

Heavy rainfall fills large potholes on a dilapidated road in Hastisunda area of Barishal's Uzirpur upazila, disrupting movement and causing frequent accidents for commuters. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Sentenced to die for another

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not verify whether the name and address given by the second accused were genuine. He also sought to keep him in jail over concerns that he might flee if released on bail.

Although police had doubts about the identity, they failed to establish who the arrested man actually was.

On June 13, 2022, the man claiming to be Sona Mia was released on bail and went into hiding, said Cox's Bazar Sadar Police Station OC Sheikh Mohammad Ali. He never appeared before the court again.

On November 25, 2025, a court sentenced "Sona Mia" and another accused to death in the case. Two others received life sentences, while another was acquitted.

Nearly six months later, on June 24 this year, Rab arrested the real Sona Mia in Ramu.

He told the court that he was not an accused in the case and had never been arrested with yaba or imprisoned.

Following a court order, Cox's Bazar Sadar Police investigated the matter and submitted a report on July 5. It found that the person arrested with the yaba in 2020 was actually Md Ramzan, who had identified himself as Sona Mia.

Police found that Ramzan had used a forged birth registration certificate to assume Sona Mia's identity, said the OC.

According to police, Ramzan and Sona Mia had once lived in a Rohingya camp before sharing a room in Kutubdia Para in Cox's Bazar town. Ramzan allegedly learned Sona Mia's birth registration details there and later used them.

OC Sheikh Mohammad Ali said another accused and Sona Mia both identified Ramzan. According to their statements, Ramzan was a long-time resident of Kutupalong Rohingya camp.

A review of old and recent records at Cox's Bazar District Jail also found significant discrepancies between the two men. Their photographs, fingerprints and identifying marks did not match.

Abdul Mannan, president of Cox's Bazar District Bar Association, said there had been serious negligence from the beginning of the investigation.

"The charge sheet was submitted without properly verifying the birth registration certificate, checking the attached photograph or visiting the address to confirm the person's identity," he said.

He said the court ordered Sona Mia's release on conditions on August 12.

Sona Mia's wife, Jannatul Ferdous, said her husband was a day labourer who had never committed any crime.

"Because of Ramzan's identity fraud, my husband became a death-row convict," she said.

She demanded a proper investigation and a resolution of the case.

Govt gives itself flying colours

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diversification, green industries and other sectors.

The assessment says the government significantly increased allocations for education and health.

It also launched the "One Teacher, One Tab" programme, established 327 new digital classrooms for primary schools and restored 82 percent of classrooms by repairing 65,000 laptops, 62,000 projectors and other old equipment.

In the health sector, the government has started recruiting 100,000 health carers, at least 80 percent of whom are expected to be women. It also took steps to recruit 5,000 doctors, establish dialysis units at the upazila level and expand hospitals. The sector received Tk 694.09 billion in the budget allocation.

Net FDI increased 44 percent in 2025 to $1.78 billion, according to the document.

Fourteen closed jute mills have been placed under private management, with nine resuming production. The assessment also cited initiatives to expand trade, investment, labour-market access and economic cooperation with China, Malaysia and South Korea.

The Jatiya Sangsad passed 105 bills in 52 working days, while several high-profile rape and murder cases saw expedited trials and verdicts, the assessment notes.

The government also cited efforts to arrest and extradite suspects in major murder cases, including former IGP Benazir Ahmed. An accused in the Ziaur Rahman murder case was also arrested after 45 years on the run.

Allowances for decorated freedom fighters and families of Bir Sreshthos have been increased, while 13,479 of the 14,368 gazetted July fighters are receiving monthly allowances through bank accounts.

Under a pilot honorarium programme for religious leaders, allowances have been provided to 13,949 people.

The assessment also mentioned achievements by other ministries and divisions.

Mohammad Mojibur Rahman, a professor at Dhaka University's Institute of Education and Research, said the government had taken several initiatives, but its achievements appeared limited.

He said the government also lacked adequate preparation and effective contingency plans to deal with crises such as power and energy shortages.

Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, a former professor of government and politics at Jahangirnagar University, said violence on educational campuses continued while expected progress in investment has yet to become visible.

"In particular, there has not been much foreign direct investment. Partisanisation of the administration has not been stopped either. Improving law and order also remains a major challenge," he said.

He added that controversies involving some ministers and state ministers have damaged the government's image.

Political appointments also drew criticism. BNP leaders were appointed to top posts at 11 government institutions on one-year contracts, while party figures were made administrators of 11 city corporations and 42 district councils.

Almost all the vice-chancellors appointed are current or former leaders of pro-BNP teachers' organisations.

A state minister also drew criticism after naming newly formed unions in his constituency after his sons. The decision was later cancelled following the prime minister's intervention.

Law and order remains a major concern, with murders, extortion, mob attacks, kidnappings and other crimes continuing despite several anti-crime drives, analysts said.

Moreover, they said, the power and energy sector has emerged as the government's most challenging area. Fuel shortages and price increases in March and April were followed by a sharp fall in gas supply in July, reducing electricity generation. Industries, fertiliser factories and CNG stations have suffered from extremely low gas pressure, forcing some factories to suspend production.

GDP calculation methodology

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the previous Awami League government's tenure to portray a stronger economic picture.

The country's economy has been facing challenges for the past several years.

The paper, prepared by two committee members -- BIDS Director General AK Enamul Haque and Research Director Atonu Rabbani -- was presented at a roundtable on national income statistics at the BIDS office, organised to gather expert views on the quality, transparency and accessibility of official statistics.

The interim government had earlier formed an expert taskforce to assess these issues. After taking office, the BNP-led government said it would conduct an in-depth review to determine whether official data had been incorrectly reported or distorted.

BIDS Board Member Wahiduddin Mahmud, a former adviser to the interim government, chaired the discussion, while Prime Minister's Adviser for Finance and Planning Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir and State Minister for Planning Md Zonayed Abdur Rahim Saki also spoke.

"Several issues have emerged regarding the GDP growth figures during the past government's tenure, which were presented to us during the consultation. The forensic panel is now conducting further analysis," a participant told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

He also said governance reforms should ensure the BBS can work independently, while technical improvements should focus on sound, updated methodologies and calculations.

Another participant, wishing anonymity, said the audit committee compared GDP trends using two base years -- 2005 and 2015 -- to identify abnormal patterns and investigate their possible methodological causes.

"By comparing the trends under the two base years, they identified some abnormal patterns, particularly in the manufacturing sector, and then examined the possible methodological reasons behind them," he said.

The use of the Quantum Index of Industrial Production (QIIP) also involves a number of technical, procedural and methodological assumptions that require closer scrutiny, he said.

SID Secretary Md Firoz Sarker said the government is committed to establishing the accuracy of official statistics and resolving confusion over national income measurement.

The paper said flaws in the existing methodology mean the government does not have sufficiently precise economic data.

Wahiduddin Mahmud advised the BBS to introduce a designated digital framework for national income accounting, and also develop a similar template for inflation measurement soon.

Echoing him, Titumir emphasised the need to prevent politicisation of data, and said accountability cannot be ensured without science-based information.

Future national surveys would be financed domestically rather than through donor agencies, and the government would soon open official data to researchers and educational institutions, he added.

He also expressed plans to establish a data verification laboratory at the BIDS Graduate School.

Zonayed Saki said confusion over inflation measurement among the public needs to be addressed immediately.

National Professor Mahbub Ullah, BBS Director General Md Shamimul Haque, Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh Chairman Zaidi Sattar, Centre for Policy Dialogue Executive Director Fahmida Khatun, CPD Distinguished Fellows Debapriya Bhattacharya and Prof Mustafizur Rahman, Dhaka University Economics Professor Sayema Haque Bidisha, and SANEM Executive Director Selim Raihan also joined the discussion among others.

The last day before his assassination

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Shahriar later wrote about the day in his memoir Bangabandhu: Sroddhay Bhabnay Smirite (Bangabandhu: In Reverence, In Thought, In Memory).

When the daughters arrived, Sheikh Mujib received them with affection. He spoke to them not merely as a head of state meeting the family of another public figure, but as someone concerned about their father's health.

Meanwhile, preparations for the Dhaka University visit were in full swing.

At noon, Mujib called his press secretary, Abdul Toab Khan, and assistant press secretary and speech writer Mahbub Talukder and asked them to prepare a speech for the following day.

"I was a little surprised. Would he deliver a written speech?" Mahbub writes in his memoir Bangabhabane Panch Bachhar (Five Years at Bangabhaban).

Toab Khan asked the question. Mujib clarified that he would speak extempore. "But I have to have all the written data and information at hand."

Toab instructed Mahbub to collect the necessary information from the education secretary, who was expected to visit later that day, and prepare a draft.

In the evening, as Mujib was leaving Gono Bhaban, then the president's office, for his residence on Dhanmondi Road 32, Mahbub reminded him of a farewell dinner for Muhammad Farashuddin, the president's private secretary.

"Yes, I know," Mujib replied. "That means you have given me leave now."

He smiled softly and added, "I can't stay at the dinner."

Then came another piece of news.

An Indian Air Force helicopter had crashed in Ramgati, killing several Indian soldiers. The accident immediately became diplomatically sensitive.

According to Mahbub, Bangladesh officials disagreed with the Indian embassy over whether the incident should be reported. Indian charge d'affaires JN Dixit said it would not be right to publish the news. Toab Khan felt the decision had to come from the president himself.

He called Mujib.

"Go to my office and call me on the red telephone," Mujib told him.

Toab did so and returned after a while.

Then another call came from the Indian embassy. Toab said the accident should be reported in newspapers to avoid confusion among the people.

The Indian charge d'affaires said he had spoken to Delhi about the matter.

"We have taken a high-level decision. In this situation, our decision will stand," Toab responded.

According to Shahriar, Mujib met a special envoy of the president of South Korea that day. He also met the navy chief, information minister, state minister for defence, air force chief, Dhaka University vice chancellor and education minister, among others.

As afternoon settled and activity slowed around the office, Mujib sat beside the Gono Bhaban lake. Someone sprinkled food for the fish.

At around 4:30pm, then state minister for information Taheruddin Thakur arrived and discussed various issues with the president. Nearby, Sheikh Russel, Mujib's youngest son, was learning to swim. After a while, Russel stood before his father, still dripping, with his swimming instructor.

Mujib told his son: "He is teaching you to swim, so you should give him some gift."

The education minister and another official then showed Mujib the scroll of honour that Dhaka University students would read out the next day.

Before leaving the office, Mujib instructed Shahriar to go directly to his residence on the morning of August 15. From there, they would accompany the president to the university.

That journey never took place.

Bangladesh was about to witness its darkest hour since liberation.

It was August 15, 1975.

Mujib and his family, except for his two daughters, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehena, who were in Germany, were assassinated in a coup by disgruntled army personnel.

Later that morning, then Major Sakhawat Hussain, who retired as brigadier general, visited the house to collect footage and film. He recounted the experience in his book Bangladesh Roktakto Odhyay 1975-1981 (Bangladesh's Bloody Chapter 1975-1981).

The smell of gunpowder hit his nostrils as soon as he entered. He was there to collect three rolls of film -- one from BTV and two from newspaper photographers of Ittefaq and Doinik Bangla. They had been shot immediately after the execution of the first family.

Sakhawat saw the body of Bangabandhu's former security chief, Colonel Jamil Ahmed, who was later posthumously awarded Bir Uttam. Jamil's body was bloody and riddled with bullets.

"Tears filled my eyes without my knowing it," Sakhawat wrote.

At around 10:00am, almost five hours after the assassination, he was allowed to look around the entire house.

As he entered, his heart began beating faster.

"I caught the smell of corpses. Along with that, the smell of gunpowder and the silence of death created a strange atmosphere. All in all, I felt like I had come to a city of death."

A police inspector who had been on duty lay face down on a table at the foot of the stairs, which was covered in blood.

Sakhawat moved through the house and entered another room to the right of the stairs, which he thought was probably the guest room.

"As I entered, I saw the bullet-riddled bodies of Bangabandhu's younger brother Sheikh Naser and one of his assistants. Naser's body was lying in front of the bathroom door."

He quickly left and took the stairs.

Then came the moment he would remember clearly.

"When I reached the middle of the stairs, I saw that heartbreaking scene, which I still remember clearly. It was the lifeless body of Bangabandhu lying on the stairs."

"I saw the bullet-riddled, bloody, lifeless body of Bangladesh President Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman lying in the middle of the stairs of his own house."

Mujib was wearing a white kurta and chequered lungi. His right hand was on his chest and his left was slightly extended. His glasses had fallen a little away.

"His chest was riddled with bullets. Blood was clotted on the stairs. His face was calm; there was no sign of fear. It seemed that even the slightest shadow of death had not passed over him," Sakhawat wrote.

Mujib was supposed to die at the hands of Pakistani soldiers. But they did not have the courage to do so. Instead, he died in his own home in independent Bangladesh, Sakhawat added.

He could not remain in front of Bangabandhu's body for long.

"I felt uneasy."

"To go upstairs, I would have had to step over Bangabandhu's body, which seemed deeply disrespectful. So, I slid against the wall and climbed up to go to the bedroom."

Upstairs, the horror continued.

In one bedroom, Sakhawat saw a double bed, an almirah and a table, like in any middle-class family home. There were three phones, several smoking pipes and a red phone. "There was blood everywhere. The smell of dried blood was unbearable as soon as it hit my nose. I also saw numerous boot marks, signs of soldiers' movements through the room."

The bodies of the other dead family members were in the master bedroom.

"I saw Begum Mujib's body. Bodies of Kamal, Jamal and their two newly married daughters-in-law lay next to her. And last of all, the dead body of Russell in the corner."

"Maybe they were all killed in the same room or maybe two or three bodies were dragged into one room to be put together," Sakhawat wrote.

Lieutenant Colonel (retd) MA Hamid also visited the house on August 15. In his book Tinti Sena Abbutthan O Na Bola Kisu Kotha (Three Military Coups and Some Untold Stories), he described the massacre.

On his way upstairs, he was shocked to see Sheikh Mujib lying on the stairs, with blood streaming across them.

He then saw Begum Mujib's body lying face down against the wall.

Hamid passed her and entered the room.

"A sea of blood was splattered all over the room. The soles of my boots were almost half submerged...several bodies lay in the room."

According to Hamid, on the left lay Sheikh Jamal. Judging by the condition of his body, it appeared that a grenade had been thrown into the room. Nearby was Rosie Jamal, newly married, her hands still painted with henna. The grenade blast had struck her directly in the face.

Next to her was Sultana Kamal. Only days earlier, Hamid had seen the "golden girl", beloved in the sports arena, running across the stadium.

"Little Russell's body was lying on her lap. His face looked very pitiful. The back of his skull was completely crushed. I don't know what crime this little child had committed," Hamid wrote.

Thus ended one of the bloodiest chapters in Bangladesh's history.

It was like no other day.

Another 20

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Police have confirmed the identities of the nine people: Motiur Rahaman, 17, of Sitakunda; Palash Das and Sunny Das -- from Bhatiari; Mohammad Khokon Mia of Gaibandha; and Mohammad Mansur, Abdul Alim Sujon, Md Rana, Nasir Uddin and Md Hanif -- all from Mirsarai.

Hanif was taken to Chattogram National Hospital in a critical condition, where doctors declared him dead, said hospital authorities.

Brig Gen Taslim Uddin, director of CMCH, said eight workers were brought dead to the hospital while one was undergoing treatment.

Standing in front of the CMCH morgue, Abdul Awal Subhash, younger brother of victim Abdul Alim Sujon, said, "My brother died while trying to rescue others. He rescued one person first and brought him upstairs. When he went down again, he was engulfed by toxic gas." "He joined the yard about a year and a half ago," he added.

Mohammad Kawsar, a cousin of the deceased Rana, said, "Rana started working in the yard about five or six months ago. I received a call from his family in Gaibandha at noon and rushed to the Chittagong medical. When I arrived, I found that he was pronounced dead."

Visiting the victims, Chattogram DC Md Zahidul Islam Mian told reporters that the ship was nearing the end of the dismantling process. Gas spread after work began yesterday.

He said they have initially learned there was a huge concentration of carbon monoxide, causing many to lose consciousness due to a lack of oxygen. Those who went to rescue them were also affected.

"We are overseeing the treatment of those injured. The families of all the deceased will receive 10 lakh taka each in financial compensation," he said.

The DC also said a team of chemists and an army team were working to control the spread of gas in the locality.

"Legal action will be taken if negligence is found on the part of the company," he added.