HRFB alarmed by sedition case against Satkhira activist

Calls for fair probe into charges against Shampa Goswami

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Human Rights Forum Bangladesh (HRFB) yesterday expressed deep concern over a sedition case filed against Shampa Goswami, executive director of Satkhira-based Prerona Nari Unnayan Sangathan.

In a press statement, the rights group also raised concerns about threats to her safety amid allegations of harassment following the filing of the case.

According to HRFB, a sedition case was filed against Shampa with Shyamnagar Police Station in Satkhira on September 29 under Section 124A of the Penal Code. Shampa alleged that police have been keeping her house and organisation's

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A Gazipur Metropolitan Police vehicle sprays water to extinguish a fire in another police vehicle torched during clashes between law enforcers and RMG workers demanding higher wages in Gazipur yesterday.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Khulna sees four killings in 3 days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Police recovered the bodies of four men in Khulna district in separate incidents over the last three days.

Around noon yesterday, the bodies of two men were recovered from the Atharobanki river in Rupsha upazila.

They were identified as Mehedi Hasan Sohag, 38, a boatman from the upazila's Rajapur; and Al Amin Hossain, 24, said Anisuzzaman, additional superintendent (Crime and Ops) of Khulna police. Locals first spotted a body floating in the river near Jelkhanaghat. Later, as water receded during low tide, they spotted another body at the same location.

The police officer said, "One was hacked to death, while the other was shot." He said they could not immediately say whether either of the victims had any criminal cases against them.

Manzur Morshed, superintendent of Khulna River Police, said police were preparing inquest reports on the bodies.

The bodies were found a day after Syed Humayun Kabir, joint convener of the Khulna city unit of Tanti Dal, was hacked to death at his business establishment in the city's Rayermohol area around 6:30pm on Sunday.

According to Aranghata police, the killing may have been triggered by a dispute over payment for a refrigerator bought on credit. On Saturday night, a 35-year-old man was found with stab injuries on a road in the city's Labanchara area. He was declared dead at Khulna Medical College Hospital.

The victim was identified as Shahidul Islam Kolin.

Clashes, blockades

FROM PAGE 1

7:30am, bringing traffic to a standstill. Around noon, protesters set fire to a police vehicle at Naojor and another pickup at Safipur along the highway.

An industrial police inspector, requesting anonymity, said police personnel were inside a pickup when it was set ablaze. No injuries were immediately reported.

Md Arif Hossain, assistant commissioner and executive magistrate at the Gazipur Deputy Commissioner's Office, said a BGB member was injured during the protests in Kaliakair.

Nine platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh personnel were deployed in Gazipur to contain the unrest, according to BGB headquarters.

During a visit to the Naojor area around 12:30pm, this newspaper saw that over 100 workers gathered on the Dhaka-Tangail highway, some carrying sticks and rods.

The workers left the highway around 1:00pm. "The movement will continue. We will return in a while," a worker was heard saying.

Mohammad Taherul Haque Chowhan, additional police commissioner (administration and finance) of Gazipur Metropolitan Police, said at least 22 people were arrested.

Talking to this newspaper, Hazrat Billal, publicity affairs secretary of Bangladesh Garment Workers' Solidarity, said the unrest stemmed from workers' long-standing deprivation, inadequate wages, and obstacles to forming trade unions.

He said workers should not be held responsible for the violence, calling for the dismantling of syndicates involving factory owners and unscrupulous labour leaders.

He also urged the workers to pursue their demands through democratic means.

In Savar and Ashulia, demonstrations spread to Zirabo, Kathgora, Ghoshbagh, and Narsinghpur.

The protests began around 9:30am when workers of New Age Group factories left their workplaces, according to witnesses and police.

Workers subsequently assembled in front of factories belonging to Ananta and Ha-Meem groups. Some protesters hurled brick chunks and stones at police near a Ha-Meem Group factory.

Workers also demonstrated outside Bengal Plastic Pipes Ltd beside Kathgora Road and later threw brick chunks and stones at the factory.

Police said at least eight factories came under attack.

Clashes with police erupted when protesters twice attempted to block the Nabinagar-Chandra highway at Kabirpur. Police fired tear gas and used water cannons to disperse them.

Clashes also broke out in Ghoshbagh along the Abdullahpur-Baipail road, while protesters torched a lorry in Narsinghpur.

Two people were detained in the area over attacking law enforcers, said Mohammad Tariqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Ashulia Police Station. It could not immediately be confirmed whether they were garment workers.

The unrest also spread to Ullail in Savar, where workers gathered beside the Dhaka-Aricha highway. Workers at several factories in Padmar Mor, Hemayetpur, also stopped work.

Mohammad Mominul Islam Bhuiyan, superintendent of Industrial Police-1, said workers from protesting factories had prompted employees of nearby factories to join the demonstrations.

He also alleged that outsiders joined the protests, adding that police would take action based on available information.

In Dhaka, police drove protesters away twice as they attempted to march towards Mirpur-10 from Mirpur-14 around 9:00am.

Around 11:00am, workers from factories in the Shewrapara and Purabi areas of Mirpur-6 attempted to gather in Mirpur-2 and march towards Mirpur-10. Police fired tear gas to disperse them.

Hasan Mohammad Nasher Rikabdar, deputy commissioner of police (Mirpur division), said four cases had been filed over the unrest, while preparations were underway to lodge two more cases with Kafrul and Rupnagar police stations over Sunday's incidents.

At least 60 people were arrested, he told The Daily Star.

Among those arrested was Rajib Chandra Das, who was detained in Uttara over the allegation of torching a police vehicle on Sunday.

Khalid Mansur, officer-in-charge of Uttara West Police Station, said Rajib was held after he admitted to the offence in a Facebook post.

In another development, workers from several factories blocked the Dhaka-Narayanganj Link Road, bringing traffic to a halt.

Tarek Al Mehedi, additional superintendent of police (crime and operations) in Narayanganj, said the workers gathered at Katherpul in Kutubail around 11:30am and blocked the road around noon.

Shahidul Islam, a worker at Metro Knitting and Dyeing Mills Ltd, said he earned Tk 12,500 a month, while house rent alone cost him Tk 5,500. He needed another Tk 10,000 for groceries.

"We have only one demand: our monthly wages must be raised to Tk 30,000."

[Our correspondents in Savar, Gazipur, and Narayanganj contributed to this report.]



M Mansur Ali



AHM Quamruzzaman



Tajuddin Ahmad



Syed Nazrul Islam

Tankers 'explode' after hitting Hormuz mines

AGENCIES

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy said yesterday two oil tankers "exploded" after striking mines while traveling through an "unauthorized route" in the Strait of Hormuz.

The country has imposed restrictions on vessels seeking to pass through the strait and has attacked ships it says violate those restrictions, as it seeks to assert control over the strategic waterway and exert pressure on the US.

Iran said it was ready to reopen the strait within two days if the US agrees to its conditions, having previously proposed a one-week timeline.

"The possibility of implementing this plan in two days is another indication of Iran's good-faith approach," foreign ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei said yesterday.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump has reiterated his threat to resume strikes against Iran, telling a campaign rally that he may have to give Tehran "the hammer" at some unspecified time.

"And the only reason why I'm not finished with Iran is I want to be nice. I want to try and save all those lives if I can ... But at some point we're going to have to give them the hammer," AFP quoted him as saying.

Trump held a call with Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu over when and whether to ramp up combat operations against Iran, US media reported.

The Middle East and Gulf region should not become a battleground for great-power rivalry and China is willing to work with Arab nations to achieve lasting peace, Chinese President Xi Jinping told Oman's sultan, Reuters reports.

Xi told Omani Sultan Haitham bin Tariq al-Said that the world is undergoing profound changes.

In a separate development, the Houthi-affiliated Al Masirah TV said at least seven people have been wounded following air attacks by the Saudi-led coalition on Yemen's rebel-controlled Hodeidah governorate, reports AFP.

Consumers squeezed again

FROM PAGE 1

fixed price.

The new rate is also higher than the Tk 1,976 per cylinder proposed at the public hearing by BERC's technical evaluation committee.

At the time of the committee's proposal, the average Saudi Aramco contract price (CP) was $712 per tonne. It has since risen to $759 per tonne.

BERC uses the international Saudi CP to calculate local LPG prices. The shipping cost for November has been set at $250 per tonne, unchanged from the previous month.

Before the public hearing, the LP Gas Traders Cooperative Society on October 12 announced a two-day nationwide shutdown of LPG sales and distribution.

Amid high market prices, the traders demanded higher commissions, an end to what they described as administrative harassment. They also want permission to bring unused cylinders back into the supply chain.

Businesses sought higher charges and commissions despite audit reports submitted to the technical committee showing that most LPG companies were profitable.

Talking to The Daily Star, multiple businesspersons cited global supply chain disruption compounded by the Middle East conflict.

Importers claimed that they now have to buy expensive LPG from the US and other sources instead of from the Middle East.

Bangladesh's annual LPG demand is around 17 lakh tonnes, serving nearly one crore consumers. The market is dominated by private-sector companies, which account for almost the entire supply.

Although around 35 companies hold licences, only about 10 to 12 are active importers.

Consumer representatives questioned the rationale for considering further increases when customers were already paying significantly above the official rate.

The LP Gas Business Cooperative Society had also lodged a complaint with BERC on September 21, alleging that some companies were selling LPG to distributors above the regulator-fixed prices, forcing distributors and retailers to charge consumers more.

Khalilur Rahman, an adviser to the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, demanded an investigation into allegations of artificial shortages, hoarding, and overcharging before any further price adjustment.

Call from Mushtaque

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power struggle within the military that followed the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975.

As senior army officers moved to challenge the president's self-confessed killers who had taken control of the Bangabhaban, another plot was underway behind prison walls.

Amid the turmoil, Nazrul, acting president of the government-in-exile; Tajuddin, its prime minister; Mansur, finance minister; and Qamaruzzaman, minister for home affairs, and relief and rehabilitation, had landed in jail on politically motivated charges of corruption under martial law.

According to the full verdict of the Appellate Division delivered on April 30, 2013, a chain of events began unfolding around 3:00am on November 3.

The then Inspector General of Prisons, Nuruzzaman Howlader, received several telephone calls from army personnel at the Bangabhaban. He was told that armed men might enter the jail and forcibly remove some prisoners and was instructed to proceed immediately to Dhaka Central Jail.

Nuruzzaman informed then Deputy Inspector General of Prisons Kazi Abdul Awal of the calls and directed him to go to the jail at once. He too rushed there.

Upon arrival, Nuruzzaman and Abdul Awal sat in the office of the DIG (Prisons), where the prison chief continued receiving telephone calls.

"Sometime later, Captain Moslem Uddin arrived at the jail gate accompanied by four other armed personnel," the verdict said, adding that they asked for Nuruzzaman and enquired as to whether the four leaders had been kept separately as instructed.

Nuruzzaman asked why they had been segregated.

Offering no explanations, the armed personnel plainly announced that the four men were to be put to death.

Nuruzzaman then sought to speak to President Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed.

According to the verdict, Mushtaque instructed Nuruzzaman over the phone to let the five army personnel "do whatever they wanted to do".

The armed men then entered the prison and opened fire on the four leaders.

But the operation did not end there.

After Fajr prayers, Nuruzzaman learned that another group of armed personnel had arrived at the prison to confirm the kills. They discovered that two of the four leaders were still alive and then killed them with bayonets.

Years later, retired Brigadier General M Sakhawat Hussain wrote that the murder of the four leaders in jail "took place with the informed consent of Rashid and Mushtaque."

In his book "Roktakto Dingulo: 1975-81", Sakhawat recalled that the massacre occurred in the dead of night, coinciding with the counter-coup of November 2-3, and was carried out in a planned manner under the leadership of Moslem.

According to him, apart from Mushtaque and Rashid, the only other person who knew about the jail killings was Major General Khalilur Rahman.

Khalilur informed the inspector general of police and instructed him to convey the news to the president through his secretary, Mahbubul Alam Chashi. When Mahbubul informed President Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmad, he understood from the president's reaction that he was already aware of the murders.

For reasons unknown, Khalilur kept the incident under wraps. He did not inform others, including officials at the cantonment. By the time Khaled Mosharraf, then chief of general staff of army, and Shafayat Jamil, then Dhaka brigade commander, learned of the killings, Rashid, Farooq, Dalim and Moslem had already left for Bangkok.

Sakhawat also cited Moslem's account, in which he said the DIG had taken him to the cells where the four leaders were being held. Moslem claimed he had personally killed the imprisoned leaders with a burst of fire from a Sten gun.

"Thus, with the consent of the highest level of the state, one of the most brutal murders in the history of Bangladesh took place as planned, tarnishing the history of the Bangladesh military," Sakhawat wrote.

The details of the killings later emerged from tape-recorded statements collected by an investigation committee formed on November 4, 1975. The military inquiry was assigned to then Lt Col (later brigadier) AJM Aminul Haque Bir Uttam.

Sakhawat noted the full contents of those statements have never been made public.

On November 4, 1975, Kazi Abdul Awal, then deputy inspector general of prisons, lodged an FIR with Lalbagh Police Station.

For nearly 21 years, however, the Indemnity Ordinance blocked any investigation or trial. Only after its repeal in 1996 could the Criminal Investigation Department reopen the case on August 18 of that year.

A Dhaka court eventually delivered its verdict in 2004, convicting and sentencing 11 people for their roles in the killings.

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court later observed that the murders were part of a broader criminal conspiracy involving powerful elements within the state machinery.

On April 30, 2013, the Supreme Court upheld the lower court verdict, confirming death sentences for Moslem Uddin, Marfat Ali Shah and Abdul Hashem Mridha. Life imprisonment was upheld for Khondaker Abdur Rashid, Shariful Haq Dalim, Noor Chowdhury, Rashed Chowdhury, Ahmed Shariful Hossain, Abdul Majed, Kismat Hashem and Nazmul Hossain.

What to make of the US midterms

FROM PAGE 12

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The Republicans lead the lower house of Congress by the thinnest of margins, with 218 seats, which is the minimum required. The Democrats have 214. The remaining three are either vacant or independent.

Polls are predicting that Democrats will take anywhere between 224 and 240 seats. The more its majority in the House, the more ambitious can its agenda be. A comfortable margin means that the leading party could absorb a handful of defections and would not feel hostage at the hands of a few rebels who turn out to be kingmakers when the margin is thin.

A Democrat-led House would also mean that there would be serious negotiations over the budget and debt ceiling. Government shutdowns may be imminent.

SENATE

The Republicans have a solid lead with 53 to 47. Of course, they only need 50 seats since the vice president can always cast the tie-breaking vote. But the Democrats will need to secure 51 seats to take the Senate. This November, 35 are up for election of which 22 are Republican held. Meaning that the Democrats will need to hold on to their 13 Senate seats and win at least four more held by the Republicans to gain a majority in the upper house.

Polls show that up to 10 Republican seats may be up for serious electoral battles with the Democrats slated to win quite a few, enough to flip the majority to 53 in their favour.

A solidly Democratic Senate would mean Trump nominees are frequently denied confirmation. A reaction might be that there is a string of confirmations between election night and January when the new Senate would begin sitting.

It would not, however, be as simple in legislation. Sure, there is still the presidential veto, which would require two-thirds majority to override. But the Senate's filibuster provision would keep laws from going on the vote unless there is "cloture" (a majority of 60 votes) that could force the end of a debate. Rather unlikely, if not impossible, for Democrats to win that many in the Senate.

However, with both houses of the Congress in Democratic control, they could start passing laws in healthcare and environment or other issues almost goading the president to veto. Every veto would give the Democrats issues for future campaign where they will be able to call out Republican Congressmen and Senators for not signing on. And if the Republicans do sign on, that would on one hand be a sign that his lawmakers are running away from Trump or that the president is so blindly partisan that he is vetoing even pieces of legislation that have been co-sponsored by his own party leaders. Either way, this puts everyone in a bind.

Hence, of the 22 Republican Senate seats, there are a few to watch for -- Michigan, Texas, Maine, Ohio, Kansas, Alaska, Iowa, and some are also putting Nevada and Wisconsin down as battlegrounds.

Each has its own story. But perhaps the ones from Michigan or Alaska deserve mention. The popular Dr Abdul El Sayed's opponent in the state's Democratic nomination Haley Stevens has recently endorsed the Republican incumbent Senator Mike Rogers.

This comes after Sayed publicly said he wanted Stevens not to attend the same church on Sunday, since Stevens, whose boyfriend is an AIPAC donor, kept hammering Sayed for his criticism of Israel. Sayed enjoys a double-digit lead over Senator Rogers and is expected to win. But of late, after this meltdown within the party, the Democrats are nervous about this fallout and its effect on the voters.

In Alaska, one Dan Sullivan had hogged headlines since this senatorial candidate is virtually unknown in politics and is notable for one thing only -- his name matches with the incumbent Republican Senator. Senator Dan Sullivan is close behind Mary Peltola who had been the state's first indigenous congresswoman elected to the House in 2022.

A NYTimes investigation found that people linked to her supporters were behind propping up this second Dan Sullivan, obviously with the hope of taking away his votes that might give Peltola an advantage.