhaka University.

Addressing the programme, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir hoped that the government would hold a credible election by completing the necessary electoral and financial reforms.

He said BNP seeks reforms, as the party was founded on the principles of state reforms and the introduction of multi-party democracy.

"It is not true that BNP does not want reforms. We have presented reform proposals at various times. Reform is an ongoing process, but elections cannot be delayed in the name of reforms," he said.

Fakhrul said the persisting problems in the country can be resolved only by establishing an elected government through a fair and acceptable election.

The BNP leader also said various conspiracies are being hatched against the country and against the BNP both at home and abroad, similar to the past. "No conspiracy can split or weaken the BNP like in the past."

He urged BNP and JCD leaders and workers to confront all conspiracies with their intellect. "We must mount strong resistance against all conspiracies."

10 killed as driver rams truck

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officers in the subsequent shootout but they were listed in stable condition.

The vehicle used was a white Ford F-150 electric pick-up, an AFP correspondent on the scene said.

The New Orleans attack came 10 days after a similar car-ramming assault at a Christmas market in the eastern German city of Magdeburg that killed five and wounded more than 200. In that case, police arrested a Saudi man and said he appeared to be mentally disturbed.

President Joe Biden called New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell "to offer full federal support following the horrific news," the White House said.

"There is no justification for violence of any kind, and we will not tolerate any attack on any of our nation's communities," Biden said in a statement.

President-elect Donald Trump immediately linked the attack to illegal immigration, giving no

evidence and before authorities made clear the suspect was American.

"When I said that the criminals coming in are far worse than the criminals we have in the country... it turned out to be true," Trump posted on social media.

Trump also claimed that the nation's crime rate "is at a level that nobody has ever seen." In fact, violent crime is sharply down across the country, according to the FBI.

In the wee hours of the year's first day, the area would have been packed with revellers celebrating in the French Quarter, a district renowned for its bars, restaurants and jazz history.

A white truck crashed through a barricade "at a very high rate of speed," witness Jim Mowrer told CBS News.

"We were in the middle of the road and managed to run off the road onto the sidewalk and into the doorway of a building for cover. We did hear gunfire, saw police running," he said. "Once the gunfire stopped, we

stayed in the alcove until the gunfire stopped, came out into the street, and came across a lot of – several people who had been hit, (we) wanted to see what we could do to help," he said.

"People we came across were unfortunately deceased."

New Orleans is one of the most heavily visited destinations in the United States and the incident came shortly before the city hosts the Sugar Bowl, a major college football game featuring teams from the University of Georgia and Notre Dame.

Policing had already been heavy over the New Year's holiday, according to the city, as authorities braced for big crowds.

The city police department had announced staffing at "100 percent, with an additional 300 officers assisting from partner law enforcement agencies," including on horseback and using unmarked units.

The iconic French Quarter listed special deals for New Year's, including LGBTQ+ parties and a drag cabaret near where the incident took place.

Wait for textbooks gets longer

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"I am sad. I wanted to read the new books on the first day," she said.

Parul Akhter, a class 8 student in Char Kulaghat village, Lalmonirhat, also didn't receive any book.

"How will I study if I don't have the books?" she asked.

Harichand Biswas, headteacher of Kalibati Secondary School in Dumuria, Rangpur, said none of his 206 students received books.

In Chattogram, 5.7 lakhs copies were distributed against a demand of 1.7 crore, said Uttam Khisa, secondary education officer in the district. At primary schools, 17.50 lakh were given against a demand of 44 lakh.

In Sunamganj, no textbooks had been delivered to secondary schools. In Sylhet, seven out of 13 upazilas received no secondary school books, said Jahangir Alam, education officer in the district.

In Khulna, only 1.54 lakh primary textbooks out of 10 lakh reached. In Lalmonirhat, most of the primary school books had been delivered, while secondary schools received nothing.

Primary and secondary schools in Panchagarh received 20,548 books against a demand for 6 lakh; in Dinajpur, 5 lakh against 19.56 lakh; in Nilphamari, 7.49 lakh against 18 lakh; in Pirojpur, primary schools got 27,000 against 6 lakh and secondary schools got 5 lakh against 11 lakh.

Mostofa Alam, secondary-level education officer in Rajapur upazila

of Jhalakathi, said only 9,000 copies of Bangla, English, and maths had been received against a need for 3 lakh.

WHAT CAUSED THE DEBACLE

"The decision not to print books abroad added complexity. Additionally, the number of books increased this year due to curriculum changes," Adviser Wahiduddin said.

"We had a short time, and many books had to be revised to ensure political impartiality. We also prioritised high-quality printing, paper, and cover."

NCTB Chairman Prof Reazul Hassan said the process began in September, which was already late.

Sources said that in 2024, around 31 textbooks were printed for this year. After the July mass uprising and the formation of the interim government, it was decided that the curriculum must be changed. This increased the number of required books.

A number of old contents had to be replaced with new ones, especially about the July mass uprising.

And to accommodate the changes, new vendors had to be hired as late as December, NCTB officials said, adding that the process usually ends by June or July and the books get ready for shipment by October, and students get brand new books on January 1.

[Correspondents from the districts contributed to this report]

Army won't interfere in politics

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Prothom Alo published yesterday.

The army must not interfere in politics, he said.

The four-star general was answering a question hinting that there were apprehensions within the people about the army's interest in politics and that this had happened before.

The army boss said the army's interference in politics has never been good for them. "So, it is my pledge that during my tenure as army chief, I will not meddle in politics. I will not let the military interfere in the political affairs."

He continued saying, "We wholeheartedly believe only politicians can replace politicians. The army can't be an alternative to politicians."

When the newspaper pointed out that the army's Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) had interfered in political affairs before, the army chief noted that the DGFI was an autonomous agency, and said the army did not want to do anything of that sort. "We won't do anything that damages the army's reputation."

Gen Waker recalled his experience from the 2007-2008 military-controlled caretaker government, saying the 1/11 event, which had led to the formation of the caretaker administration, was "not so pleasing."

"Long-term deployment in the field creates the risk of army personnel breaching discipline. Although the number of such incidents is very low, the occurrence of such incidents is embarrassing for us," he said, adding that the army personnel would happily return to their barracks as soon as the police were ready to resume their duties in earnest.

The army is currently vested with magistracy powers to aid the civil administration, and it is taking steps accordingly, he said.

Asked about the army's support for

the interim government, Gen Waker reiterated the army's full-fledged cooperation with the incumbent government headed by Nobel Peace Prize winner Prof Muhammad Yunus, saying, "We will assist the chief adviser in whichever manner he seeks our cooperation."

He said he would not mind aiding the government even if it inconvenienced the military. "We will do it in the interest of the country and nation."

Regarding a question about the government facing numerous demands from diverse groups, the army chief said he thought people should restrain themselves and not become a burden on the Yunus government. Patience, he said, would make it easier for the incumbents to hold quick elections and pave the way for an elected government.

Regarding the relationship with India, Gen Waker said that the military was very keen to maintain its cordial relations with the big neighbour. He said Bangladesh was dependent on India for a wide range of things, as was India on Bangladesh.

He said it was a relationship of 'give and take', and one had to negotiate or bargain for a better share of the pie. "But we should not do anything that makes it seem that India is dominating us in any way that harms our interests."

The army chief said if Bangladesh takes care of India's interests, India would duly reciprocate. "Instability will not be created in our Chattogram Hill Tracts. The stability along the Myanmar border will not be disrupted either. They will not kill our people along the borders. We will get our fair share of water."

He said there was no problem with this relationship of 'give and take' but stressed it had to be fair.