Ex-BDR member's body found on Indian side of Feni river

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Khagrachhari*

The body of a 66-year-old Bangladeshi man was found in the Feni river near the Ramgarh border in Khagrachhari yesterday morning, a day after he went missing while collecting grass for cattle.

The body of Angthepru Marma was found submerged in water on the Indian side of the Feni river, near the Sabroom border area of South Tripura, said police.

Family members and the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Ramgarh Police Station Md Nazir Alam confirmed that he was a member of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), now Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

BGB-43 Ramgarh Battalion Assistant Director Shamsul Haque said after receiving news of the man's disappearance on Friday night, BGB informed the Border Security Force (BSF) about the incident and sought its help locating him.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



This bridge over the Pagla river in Chapainawabganj's Shibganj upazila has a gap in the middle despite the completion of the approaches on both banks. Work on the structure, a key link between neighbouring unions, has remained stalled for about a year, forcing vehicles and pedestrians to continue using an ageing iron bridge next to it. PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Mob beats madrasa teacher over alleged sexual harassment

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Noakhali*

A group of locals beat a madrasa teacher over allegations of sexually harassing a class 3 student in Begumganj upazila of Noakhali yesterday.

The incident took place on the premises of a Hafizia madrasa this afternoon. The accused, Saiful Islam, is an assistant teacher at the madrasa, said Sub-Inspector Mehedi Hasan, in-charge of Rajganj Police Outpost under Begumganj Police Station.

SI Mehedi said the teacher allegedly molested the 10-year-old student when she went to the madrasa in the morning.

After classes ended around 1:00pm, the girl returned home and told her mother about the alleged sexual harassment. Her mother later informed locals about the matter. As the news spread, hundreds of men and women went to the madrasa, detained the teacher and beat him.

Police went at the scene after being informed and rescued the accused teacher, Mehedi said.

As the police team was escorting him to the police station, locals hurled brickbats at them and tried to obstruct them from taking him away. Several police personnel were injured in the incident, said the SI. ANM Imran Khan, additional superintendent of police (Begumganj circle) in Noakhali, said the accused teacher is currently in police custody.

Citing the student's mother, he said the teacher had touched the girl inappropriately when she went to the madrasa in the morning. Preparations are underway to file a case.

Locals alleged that the teacher had done the same thing to other students several times before. They demanded a fair investigation and strict legal action against him.

RMG owners may invoke 'no work, no pay' from today

FROM PAGE 1

Nearly 1,500 factory owners attended the meeting, where many voiced concerns over their inability to continue production amid repeated demonstrations, vandalism and work stoppages.

According to BGMEA leaders, workers in some factories have been leaving their workplaces after clocking in, while others have allegedly been involved in attacks on industrial establishments.

Most factory owners supported invoking the "no work, no pay" provision if normal operations cannot be ensured from today, Mahmud said.

The industry is hopeful that the government will restore law and order in the affected industrial belts quickly, allowing production to resume uninterrupted, he added.

"The garment industry is the country's largest source of industrial employment and a key driver of export earnings. Restoring normalcy is essential," he said.

The BGMEA chief also urged factory owners, labour leaders, government agencies, civil society and the media to play a constructive role in helping ease tensions.

The labour unrest has now entered its third week despite the formation of a wage board tasked with recommending a new minimum wage for garment workers. The board is scheduled to hold its third meeting tomorrow.

Workers' representatives on the board have already proposed a minimum monthly wage of Tk 32,000.

Mahmud said employers would present their wage proposal at tomorrow's meeting.

However, he noted that many factory owners questioned the viability of wage negotiations if production and workplace security cannot be guaranteed.

Meanwhile, leaders of five labour federations on Friday urged workers to return to their jobs, arguing that the wage board process should be allowed to proceed.

The union leaders also highlighted recent amendments to labour laws, including raising the annual wage increment from 5 percent to 9 percent and reducing the wage review period from five years to three.

They acknowledged, however, that current wages remain inadequate given the rising cost of essential commodities.

Workers' representatives have proposed a minimum monthly wage of Tk 32,000. Employers will present their wage proposal at tomorrow's meeting. However, many factory owners questioned the viability of wage negotiations if production and workplace security cannot be guaranteed.

FRESH PROTESTS

In Gazipur, garment workers blocked the Dhaka-Tangail Highway in Kaliakoir yesterday morning, demanding a wage hike.

The blockade began around 9:00am in the Chandra Palli Bidyut area and continued for about two and a half hours, said Kaliakair Police Station Officer-in-Charge Sahidul Islam.

The protest brought traffic to a standstill, forcing many commuters to abandon vehicles and walk to their destinations.

Police cleared the highway around 11:30am and restored traffic movement.

At least 20 people were detained on sabotage-related charges, the OC said.

Gazipur Industrial Police Superintendent Md Amzad Hossain said workers from 11 nearby factories had joined the demonstration. The factories later declared a holiday.

In the Savar-Ashulia industrial belt, at least 12 factories where workers did not join work yesterday also declared holidays.

With those additions, operations remained suspended at 59 factories amid the prolonged unrest, according to Mohammad Mominul Islam Bhuiyan, superintendent of Ashulia Industrial Police-1.

He said 18 factories had been closed under Section 13(1) of the labour law, while 17 others had been shut indefinitely. Five factories were verbally declared closed, and seven announced general holidays.

"After work began today, 12 more factories where workers did not join work declared holidays. As a result, production did not take place in a total of 59 factories today," he said.

A meeting between law enforcement officials and labour leaders was held at the office of the industrial police superintendent yesterday afternoon to review the situation, said worker leader Khairul Mamun Mintu, who attended the meeting.

[Our correspondents from Savar and Gazipur contributed to this report.]

Trump, Xi, Putin to meet in China

FROM PAGE 1

the southern Chinese city, White House spokeswoman Olivia Wales told reporters.

"The president has made it clear that, among other topics, he will discuss the reduction of nuclear weapons in the world. This proliferation, President Trump believes, is very dangerous," Wales said.

One of the major conflicts dominating Trump's second term as president will feature, but the other will not, the US officials said.

"I think the president does intend to talk about Iran in the trilateral meeting with Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin," a senior US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told reporters on a call.

Washington has a "whole other track" of negotiations with Kyiv and Moscow aimed at ending the war in Ukraine, the official added, referring to talks that US envoys have had in recent days with Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

"China is not really a part of that track, so it doesn't seem appropriate to have the Ukraine discussion there," the official added.

YALTA REDUX?

The meeting calls back to the 1945 Yalta summit in the Soviet Union, where then-US president Franklin D. Roosevelt, Britain's Winston Churchill and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin laid out the post-WWII settlement and new territorial boundaries in Europe.

Zelensky has raised the alarm that the meeting in Shenzhen could be a Yalta-like "redistribution of spheres of influence" for the 21st century.

The Trump administration has sought to reassert US dominance over the "Western hemisphere" -- including by capturing Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in January -- but splitting the world among great powers like it's 1945 may not guarantee security.

Trump will also hold a bilateral working lunch and meeting with the Chinese president on Thursday -- their fourth meeting since the US president's return to power last year.

But Trump is not scheduled to have a separate one-on-one with Putin.

Among other topics, Nvidia chief executive Jensen Huang's resignation over an affair with an alleged Chinese spy is not expected to come up in Trump's meetings with Xi, the officials said.

"The situation with Nvidia should not really have any bearing on the trip," a second US senior official said.

The United States also did not plan to discuss export controls on sensitive chip technology, which were at the heart of the Nvidia scandal.

"We do not negotiate American export controls. These are national security matters that we develop in the administration... and we don't expect it to figure at all in any of our conversations with the Chinese while we're there," the second official said.

Tesla and SpaceX boss Elon Musk will accompany Trump on his trip to China but will not be involved in the meeting with Xi and Putin, the officials said.

Trump will leave Washington on Monday and arrive in the Philippines on Tuesday for a summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) before heading to Shenzhen.

'He said he would return tomorrow'

Family left without sole breadwinner as bus driver dies following Faridpur arson attack

SHAHRIAR HOSSAIN, *Gopalganj*

On the night of November 9, bus driver Md Kalachan Sheikh, 60, told his wife that he would spend the night on the bus and return home the following day after completing his trip.

But that night, arsonists set fire to the parked bus while he was sleeping inside. He managed to escape the flames but collapsed shortly afterwards.

He was taken to Faridpur Medical College Hospital, where he was declared dead -- never to return to his family.

The Kishore-Tanay Paribahan bus, which operated on the Faridpur-Tekerhat-Madaripur route, was parked near Goalchamat New Bus Stand.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Kalachan's wife, Moyna Begum, recalled their last conversation.

"He called me around 10:00pm on Monday after eating at a hotel and said, 'I won't come home today; I'll return tomorrow. I have to spend the night on the bus.'"

Moyna learnt about the fire around 2:30am the following day.

"I was told that my husband died of smoke inhalation. How will I survive with my three children and an ailing mother-in-law after losing the family's sole breadwinner?

"I have two sons and a daughter. My elder son has completed higher secondary education but is unemployed, while my younger son is in class nine. We were planning the wedding of our only daughter. Who will look after us now?" she said, breaking down in tears at their home in Diknagar village of Gopalganj's Muksudpur upazila.



Md Kalachan Sheikh

She demanded a fair investigation into her husband's death and punishment for those responsible.

Kalachan's elder son, Mithun Sheikh, said, "My father died while guarding the bus at night. However, the bus owners have not contacted us or provided any assistance so far.

"Many people have advised us to file a case. But against whom should we file one? So far, no one has even informed us whether any case has been filed over my father's death. Besides, we do not even have the financial means to pursue a case.

"The police should investigate the incident and uncover the actual facts."

Abdul Haque Hawladar, joint general secretary of Muksudpur thana BNP, said, "Kalachan Sheikh was a good man. The entire family depended on his income. His death has now left the family facing an uncertain future."

Md Shamsul Azam, additional superintendent of police (Crime and Ops) in Faridpur, said bus owner Tapan Kumar Das had filed a case against unidentified persons over the arson on November 12.

No one had been arrested in connection with the case as of 7:00pm yesterday, he added.

Kalachan was killed amid a wave of violence across the country on the night of November 9 and the following day, during which eight vehicles were torched and crude bombs exploded in different parts of the country, including Dhaka.

GDP growth overstated by up to 1.3 points since FY15

FROM PAGE 1

Statistics (BBS) surveys, said Prof AK Enamul Haque, director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) and a panel member.

About 60 percent of the data comes from the BBS, while 40 percent comes from secondary sources, according to him. "It is very important to triangulate data from secondary sources, particularly when unusually large increases are observed," he said.

The findings also suggest the economy was portrayed more favourably than it actually was during the Awami League government's tenure, when reported GDP growth climbed to nearly 8 percent.

"The overestimation was intended to serve political interests and promote a development narrative, particularly in sectors where reliable primary data were unavailable and estimates relied on administrative or secondary sources," Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir, finance and planning adviser to the prime minister, said at the presentation.

INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT

The panel examined 22 industrial subsectors and found sharp discrepancies in several, where reported production growth was not supported by corresponding economic activity.

Cement production, for instance, was reported to have grown by 61.6 percent, 51.7 percent and 45.9 percent in three consecutive years, but the figures did not tally with the industry's contribution to GDP, Titumir said.

"If cement production is reported at a particular level, the corresponding value addition reflected in GDP must be consistent with the data of related sectors. But those figures did not match," he said.

Shipbuilding recorded growth of 242.4 percent in FY2014-15 and 97.6 percent the following year. The panel suspected the figures were inflated by counting a single large order, early-stage activities such as steel cutting, or one company's output as that of the entire sector.

Some estimates relied entirely on a single company. Petroleum refining, for example, was reported to have grown by 87.4 percent in FY2015-16 before contracting by 50.3 percent the following year, with both figures based solely on data from Eastern Refinery.

The sharp increases in 16 of the 22 subsectors were also at odds with slower growth in the readymade garment (RMG) industry, which accounts for 34.84 percent of the Quantum Index of Industrial Production.

RMG growth fell from an average of 13.55 percent during FY2010-11 to FY2013-14 to 8.69 percent during FY2014-15 to FY2015-16. The sector was largely unaffected by the data problems because reliable data were available, Titumir said.

TAX, EXPORT

The audit also found weaknesses in administrative data from the National Board of Revenue (NBR) and the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

The NBR reported revenue growth of 20 percent in FY2014-15 and 23 percent in FY2016-17, before the rate gradually declined.

The panel also found discrepancies among export figures reported by the EPB, Customs and Bangladesh Bank.

Titumir said NBR figures had been inconsistent before the introduction of the Integrated Budget and Accounting System (iBAS). The government has since decided to treat Bangladesh Bank's export figures as authoritative and taken steps to reconcile the discrepancies.

Asked whether the audit would identify those responsible, Statistics and Informatics Division Secretary Md Firoz Sarker said the aim was to identify weaknesses rather than assign blame.

PAST REVIEWS

The credibility of Bangladesh's GDP figures had been questioned earlier.

The 2024 White Paper Committee challenged the sustained growth reported since FY2012-13, citing gaps between official GDP figures and indicators such as tax collection, private investment, and bank lending.

A 2022 World Bank analysis also found discrepancies with official estimates.

The IMF gave Bangladesh's national accounts framework a "C" grade in 2024, citing delays in data publication, while a 2025 expert task force flagged a lack of institutional independence and the risk of political influence in GDP estimation.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Towfiqul Islam Khan, additional research director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, who led the White Paper's research and technical support team, said the audit echoed its concerns.

"When we prepared the White Paper, we also highlighted similar discrepancies, particularly mismatches between export data and proxy indicators. Although we did not quantify the extent of overestimation, we pointed to these inconsistencies," he said.

He said even a small annual overstatement could have significant consequences over time. "An overestimation of less than one percentage point may appear small in a particular year. But when it continues over 12 to 15 years, the cumulative impact becomes significant and cannot be ignored," he said.

Towfiqul attributed the problem to both technical weaknesses and political motivations, saying inflated growth figures had distorted development priorities and diverted attention from underlying economic weaknesses. Outdated proxy indicators and surveys also contributed.

STRONGER SAFEGUARDS

Enamul called for standardised data collection templates, regular updates of industrial statistics, and systematic reconciliation of figures from different government agencies.

He said GDP compilation and release should remain the professional responsibility of the BBS, backed by technical expertise, independent peer reviews and its own data-management software.

Speaking at the presentation, National Professor Mahbub Ullah, president of the Bangladesh Economic Association, called for aligning GDP estimation with the UN System of National Accounts to improve international comparability.

"The more we collect data directly from the field, the more reliable our estimates will be. However, sample sizes must be determined carefully to ensure they properly represent the entire population," he said.

He also proposed a national economic input-output matrix to capture links among production activities, such as those between cement and sand, and sand and bricks.

Towfiqul called for strengthening the BBS's technical capacity and institutional independence, alongside greater transparency and accountability.

"Ultimately, the government itself loses when GDP is not estimated properly, because policymaking based on inaccurate data cannot be sound," he said.