

BSF ‘tortures’ Bangladeshi on Jhenaidah border

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A Bangladeshi was tortured allegedly by Indian Border Security Force members along Maheshpur border in Jhenaidah early yesterday.

The victim was Faruk Hossain, 42, of Berli village in Narail’s Kalia upazila.

Farmers found Faruk in the Cumillapara border area in the morning.

Later, the villagers informed his family members. After primary treatment, he was taken home.

Local UP member Obaidul Islam said Faruk was trying to enter Bangladesh through the Khosalpur border around 12:30am with his wife Hasi Sheikh and daughter Ayesha Khatun. At that time, he was detained by the BSF members and tortured brutally.

Injured Faruk told the media that he was tortured after being detained by the 194th Battalion BSF in Baranbera, India.

“They tied a rope around my neck and threw me towards the border, thinking I was dead,” he said. He regained consciousness around dawn.



The Ismail Shah Shrine at Bottola in Barguna’s Amtali upazila came under an arson attack early yesterday. The fire burnt down the shrine’s hall rooms and sheds. Inset, the photo shows the shrine engulfed in flames around 12:15am.

PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

20 hurt in Barguna shrine attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

At least 20 people were injured as the Ismail Shah Shrine at Bottola in Barguna’s Amtali came under an arson attack during an urs early yesterday.

The shrine’s hall rooms and sheds were burnt in the attack carried out by Islami Andolan Bangladesh men around 12:15am, alleged Mostafizur Rahman Babul, the shrine’s custodian.

Firefighters managed to douse the flames around 2:45am.

Locals said the shrine, established in 1996, usually organises a two-day urs festival every year. This year’s event began on Sunday evening.

However at midnight, a group of over 100 supporters of Islami Andolan Bangladesh’s Amtali unit led by its President Omar Faruq Jehadi and General Secretary Gazi Bayezid stormed the shrine and demanded an end to the rituals and music, they alleged.

According to witnesses, when Mostafizur refused to stop the event, an altercation broke out between them. Eventually, the Islami Andolan supporters vandalised the shrine and beat up the devotees present, leaving 20 injured. Later, the attackers set fire to the shrine.

Of the injured, 11 were admitted to Amtali Upazila Health Complex while others received first aid.

On information, Amtali Upazila Nirbahi Officer Muhammad Ashrafur Alam, Assistant Commissioner (Land) Md Tarek and Officer-in-Charge Md Ariful Islam went to the spot and

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BNP cautiously optimistic of polls

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a cut-off date for everything. Nothing can be open-ended. Uncertainty surrounding this matter is creating doubts among people, which is unfortunate,” he added.

Salahuddin Ahmed, another member of the party’s standing committee, termed the chief adviser’s remarks “inconsistent”.

“Earlier, he [Yunus] said that the election would be held in December. Now he is saying the date may change depending on the undertaking of comprehensive or short reform packages. What we figure now is that constitutional reforms are a major issue, and for this, a parliament is needed.”

The other reforms could be done through ordinances if all political parties agreed, and it would not take more than three months.

“We don’t know why he [Yunus] is making inconsistent comments. We expect him to make it clear that the election will be held by December,” he added.

At a programme on Sunday, Mirza Abbas, another standing committee member, said: “We’ve heard many things – some say the election will happen, the others say it won’t. We don’t want to believe in anything. We want to believe that Dr Yunus will stand by his words. We hope to see an election

by December.”

The BNP’s suspicion deepened following a February 10 meeting between its senior leaders and Yunus. After the meeting, BNP leaders said they were assured that the election would be held in December.

However, two weeks later, Shafiqul Alam, the chief adviser’s press secretary, said the election could also be held in March next year depending on political consensus.

The BNP leaders believe that the government is trying to cater to the interests of multiple political groups, which may explain the conflicting statements.

They point to the emergence of the National Citizen Party (NCP) led by Nahid Islam as a factor influencing the interim government’s strategy.

Nahid recently told Reuters that holding the election in December may be difficult because of the current law and order situation.

However, he added that before polls can be held, it would be crucial to reach a consensus on the “July Charter” that the interim government plans to prepare in consultation with political parties and student activists.

“If we can reach that consensus within a month, we can call for polls immediately. But if it takes more time, the election should be deferred,” Nahid added.

Following Nahid’s remarks, the BNP standing committee held an emergency meeting where it discussed the possibility of a deliberate delay in the election.

“It is clear that the government is trying to play both sides. On one hand, it is trying to assure the BNP that an election would be held in December. On the other hand, it is trying to keep open the option of holding the election in June next year to satisfy the other political parties,” said a senior leader wishing not to be named.

Sarjis Alam, the chief organiser of the NCP for the northern region, made a controversial statement that reinforced BNP’s concerns.

Until the execution of Sheikh Hasina, no one should even talk about the election, he said.

Meanwhile, despite the uncertainty, the Election Commission is preparing for a December election.

However, logistical challenges remain.

If the election is delayed beyond December, the next feasible window might not open until October 2026 as there will be Ramadan, HSC exams and the monsoon season from February to June.

The BNP leaders argue that an election delay will only add to the political instability and distrust towards the government.

Be impartial during polls

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“you must operate within the boundaries of the law” regardless of what the political parties say.

“No matter who it is – whether it’s the newly formed political parties led by students or the established ones – if they make any demands, respond by saying, ‘We will adhere to the law.’”

Police’s special focus should also be on women’s safety, now “a critical topic of discussion”, and it is an enormous task, he said.

“Due to our negligence... half of our country’s population has become helpless, with no one to pay attention to them. Women are even afraid to walk on the streets.... They are unsure where to look – whether to gaze up or down. They are also uncertain about what clothes to wear.”

Every man has a personal responsibility to ensure women’s safety. “But as police officers, we have the greatest responsibility. The law has given every citizen their rights, and it is our duty to uphold those rights.”

The safety of minorities is equally important. It is the government’s responsibility to ensure the rights granted to them by the constitution, he said.

The country is going through a war-like situation. And as the election approaches, the “defeated forces” are likely to engage in more misdeeds to create unrest to disrupt peace, he said.

The government ultimately depends on the police to create the environment

for implementing its initiatives.

Terming the previous regime a dark period, Prof Yunus said the police were “active participants” in that era.

During the Awami League rule, police were influenced by bad individuals, he said, expressing hopes that they would prove that they are good people.

“To build a new Bangladesh, you must move away from that mindset and embrace the idea of building a truly new Bangladesh.... In this new Bangladesh, police must prove their commitment to maintaining law and order. The police must also demonstrate that they are victims of circumstance, not wrongdoers. They are now ready to help build a reformed nation.”

THE MEETING

Senior officials told the chief adviser that only an independent commission could bring the police force back to the right track and make it service-oriented.

Baharul Alam, inspector general of police, said a proposal to form a police commission was placed before the Police Reform Commission, but the police do not know whether it would be implemented.

An independent commission is crucial for ensuring stability.

A high official, requesting anonymity, said that there were enthusiasms among the police over the meeting.

Police officers told Yunus that they wanted reforms in the force and an environment in which they could carry

out their duties without facing political pressure, according to officers who attended the meeting.

Ahsan Habib Palash, deputy inspector general of the Chattogram Range Police, told The Daily Star that he informed the chief adviser about logistical challenges.

“We often face problems in conducting anti-robbery operations, because in many places, we have a shortage of vehicles,” he said.

Palash also requested a raise in the travel and daily allowances for officers working in the hill tracts. In addition, he sought higher allowances for investigating general diaries.

Farzana Islam, superintendent of police in Rajshahi, requested the chief adviser for more living quarters for officers and improved living standards at the barracks.

Police personnel need daycare centres for their children and the traffic police need bathrooms and drinking water, she said.

Farzana said she requested posting women officers at the women and children’s desks.

The chief adviser assured that he would look into the demands.

Home Adviser Lt Gen (ret’d) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury and Home Secretary Nasimul Gani also spoke at the meeting.

IGP Baharul later held another meeting at the Police Headquarters where he told officers that they must face the challenges in the coming days with utmost professionalism.

these areas, and suggested that the new organisation will act as a supplementary body to AVSEC.

Petitioners on the other hand, demanded the de-militarisation of AVSEC.

In 2016, people from the disciplined forces were deployed to AVSEC for a temporary period “in aid to civil power”, but their stays have been extended multiple times such that they have become permanent, said the statement given by the protesters.

They demanded a clear cut-off date by which people from the disciplined forces been to be pulled out of AVSEC.

AVSEC and the Airport Armed Police Battalion have been involved in a dispute over the past months over security responsibilities at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

EC opposes key reform proposals

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It also argued that the Supreme Judicial Council already handles this and such a provision would weaken the EC’s ability to make firm decisions.

The letter, signed by EC Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed, said that the formation of a separate commission for delimitation would weaken the commission’s constitutional authority and disrupt the electoral process.

During a press conference yesterday at the EC Secretariat, Akhtar said, “Implementing these recommendations will undermine the EC’s independence.”

The EC also disagreed on transferring voter list management and national ID card distribution to a proposed National Citizen Data Commission.

This would weaken the EC’s ability to conduct elections independently and violate article 119 of the constitution, which outlines the Election Commission’s functions, the EC said.

The commission objected to the inclusion of a proposal to bar fugitive individuals from contesting elections, saying such restrictions should be handled through existing legal mechanisms, not electoral reforms.

The EC differed with the proposal to make candidates submit nomination papers in person instead of allowing online submissions. In this regard, the EC cited concerns over adequate logistical support and previous incidents where candidates faced obstacles in filing nominations in person.

The EC rejected the idea of appointing returning officers solely from its own officials, emphasising that appointments should be based on competence and seniority rather than rigid rules.

The commission raised objection to a proposal to allocate its budget through

a parliamentary committee rather than the government’s consolidated fund, warning that the move would increase bureaucratic delays and compromise the EC’s financial independence.

It also differed with a recommendation on removing time restrictions for filing election-related cases, saying it would prolong disputes and increase political harassment.

The commission also objected to allowing aggrieved political parties to challenge results within 48 hours in the Supreme Court’s Appellate Division or a National Constitutional Council. It said that the Representation of the People Order of 1972 already provides for election challenges through tribunals.

The EC’s letter – copies of which were sent to the Cabinet Division and the principal secretary at the Chief Adviser’s Office – requested that necessary steps be taken on these issues.

PROXY VOTING

The EC backed the proxy voting system as the “best available option” to ensure voting rights for expatriate Bangladeshis. This system will allow a designated voter in Bangladesh to cast a vote on behalf of an expatriate.

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (Ret’d) Abul Fazl Md Sanaullah briefed reporters about the matter at the EC Secretariat yesterday after a meeting with the heads of missions from Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states in Bangladesh.

“If we truly want to provide our expatriates with the opportunity to vote, we must adopt either one option or a combination of multiple options,” he said. The EC earlier said it was also considering a postal ballot system with a specified timeframe and an online voting system for the expatriates.

Asked whether proxy voting would lead to a lack of trust in the electoral

process during yesterday’s briefing, Fazl said, “If we aim to facilitate voting for expatriates on a large scale, proxy voting seems to be the only practical solution. The two other methods could be tested at the pilot level, but implementing them on a large scale may not be feasible.”

“This system [proxy voting] is already in place in India for defence personnel. Additionally, some European Union countries, such as France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, also have similar arrangements. Postal ballots are no longer effective for us. The time between printing the ballot papers and the actual voting day is too short to send, collect, and return the ballots for counting,” he said.

The commissioner further said, “The second option is online voting. However, as the Egyptian ambassador mentioned, their experience with online voting was not good, leading them to discontinue the system. On the other hand, while the Pakistani ambassador spoke positively about online voting, they have not been able to implement it on a full scale.”

During the meeting, Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin, along with three election commissioners and the EC secretary, briefed the heads of missions from the OIC member states on preparations for the upcoming 13th National Parliamentary Election.

The heads of missions from Afghanistan, Algeria, Brunei Darussalam, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Malaysia, the Maldives, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates were invited to attend. However, ambassadors or representatives from seven countries, including Saudi Arabia and Turkey, did not participate in the meeting.

violent ways and means.”

She further said, “President Trump remains committed to identifying the ideology that drives Islamist terrorism, and working to defeat this ideology and their ability to exact that terror on people, the American people and others.”

Gabbard’s remarks came a day after she, along with Britain’s National Security Adviser Jonathan Powell and New Zealand’s intelligence chief Andrew Hampton, attended a security conference in New Delhi.

The event was hosted by India’s National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, along with RAW chief Ravi Sinha and Intelligence Bureau chief Tapan Deka.

Gabbard is the first senior-level official from the Donald Trump administration to visit India during the US president’s second term that began on January 20.

STATEMENT FROM CA’S PRESS WING “We note with deep concern and distress the remarks made by DNI Tulsi Gabbard, in which she alleged ‘persecution and killing’ of religious minorities in Bangladesh and that ‘the threat of Islamic terrorists’ in the country is ‘rooted’ in the ‘ideology and objective’ to ‘rule and govern with an Islamist caliphate,’ the government said in the statement.

Gabbard’s comments are not based

on any evidence or specific allegations. “They paint an entire nation with a broad and unjustified brush. Bangladesh, like many countries around the world, has faced challenges of extremism, but it has continuously worked in partnership with the international community, including the US, to address these issues through law enforcement, social reforms, and other counterterrorism efforts.”

Groundlessly linking Bangladesh to the idea of an “Islamist caliphate” undermines the hard work of countless Bangladeshis and their friends and partners around the world who are committed to peace, stability, and progress. Bangladesh strongly condemns any efforts to link the country to any form of “Islamist caliphate”, the statement added.

“Political leaders and public figures should base their statements, especially about the most sensitive issues, on actual knowledge and take care not to reinforce harmful stereotypes, to fan fears and potentially even stoke sectarian tensions.

“In support of our shared global efforts to combat extremism and terrorism, the interim government remains committed to engaging in constructive dialogue based on facts and on respect for the sovereignty and security of all nations.”

New DNA labs, tribunal

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Adviser Asif Nazrul reiterated that time for trial and investigation will also be shortened in line with the government’s efforts to deal with cases in an expedited manner.

He said there is no relation between the proposed changes and the case of the Magura child, as her case will be settled on a priority basis.

The adviser said the DNA report of the Magura girl case will be prepared in two-three days and the trial of the case will begin soon.

Adviser Rizwana said a good number of amendments were placed from the Law Ministry before the meeting,

and the advisory council, in principle, agreed on those.

“We have already received some opinions and we will scrutinise these opinions tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. We expect the proposed amendments will get final approval on Thursday,” she said.

Adviser Rizwana said lack of adequate DNA labs is one of the reasons for the delay in settling rape-related cases, and at this moment, there is only one DNA lab.

She said the government decided to set up two more DNA labs quickly in Chattogram and Rajshahi.

The adviser also said some judges

will quickly be appointed through a special Judicial Service Commission so that the trial of rape cases and other cases can be expedited.

She said they are observing that anarchy is going on in the name of damaging shrines and the government remained reactive with appropriate steps.

Adviser Rizwana said the government will in no way accept any shrine destruction and urged all to refrain from such activities.

The government also warned of tougher actions in line with the law if anyone is found involved in damaging shrines.