

Police probing mechanic's death in garage fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

Police have opened an investigation after recovering the charred body of a young mechanic from an automobile workshop in Narsingdi.

The victim, Chanchal Bhowmik, 25, hailing from Lakshampur village under Cumilla's Barura upazila, had been working at the workshop at Dagararia of Narsingdi Sadar upazila for around six years.

On information, police went to the spot and recovered the body around 4:00am on Saturday, said Ishaq Miah, sub-inspector of Narsingdi Sadar Model Police Station.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, the workshop's owner Rubel Miah said he had a brief discussion with Chanchal around 10:00pm on Friday.

"Then Chanchal closed the shop and I left the area. Like other days, Chanchal went to sleep inside the shop," said Rubel, adding that he heard about a fire from a person around 4:00am on Saturday.

Contacted, Shimul Rafiq, deputy director of Fire Service and Civil SEE PAGE 8 COL 6



BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman interacts with supporters at the Railway Polo Ground in Chattogram city yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

All parties seeking AL vote, only JP is taking blame

Say its Chairman GM Quader

S DILIP ROY

Jatiya Party is branded as criminals and collaborators if the party seeks the barred Awami League's votes but not the BNP, Jamaat or the National Citizen Party, said its Chairman GM Quader.



"This is nothing but extreme political discrimination," said Quader in a press briefing at the party office in Rangpur on Saturday evening.

Quader is contesting in the election from Rangpur-3.

"The Awami League has not yet been banned as a political party. Even if there are restrictions on its political activities, there is no example anywhere in the world of stripping its supporters of their voting rights as citizens. Yet, the Awami League supporters are being told, 'if you want to vote, you may do so, but you cannot vote for Jatiya Party'. So, what is the crime of Jatiya Party?"

After the July uprising, the head of the interim government himself said that the student coordinators of the quota reform movement are their appointing authority.

Dhaka slams Delhi for allowing Hasina to deliver speech

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The ministry said allowing the event to take place in the Indian capital and letting "mass murderer" Hasina to openly deliver her hate speech are contrary to the norms of inter-state relations, including the principles of respect for sovereignty, non-interference and good neighbourliness.

This also constitutes a clear affront to the people and the Bangladesh government, it said.

"It sets a dangerous precedent vis-a-vis the future of Bangladesh-India relations and may seriously impair the ability of the future elected polity in Bangladesh to engage, shape, and nurture mutually beneficial bilateral relations.

"The unabashed incitements by Awami League's leadership yet again demonstrated why the interim government had to ban its activities."

The foreign ministry said Bangladesh would hold the AL responsible for committing incidents of violence and terror in the run up to the elections and on the election day, and will take appropriate actions to foil its evil conspiracies.

In the earlier months, the interim government repeatedly requested India to prevent Hasina, who fled to India on August 5, 2024, amid uprising, from speaking and inciting violence in Bangladesh.

Dhaka sent official letter to New Delhi, seeking her extradition.

At an event in December last year, Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said Hasina would decide if she wants to return to Dhaka.

'We left as they strayed from Islamist principles'

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of running the state, corruption will be uprooted, In sha Allah. We will build a Bangladesh that reflects the people's aspirations," he said.

Rezaul said many candidates make various promises of development, but no one speaks about the "development of principles".

"If members of the parliament formulate proper policies and hold the executive accountable for implementing those policies, development will naturally reach all citizens of the country," he said.

He said the nation has heard many claims of development over the past 54 years, but those so-called developments were followed by a "festival of corruption".

"Killings, enforced disappearances, and money laundering have been pushing the country backwards. Therefore, emphasis must be placed on the structural development of the state and improvement of policies," he added.

He added that Islami Andolan Bangladesh is working not merely for a change of leaders, but for a change of policies.

Party's Central Training Secretary Nurul Karim Akram and Central Joint Vice-President Hossain Ahmed, among others, were present at the rally.

'Won't allow graft to ruin BNP's plan'

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At another rally at the Central Eidgah ground in Daudkandi upazila of Cumilla at 12:45am today, Tarique warned party leaders and activists to remain careful about wrongdoings.

"You have seen in the past that when the BNP was in power, some of our leaders and activists were involved in unethical acts that caused sufferings to people. We handed them over to the law. Do you remember? So BNP leaders and activists must remain careful.

"If anyone is found acting beyond the law, they will face legal action. There will be nothing you can do, I will also be unable to do anything," he said.

At the Chattogram rally, remembering the martyrs of the July uprising, he said democratic and economic rights had been eroded over the past 15 years. He warned of new conspiracies to take these rights away.

He said although many allegations and criticisms can be made against rival political parties, such things do not bring any real benefit to the people.

"If we criticise only for the sake of criticism, will it help ordinary people? It will not. If we only keep criticising, will it fill people's stomachs? It will not," he said.

DEVELOPMENT PLEDGES

Tarique said Khaleda Zia's earlier plan to turn Chattogram into a commercial capital would be completed if BNP forms the government, creating jobs through new Export Processing Zones.

He promised a nationwide canal-digging programme, which he said would help alleviate waterlogging in Chattogram.

A safe environment will also be created in Chattogram and other parts of Bangladesh so that people can do business easily and without fear, the BNP chief said.

He also promised to bring changes to different levels of education to help the youth get jobs.

Tarique said BNP wants to deliver

healthcare services to every doorstep, especially for women and children, by appointing 1 lakh healthcare workers.

To make women financially independent, Tarique said if the BNP can form the government, the party will deliver "family cards" to women.

He said farmers will receive loan facilities and other benefits through the "farmers cards" so that they can become financially self-reliant.

Seeking votes, he said only a BNP victory on February 12 would make these changes possible.

"If you stand by BNP and make BNP victorious with the Sheaf of Paddy in the election, only then will we be able to bring these changes. Are you with us?"

"Yes!" the crowd replied.

Later in the day, Tarique addressed a rally in Feni, where he pledged to establish a medical college and provide training and language education for youths seeking overseas employment.

Urging voters in greater Noakhali to ensure BNP's victory, he said restoring democracy through the ballot would bring back accountability and local solutions.

'GUARD POLLING STATIONS'

At another rally on Chouddagram High School ground in Cumilla in the evening, Tarique instructed party leaders and activists to remain alert to prevent fraud until the end of voting.

"You must guard the ballot boxes and the polling stations so that no one can conspire with the voters."

He also advised senior party leaders and activists to offer Tahajjud prayers and then go to the polling stations and perform Fajr prayers in front of the centres.

He said some people were questioning the BNP's card-based aid plans because they have no experience of running the country. "Why would I deceive the people if I knew that it would cause me losses? Will the people trust me anymore if I deceive them?" he asked.

He clarified that through "family cards", the BNP plans to provide assistance for seven to 10 days a month, not the entire month. "We never said we would give everything at once. We will do it gradually and move forward step by step."

At another rally at Suwagazi Dighajir ground in Cumilla at 10:30pm, Tarique said an EPZ would be built in the district to create jobs.

'CALL ME BHAIYA'

Earlier in the morning, Tarique held an interactive session with students titled "The Plan: Youth Policy Talk with Tarique Rahman" at a hotel in the port city, attended by around 350 students.

When a student addressed him as "Sir", he asked to be called "Bhaiya", drawing applause.

He pledged to introduce student loans for higher studies abroad, including support for visa and related costs.

On indigenous rights and hill region tensions, Tarique said all citizens, regardless of region or identity, should enjoy equal rights and opportunities based on merit.

He proposed limiting quotas mainly to persons with disabilities and ensuring merit-based recruitment elsewhere.

"As we have said before, limited quotas, say around five percent, can be kept for people with disabilities. But in all other cases, recruitment or access to opportunities should be based on merit and qualifications alone. Whether from the plains or the hills, the same principle should apply to everyone," he said.

He also said the National Identity Card system should be fully digitised so citizens can obtain NIDs from home, which would reduce corruption and complications.

[FM Mizanur Rahaman and Dwaipayan Barua also contributed to the report.]

Ecneec clears Tk 45,191cr

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project's deadline has been extended by two and a half years, pushing the expected completion to June 2028.

The project was initially approved in 2016, with around 90 percent of the funding coming as a soft Russian loan. According to Planning Commission documents, the cost escalation is driven mainly by higher allocation for parts of the project, inclusion of 10 new components, and the depreciation of the taka against the US dollar.

Healthcare was also a major priority in the final-hour approvals. The committee approved a new "health and nutrition services" project with an estimated cost of Tk 8,735 crore, supported by Tk 6,196 crore in World Bank loans. The project aims to improve the nutrition of pregnant women and the health of newborn babies.

An official of the Directorate General of Health Services said that a portion of the project funds will be used for vaccination programmes and to upgrade the infrastructure of several upazila health complexes in the Sylhet region.

Furthermore, the Ecneec approved the Bangladesh-China Friendship General Hospital, a 1,000-bed facility for the northern region. The government will build the hospital in Nilphamari at a cost of Tk 2,459 crore, with most of the funds expected from China.

Planning Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud defended the heavy agenda during a post-meeting briefing. "Usually, political governments approve many projects in a single meeting at the last moment. But we are not doing this for that reason," he said.

"We were supposed to have two Ecneec meetings, but it seems there is no time for another," Wahiduddin said. "We had to consider whether it would be appropriate to hold another meeting right before the election," he added.

Addressing concerns about the legitimacy of approving projects after the announcement of the election schedule, he maintained that the state must remain functional.

Wahiduddin, who had also served as an adviser to the 1996 caretaker government, emphasised that the administration was careful to avoid projects that could unfairly benefit specific candidates or parties. "For the sake of the economy, many policy decisions must be taken," he said, citing his 1996 experience where regular Ecneec meetings were held to ensure economic stability.

Regarding the increased cost of the Rooppur project, Wahiduddin said that the project timeline had been extended due to the Covid-19 pandemic and other factors, which led to higher overall expenditure.

He said the project cost has not increased in dollar terms with the original figure remaining unchanged at \$11.38 billion. However, the cost has risen in taka terms due to taka's

depreciation.

The approved projects will be funded through a mix of government exchequer (Tk 10,881 crore), project loans (Tk 32,018 crore), and implementing agencies' own resources.

As the country prepares for the transition, however, the focus now shifts to whether the incoming government will honour these commitments or subject them to further scrutiny.

Contacted last night, Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at World Bank's Dhaka office, told The Daily Star, "If these pending projects are not approved now, they might remain stuck or linger, which would result in economic losses.

"Since it is uncertain when the next government will hold its first Ecneec meeting, approving these projects now ensures that development work does not come to a standstill."

Selim Raihan, a professor of economics at Dhaka University, said, "My point of hope is that since this is not a political government, there is no political motive."

"I do hope that this is unlike previous governments, where populist projects were often initiated before elections that cost money but weren't very useful in reality."

The Ecneec also cleared significant transport infrastructure to unclog key regional arteries. In a bid to boost tourism and internal trade, the government authorised a Tk 1,064 crore upgrade for the 39km Rangamati-Mahalchhari Khagrachhari highway. The project serves a dual purpose: improving safety on accident-prone hill tracks while integrating the remote region more tightly with the national grid.

Simultaneously, Tk 1,359 crore was allocated to Munshiganj to upgrade three regional highways, a move designed to capitalise on the traffic fed by the Padma Bridge.

A distinct project titled "Women Entrepreneurs in Sanitation," largely funded by the Islamic Development Bank, was approved with a budget of Tk 86 crore.

FOCUS ON CHATTOGRAM

The government also approved projects to resolve bottlenecks in Chattogram by granting deadline extensions to three stalled mega-projects, including the Elevated Expressway from Lalkhan Bazar to the airport and the Chattogram City Outer Ring Road.

Both saw their timelines pushed to late 2026. The government approved these extensions without hiking costs, signalling a strict directive to contractors to wrap up the "finishing touches" on the port city's logistical backbone.

The runway strengthening project at Shah Amanat International Airport was given until June 2026 to ensure the facility can safely handle heavy wide body aircraft.

The committee also approved a deadline extension for a Tk 71 crore initiative designed to develop the Parki coastal area into a tourist destination.

'Fearing defeat, some may take crooked paths'

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Shafiqur also pledged to introduce evening bus services for women in the capital and major cities. "No oppressor will dare to harass you anymore. You will no longer face harassment at your workplaces," he said.

At the second rally at Dhophkhola field, he urged young people to prepare to take charge of the country.

"We want to entrust Bangladesh to the youth... If any miscreant tries to interfere with the votes on the 12th, that hand must be crushed. They [youth] have come of age but have been denied their voting rights. They are eagerly waiting for the 12th. No one should be allowed to carry out any criminal activities," he said.

He said Jamaat does not want to "sit on the throne to plunder the country."

"We will not extort people and will not allow extortion. We will neither engage in corruption nor tolerate it," he said, adding that to build a corruption- and extortion-free country, people must exercise their rights in the two votes scheduled for the same day.

"From today, we will enter a battle to ensure every single 'yes' vote. We will explain to people that if 'yes' wins, Bangladesh will win; if 'yes' is defeated, Bangladesh will be defeated," he added.

Opposing unemployment allowances, he said such a move would create an "ocean of unemployed people."

Referring to recent developments, he said, "When the people of Bangladesh are about to make their decision in search of liberation, many are openly interfering in our internal

affairs. We would humbly but firmly request them -- please stop meddling in our internal matters."

Speaking on Old Dhaka, the Jamaat chief said, "We will turn Old Dhaka into gold, In Sha Allah (God willing). We will show that respect to Old Dhaka."

Calling on young people to prepare for future responsibilities, he said,



Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman addresses a rally at Dhophkhola field in Old Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

"This time we have a youth-based panel. We have brought forward a large number of young people. Elect them and, In Sha Allah, Bangladesh will change."

From the rally, Shafiqur handed over the scales symbol to Abdul Mannan, the II-party alliance candidate for Dhaka-6, and the water-lily bud symbol to Nasiruddin Patwari of the NCP, the candidate for Dhaka 8.

broad daylight.

"A party whose activists, driven by extortion, do not spare even their own brothers, friends or colleagues -- and take lives if extortion money is not paid -- demands serious reflection from us," he said.

Liberal Democratic Party President Colonel (ret) Oli Ahmed, whose party is part of the II-party alliance, was among the speakers at the Alia Madrasa and Dhophkhola rallies.

A truth teller

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War to the world.

During the war, when news media controlled by the then Pakistani junta carried government propaganda, his BBC radio reports became the people's chief source of authentic information. He covered the war extensively for the BBC and documented events from close quarters.

Sir Mark Tully was born in Kolkata on October 24, 1935, into a British family. Shortly after World War II, at the age of nine, he moved to Britain for his education. Tully studied theology at Cambridge University before joining a seminary.

He returned to India in 1965, joining the BBC in New Delhi as an office administrator.

After a brief stint in London at the BBC's Hindi and World Service, he was appointed the public broadcaster's

correspondent in New Delhi in 1971.

Tully was named bureau chief a few years later, overseeing coverage of South Asia, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, a position he held for two decades.

His fluency in Hindi, a rare achievement in Delhi's foreign press corps, endeared him to many Indians, for whom he was fondly known as "Tully sahib". His warmth and evident affection for India earned him the friendship and trust of senior politicians, editors and social activists.

Tully was awarded the Padma Shri and the Padma Bhushan, among India's highest civilian honours, and rarely bestowed on foreigners.

Britain also knighted him for his services to broadcasting and journalism in 2002, a recognition Tully would later describe as "an honour to India".