Ex-Thai MP shoots dead official over money row

AFP, *Bangkok*

A former Thai MP yesterday shot dead a local government official in broad daylight over a financial dispute before being arrested and confessing to journalists at the police station.

The attack took place outside a government building in Nonthaburi province, north of Bangkok, just days after a school shooting in the same region that raised questions over gun control in Thailand.

Flanked by police officers following his arrest, former MP Chalong Riewrang told reporters he had tried to talk to local official Thongchai Yenprasert about money.

"I followed him to his car and hit his car's window, saying I want to talk. He said he will not talk, so I pulled my gun," Chalong admitted.

"I did not aim to shoot, but his driver pulled a gun and pointed it at me so I fired."

Thongchai, who was chairman of the Nonthaburi local government administration, later died of his wounds, according to Sakon Sukprom, director of Phra Nang Klao hospital.



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman greets Indian High Commissioner Dinesh Trivedi at the Secretariat yesterday. Trivedi paid a courtesy call on the premier to discuss bilateral relations.

PHOTO: **PMO**

CYBER THREAT

North Korean hackers build AI tools for attacks

REUTERS, *SEOUL*

A North Korean hacking group built large language model tools and collected software that could help automate cyberattacks, analyse stolen material and produce more convincing phishing campaigns, a South Korean cybersecurity firm said yesterday.

The cybersecurity firm, Genians, said it found evidence that the North Korean-linked group Kimsuky had set up tools for running and managing AI models locally, including Ollama, GPT4All and Msty, alongside document search technology known as retrieval augmented generation (RAG).

According to the company, the tools could allow operators to process documents without sending sensitive information to outside AI services.

Genians also found AI agent development frameworks, speech-to-text software and Cursor, an AI-assisted coding tool, on infrastructure it linked to the campaign.

The findings suggest Kimsuky is moving beyond using generative AI to create phishing lures and is building capacity to integrate existing AI models into malware development, data analysis and attack automation, Genians said in a report.

AL suppressed media to conceal July killings

Prosecution tells ICT-2

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League government used its control over the media to conceal killings and other crimes committed during the July uprising, the prosecution told International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday.

The prosecution made the allegation while concluding the fourth day of its arguments in a crimes against humanity case against Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader and six other senior leaders of the party and its affiliated organisations over atrocities committed during the July 2024 uprising.

The prosecution presented a phone conversation between Quader and then state minister for information Mohammad Ali Arafat, saying it showed the government's efforts to prevent the broadcasting of images and information about clashes and casualties.

In the conversation, Arafat told Quader that several television channels had already been shut down and that he had given blanket permission to suspend broadcasts carrying such content.

The prosecution also submitted documents from four television channels showing that they were forced to suspend broadcasts on July 18 and 22 following government instructions.

"These are systematic crimes," prosecutor Gazi Monawar Hossain Tamim told the court, arguing that the measures were taken to conceal the government's killings and other crimes.

Arafat told Quader that several television channels had already been shut down and that he had given blanket permission to suspend broadcasts carrying such content.

The prosecution also referred to a UN report documenting media control during the crackdown and played telephone conversations involving then prime minister Sheikh Hasina, her adviser Salman F Rahman and then law minister Anisul Huq.

According to the prosecution, the conversations contained discussions about using the curfew to "finish" protesters, deploying lethal weapons and helicopters, and directing AL supporters to set fire to protesters' homes and businesses.

The prosecutors further argued that the AL and its affiliated organisations, including Jubo League, Swechchhasebak League, Sramik League and Chhatra League, took organisational decisions to suppress the movement.

They said Quader, AL Joint General Secretary Bahaunddin Nasim, who is also an accused in the case, and Arafat played key roles in facilitating the crackdown.

The prosecution also referred to the July 15 attacks at Dhaka University, saying Arafat was present and made provocative remarks against protesting students, while Chhatra League leaders mobilised activists against them. More than 300 students were assaulted and injured that day, it said.

The other accused are Jubo League chairman Sheikh Fazle Shams Parash, general secretary Mainul Hossain Khan Nikhil, Chhatra League president Saddam Hussain and its general secretary Sheikh Wali Asif Enan.

RANGPUR MOB KILLINGS

Slow legal process frustrates victims' families

S DILIP ROY



Ruplal



Pradeep

A year after her husband was beaten to death by a mob, Maloti Rani Rabidas is still struggling to keep her family going, with little income and little hope that those responsible will soon face justice.

"I work at a shoe factory near our home and earn Tk 6,000 a month. We have to struggle every moment just to survive," said Maloti, whose husband Ruplal Robidas was killed in the attack.

She has since managed to marry off her elder daughter with great difficulty, while her younger daughter and son are still studying.

"We have been going through very difficult times since my husband was brutally killed," she said.

Maloti said she had received financial assistance from the government and private individuals, but it was not enough to support the family.

Her nephew-in-law Pradeep Lal Robidas' family has also been struggling since his death. His son Dulal, 23, took a job as a village police member and has been supporting his younger brother and sister with his small salary.

"All the responsibilities of my family fell on my shoulders after my father's death. I receive a very small salary. My younger brother and sister are still studying, and I am trying to support them with my limited earnings," Dulal said.

For both families, however, financial hardship is compounded by a lingering fear that justice may never come.

"We are worried about whether we will get justice. Many of the identified accused have not been arrested, and the charge sheet is yet to be submitted," Maloti said.

"Our fear has not gone away. We still feel insecure because most of the accused have not been arrested," Dulal said, alleging that police have not taken sufficient steps to arrest them and often do not respond properly when the family contacts them.

The two Dalit men, Ruplal, 48, and Pradeep, 47, were beaten to death by a mob at Burirhat in Rangpur's Taraganj upazila on the night of August 9 last year over suspicion that they were involved in rickshaw-van theft.

Ruplal worked as a roadside cobbler at Taraganj Bazar, while Pradeep was a battery-run rickshaw-van driver.

The following day, Maloti filed a murder case with Taraganj Police Station against 700 unidentified people.

After scrutinising video footage of the incident, police identified around 70 people. Fifteen of them were arrested, but all were later released on bail. The remaining identified accused are absconding, according to police and the victims' family members.

Contacted, Taraganj Police Station Inspector (Investigation) Abdullah Al Mamud said police were conducting drives to arrest the remaining accused identified through CCTV footage.

"They went into hiding after the incident, which is why we could not arrest them. But we are continuing our efforts," said Abdullah, also the investigating officer of the case.

"We have already completed the investigation. We will submit the charge sheet shortly," he added.

Asked about the family's allegation that police were not responding properly, Abdullah denied it, saying police were cooperating with the victims' family in every possible way.

Dhaka, New Delhi seek 'fresh start'

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Trivedi first paid a courtesy call on Tarique at the Secretariat and later met Salahuddin at the home ministry. It was his first call on the prime minister since he arrived in Dhaka on June 12.

Trivedi left Dhaka for New Delhi yesterday afternoon. Sources said his trip could be meant to convey Dhaka's concerns over issues that have recently strained ties, particularly deposed and convicted former prime minister Sheikh Hasina taking part in a media event on August 5.

Hasina's address at the event prompted a strong reaction from Dhaka, which had clearly conveyed its position on the matter to New Delhi beforehand.

"So, on August 5, Hasina showed disrespect to the judiciary, one of the pillars of the state. And the Indian government allowed that to happen," Khalilur told reporters at the foreign ministry after Tarique's meeting with Trivedi.

"We hope they will not do anything to undermine any pillar of our state again. This is our expectation, and based on my conversations with them, I am somewhat reassured that this incident will not be repeated," he said.

The Hasina issue has been a major source of tension since she fled to India on August 5, 2024, following the fall of her government in the July uprising.

Khalilur said Dhaka had also asked New Delhi to expedite the extradition process for Hasina and those accused of murdering Inquilab Moncho spokesperson Sharif Osman Bin Hadi.

Bangladesh has already provided India with documents requested regarding the suspected killers of Hadi, he said.

"This is an extremely sensitive issue for us as well. We requested that these killers be extradited to us as quickly as possible," Khalilur said.

Trivedi said India would decide on the extradition requests after conducting a legal examination.

The two countries also continue to face concerns over border killings and push-ins, water sharing, and trade restrictions affecting people on both sides.

Khalilur said these issues were touched upon only briefly during Tarique's meeting with Trivedi.

"Emphasis was also placed on creating an enabling environment required to take the bilateral relations forward," he added.

In a statement after his meeting with Trivedi, Salahuddin said the two countries were interdependent in geographical, social, political, and economic terms and that a new beginning was essential to strengthen their friendly relations.

He said existing differences could be resolved through dialogue and mutual cooperation, but India would have to come forward with sincerity.

The home minister said bilateral ties should move forward on the basis of equality.

We have issues, and so does Bangladesh. But there is only one people's issue: good relations. There is no issue on which we cannot sit down and find a solution.

Dinesh Trivedi, Indian high commissioner

Trivedi also stressed the importance of strengthening bilateral ties, describing differences over various issues as natural in a democratic culture and calling them the "beauty of democracy".

He said a true democracy could not exist without such issues and that people in both countries wanted a strong relationship that would create a "win-win situation" for both sides.

Trivedi conveyed to Tarique the intent to work together with Bangladesh in a "positive, constructive, and forward-looking manner", the Indian High Commission in Dhaka said in a statement.

"We had a good discussion. We have issues, and so does Bangladesh. But there is only one people's issue: good relations. There is no issue on which we cannot sit down and find a solution," Trivedi said.

He said Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants good relations with Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries.

Trivedi described Tarique as a "man of the public" who is humble and down-to-earth.

"It did not feel like I was meeting him for the first time. He is a very good person, very humble, and on the ground. We had a very good discussion. We are looking forward," he said.

Separately, Khalilur said no decision had yet been made on whether Tarique would visit India or attend the BRICS Summit in New Delhi on September 12-13 as the chairperson of BIMSTEC.

"Secondly, the invitation was not extended to the prime minister personally. It was addressed to the chairperson of BIMSTEC. Please try to understand this distinction," he said.

A diplomatic source said if Tarique does not join the summit, Dhaka might try to arrange a New Delhi visit for him around the time of the BRICS event.

Diplomatic sources in Dhaka and New Delhi said they are on standby amid positive vibes in the relationship and in anticipation of a positive signal from both sides on a possible visit by Tarique.

"Such a high-level visit would require a good amount of preparation from both sides. Many ministries are involved in various sectors of engagement. We need to prepare so we can get some concrete outcome," a foreign ministry official told this correspondent.

A village in tears

FROM PAGE 1

a concrete house for their family and then return home to get married. The work on the house has begun, but they won't be here to see it get finished," Aduri said.

Moyna said all she wanted now was for the government to bring her sons' bodies home.

Two other men from Gandagohali, Rubel Miah and Kalimuddin, were also killed in the same fire.

Rubel had lived in Saudi Arabia for eight years. He returned home two years ago to get married. Most recently, he came in December and stayed for four months before leaving again.

His daughter was born only 15 days ago.

Rubel's wife, Akhi Begum, 19, said her husband would often call to see their daughter and ask how she was doing. They even spoke on the morning of the fire.

"My daughter would never get to sit on her father's lap. Please bring my husband back," she said.

Kalimuddin, 30, had been in Saudi Arabia for nearly nine years and was due to return home in a month to get married. His mother, Karima Begum, could barely speak through her tears. "I've lost my son; how will I live now?"

Karima said she wanted her son's body brought home so she could see him one last time and bury him in the family graveyard.

While four families in Gandagohali mourn, another family in the same village is thanking their lucky stars.

Habibur Rahman, 26, was among the others working at the factory. He survived because he had gone to a nearby salon to have a shave.

Habibur told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday that most workers slept during the day and worked at night. He went to the salon around noon, and the fire broke out around 1:30pm.

By the time he returned, police and firefighters were battling the blaze, and he could no longer enter the factory.

Habibur said all 17 workers also lived inside the single-storey factory and that their passports and other documents were destroyed in the fire.



A pall of gloom has descended on Gandagohali village.

The Bangladesh Embassy in Riyadh, citing local administration sources, said eight died in the fire, and eight others died after inhaling black smoke.

The embassy, in a notice yesterday, said the fire broke out around 2:00pm [Riyadh time] at a sofa-making factory in the Musa Sanaiya industrial area under Shifa Police Station. An electrical short circuit was initially suspected as the cause.

Embassy officials went to the scene after being informed as civil defence personnel recovered all 16 bodies, the notice added.

It also said identifying the victims had become difficult because their passports and other documents were destroyed in the fire.

The victims would initially be identified through fingerprints. DNA tests could be required if identification through fingerprints is not possible, the embassy said.

According to a foreign ministry press release, the Bangladesh Embassy in Riyadh would coordinate with Saudi authorities and the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment to expedite identification of the bodies.

After identification and completion of the required Saudi formalities, arrangements to repatriate the bodies would be made at government expense.

The government will also provide a one-off special humanitarian grant to each of the 16 victims' families, while the respective district administrations have already provided Tk 20,000 in immediate assistance to each family.

Asked about the factory, Habibur said the 17 Bangladeshis worked under a contractual arrangement, taking orders and delivering finished products.

Helal Pramanik, a friend of Habibur from Gandagohali who said he had worked at the same factory around five years ago, claimed the factory was an illegal establishement.

He said it had no windows and alleged that its doors remained locked from outside during the day to prevent police from entering, leaving workers unable to escape when the fire broke out.

Of the 16 dead, 13 were from Atrai upazila, two from Naldanga upazila in Natore and one from Bagmara upazila in Rajshahi.

Naogaon Deputy Commissioner Md Saiful Islam said the administration was contacting their families and coordinating with the expatriates ministry to bring the bodies home.

Naogaon Atrai UNO Md Moniruzzaman said they were also maintaining contact with the Bangladesh Embassy to expedite the repatriation process.