US judge orders park remain open in Trump golf course project

AFP, *Washington*

A US federal judge on Saturday ruled a park in the heart of Washington must remain open to the public, after President Donald Trump's administration sought to close it for a planned renovation of a golf course.

An avid golfer who owns courses around the world, Trump aims to turn Washington's East Potomac Golf Links, a public course with affordable rates, into a facility capable of hosting major championship-caliber events.

To that end, the Trump administration called for the November 15 closure of East Potomac Park, a 395-acre (160-hectare) park where the golf course is located, to begin construction.

But a lawsuit filed by an environmental group against the project blocked the closure, with US District Judge Ana Reyes granting a temporary restraining order that required the park remain open for now as the lawsuit works its way through the courts.



PHOTO: **ANISUR RAHMAN**

Workers peer through the closed gate of Lyric Industries (Pvt) Ltd in East Mouchak in Gazipur's Kaliakoir, amid ongoing labour unrest over wage demands. According to BGMEA data, an average of nearly 300 garment factories remained closed each day over the past two weeks, while 204 were shut in Ashulia, Savar and Gazipur on November 12. **Story on page 12.**

Freedom fighter named in sabotage case 7 months after death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Shariatpur*



Zahirul Haque

Zahirul Haque Samchu Dhali had been dead for nearly seven and a half months when police named him among 251 accused in a sabotage case over crude bomb explosions, truck vandalism and an expressway blockade near the Padma Bridge South Toll Plaza on November 9.

The 76-year-old freedom fighter, who was acting president of Kutubpur Union Awami League, was listed as accused number 219.

A resident of Dhalikandi village in Madaripur's Shibchar upazila, Samchu Dhali died of natural causes on March 29, according to his death certificate.

Shibchar UNO HM Ibne Mizan also confirmed his death after checking official records.

His son, Nazmul Haque Dhali, said his father was accorded state honours at his funeral. He alleged that his father was implicated solely because of his political affiliation and demanded the removal of his name from the accused list.

Case complainant Sub-Inspector Akram Hossain of Padma Bridge South Police Station said he had received the names from higher authorities and included them accordingly.

Officer-in-Charge Md Abdus Salam said the case was filed against 251 named and 600-700 unidentified people under

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

A city in fear as drug trade, violence spiral

FROM PAGE 1

trade in a case filed over his son's death, said the officer, requesting anonymity.

The killings are part of a wider range of violence in Khulna, where gangs are fighting over drug money, extortion proceeds, and territorial control, according to police investigators and local sources.

They have identified nine criminal groups operating across Khulna city and adjoining upazilas. Among them, the rivalry between B Company and Palash group, led by Sheikh Palash, has emerged prominently in probes into several killings.

Groups linked to Nur Azim, Ashik Islam, and other local figures are also accused of involvement in drug trading, extortion, and attempts to establish dominance over different areas.

Police records show that 79 murders took place across Khulna, including the city, between January 1 and November 14 this year. Not all were linked to organised crime, but investigators have identified drug-related disputes, and territorial rivalries as motives behind several.

Talking to The Daily Star, Sarker Omar Faroque, superintendent of police in Khulna, admitted that law and order was worrying and that police had struggled to restore public confidence.

An analysis by Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP) identified conflicts over drugs and territorial dominance as factors behind 13 of the 35 killings recorded in areas under its jurisdiction in the first 10 months of this year. Other killings involved family and personal disputes, suspected theft, and mob violence.

On November 30 last year, Hasib Hawlader, 41, and Fazle Rabbi Rajon, 37, members of the Palash group, came under attack outside the Khulna Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court after attending a hearing in an arms case.

The attackers, allegedly from B Company, first hacked them with sharp weapons and then opened fire. Hasib died on the spot and Rajon on the way to a hospital.

Investigators linked the killings to a longstanding dispute between the Palash group and B Company over drug proceeds, extortion, and establishing dominance.

On November 4 this year, police submitted a charge sheet in the case against 13 people, citing narcotics trading, disputes over extortion money, and control of criminal activities as the motives behind the killings.

Hasib's mother, Hasina Begum, raised four children by working in other people's homes. Her son, who had started fish trading, left behind two daughters, aged between four and nine.

Rajon, a sand trader, is survived by a child.

The two families are uncertain about their livelihoods and their children's future.

Infighting within the BNP over dominance has also been linked to political killings. Police sources say at least 11 leaders and activists of the party and its affiliated organisations have been killed in Khulna over the past two years.

On March 4, Rupsha upazila Sramik Dal convener Masum Billah was shot and hacked to death at Dakbangla intersection. Police arrested a man named Ashok Ghosh with a firearm shortly after the killing, but the family alleged that other accused named in the case remained at large.

"How could they shoot him in front of children?" asked his wife Fatematuz Johara. "Unless they are hanged, this pain will never go away."

On March 16, Rashikul Anam Rashu, former Chhatra Dal organising secretary, was shot dead at KDA Kalpataru Market in Daulatpur.

His father, Shariful Anam, a former ward BNP president, alleged that investigators had made little visible progress in identifying and arresting the key suspects.

Allegations of killings over gang rivalry returned in late October.

On October 22, Touhidul Islam and Khushi Akhter were killed in two separate incidents.

Police sources said Touhidul was associated with the Palash group, while Khushi allegedly sold drugs for B Company. Investigators suspect drug-related disputes and territorial rivalries were behind the two killings.

On October 31, the bloodied body of Shahidul Islam, 35, was recovered from a road in the city's Labanchara area.

Police alleged that Shahidul had been involved in drug peddling. He also stood accused in a murder case.

His mother, who filed a case, said in the case statement that a drug-related dispute led to the killing.

Two days later, on November 2, police recovered the bodies of Mehedi Hasan, 35, and Rezaul Karim, 30, bearing gunshot wounds, from a char in the Atharobeki river in Rupsha.

OC Masum Khan of Rupsha Police Station said Mehedi faced two drug-related cases, while Rezaul worked as a drug carrier.

Besides drug-related disputes, locals and police say conflicts over fish enclosures, sand trading, land, contracts and territorial control have also fuelled armed confrontations.

On November 5, fish enclosure trader Tarikul Islam, 35, was shot dead in Dumuria upazila. The killing took place on the day Prime Minister Tarique Rahman visited Khulna.

In another incident, attackers shot dead Jakir Hossain, 43, a brick-and-sand trader, inside a shop in Rupsha on November 12.

Police and locals describe a recurring pattern in several attacks: gunmen arrive on motorcycles, often wearing helmets or masks, shoot their targets at close range, and flee the scene.

Speaking to this newspaper, MM Shakiluzzaman, KMP additional commissioner (crime), said police were identifying and arresting suspects and recovering weapons. However, the perpetrators often went into hiding, concealed their firearms, and sometimes secured bail after arrest.

He also admitted that the reluctance of residents to provide information created difficulties for investigators.

SP Faroque said criminals sometimes moved between areas under district and metropolitan police jurisdictions after committing offences, making coordination essential.

Talking to this correspondent, Nazrul Islam Monju, Khulna City Corporation administrator, said competition over the drug market was fuelling conflicts among criminal groups.

He alleged that despite changes in police leadership and government interventions, the situation had not improved significantly.

Khulna Metropolitan BNP President SM Shafiqul Alam Mona said fear had deterred many residents from reporting crimes or testifying in murder cases.

Mizanur Rahman Babu, president of the metropolitan unit of Communist Party of Bangladesh, alleged that drug trading, political patronage, and failures of law enforcement had contributed to the deteriorating situation. "We cannot be sure of a natural death."

Amid growing concern, senior law enforcement officials met at Khulna Circuit House on the night of November 12 and decided to launch special joint operations against crime and extortion, deploy 200 Ansar personnel, strengthen checkpoints, and increase patrols and intelligence surveillance.

Former IGP Ashraful Huda, who served in Khulna between 1990 and 1995, said the situation raised fears of a return to the city's violent past.

He recalled that during his posting, officers sometimes received news of another body before returning from investigating an earlier killing.

Huda said police had eventually brought the situation under control by strengthening intelligence networks and cooperation with locals.

"Without intelligence work, you cannot control the situation simply by deploying uniformed police," he said.

Turf wars among 9 gangs turn Khulna deadly

FROM PAGE 1

Nur Azim and Ashik groups are active in Khulna Sadar and Labanchara, while Tengki Shawon's influence extends to Sonadanga and Khalishpur. Arman Sheikh and Huma Bahini operate in Daulatpur and Khan Jahan Ali while Shakil Sheikh's group is mostly affiliated with Arman's one.

B Company has a wider network, particularly around Shamsur Rahman Road, Sheikhpara, the court area and Dakbangla. The groups' activities also extend to Dighalia, Aranghata, Koyra, Paikgachha and Dumuria, where smaller armed networks allegedly control drug trading, fish enclosures, sand businesses, land and contract work.

The rivalry between B Company and Sheikh Palash's group has been particularly violent. Police linked the double murder outside the Khulna Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court on November 30, 2025 to disputes over drug money, extortion, and territorial control between the two groups.

On October 4 this year, Nasim group leader Nasimul Gani was shot dead in Dighalia, highlighting the spread of the violence beyond the city.

Khulna Superintendent of Police Sarker Omar Faroque said police were aware of the nine groups and were conducting special operations against their members and patrons. Police had not found political affiliations involving the gangs, he said.

"We are also trying to trace the sources of firearms and working to dismantle the interconnected drug and arms networks," he added.

Meanwhile, Khulna City Corporation Administrator Nazrul Islam Monju told The Daily Star that several Khulna leaders met Prime Minister Tarique Rahman in Dhaka on Saturday. Those present included an MP, the president and general secretary of the BNP's metropolitan unit, and the district council administrator.

Monju said the prime minister listened to their accounts of the situation in Khulna but gave no immediate instructions or comments on joint operations or other measures.

HOW THE GROUPS EMERGED

Interviews with residents, political leaders, and police officers suggest that most groups grew out of smaller criminal networks that had operated for years, allegedly under political patronage.

Iqbal Hossain, a resident of Iqbal Road in his late 60s, recalled how the city's underworld changed hands over the decades.

"In the 1990s, the Sarbahara groups controlled the city. Then came Ershad Sikder's rule. Those were terrifying days. Bodies would turn up on riverbanks almost every day," he said.

He said the political influence of Sheikh Helal and his brothers became dominant from 2009.

Another resident, Abul Hasan, alleged that former lawmaker Mizanur Rahman Mizan helped establish a group under then Chhatra League leader Sheikh Palash Talukder after the 2014 election.

The group, which included Ashik Islam and Nur Azim, allegedly controlled extortion activities but gradually slipped out of Mizan's control after 2016, with Ashik and Azim eventually operating independently.

Helal is on the run, while Mizan and Palash are in jail.

After the AL government's fall in August 2024, smaller groups expanded as the previous political power structure collapsed.

Palash's efforts to establish control over several neighbourhoods brought him into conflict with Grenade Babu. Local sources attribute at least 10 killings to their rivalry, although the figure could not be independently established through case records.

Palash's arrest on March 30, 2025, further fragmented his group, with some members allegedly joining rival networks.

INSIDE B COMPANY

Among the nine groups, B Company has allegedly developed one of the most extensive organisational networks.

Police sources said its leader, Roni Chowdhury, acquired the nickname Grenade Babu following a grenade attack on the vehicle of then Khulna mayor Sheikh Tayebur Rahman in 2004. He reportedly named his group after Mumbai underworld figure Dawood Ibrahim's D Company and also uses the alias "Nawab".

Law enforcement sources describe B Company as a multilayered network involving a second-in-command, cashier, shooters, motorcycle teams, drug sellers, informants, and social media promoters.

The group allegedly has several hundred members. Some receive Tk 7,000 to Tk 15,000 a month, while others are provided motorcycles, weapons or drugs to sell.Police records show at least 15 cases against Grenade Babu, involving allegations of murder, attempted murder and assault. Joint forces raided his house on June 7, 2025, and recovered weapons, ammunition, cash and documents but failed to arrest him.

Police sources allege that he now directs the network from abroad using foreign telephone numbers.

Khulna Metropolitan Police has listed 181 criminals in the city, including around 25 associated with B Company, 12 with Nur Azim's group and nine with Ashik Bahini.

YOUNG RECRUITS, PAID ATTACKS

The recruitment of unemployed youths has emerged as another worrying feature of the gangs' activities, with investigators finding evidence of payments for individual crimes.

In the March 4 killing of Sramik Dal leader Masum Billah at Dakbangla intersection, accused Ashok Ghosh said in a confessional statement before a court that he had taken part in the murder under a Tk 50,000 agreement.

On November 11, police detained Fahad Hossain while he was allegedly attempting to set fire to the July memorial at Shibbari intersection. Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Sonadanga Police Station, said Fahad had told investigators he was offered Tk 2,000 to carry out the act.

Video footage of attacks on Sandhani Clinic, New Apollo Diagnostic Centre, and Chinese Palace restaurant also showed that many participants appeared to be in their early 20s.

Police and local officials said unemployment, poverty and drug use were drawing young people into criminal activities.

Khulna Sadar Police Station OC Lokman Hossain said youths from impoverished neighbourhoods were being recruited for small payments and drugs, while City Corporation Administrator Nazrul Islam Manju said many gang members were aged between 17 and 20.

Mizanur Rahman Babu, president of the Communist Party of Bangladesh's Khulna metropolitan unit, also blamed unemployment and the closure of jute mills, claiming that workers of the closed mills were still owed around Tk 4,500 crore.

"These gang members are our own sons, brothers, and family members. They too have a right to live. Nobody willingly chooses this dark path, but the system has pushed them towards it," he said.

"Factories have closed, unemployment has become a curse, and as a result, some are taking up arms."

OLD CONNECTIONS, ELUSIVE SUSPECTS

Several current gang figures also have family links to people previously associated with Khulna's criminal underworld.

In South Tutpara, residents identified Asad Peshkar as an underworld figure in the 1990s. His son Amin Muhuri subsequently became involved, while Amin's sons, Fardin Khan and Faisal Khan, are now on police lists.

Other families in South Tutpara and Chandmari also have multiple members listed by police, including four brothers -- Nur Azim, Shahriar Islam Rocky, Jiko Khan and Rinku -- and Ashik and Sajib, sons of Mashiur Rahman alias Zulfikar Dakat.

Despite repeated operations, police have struggled to dismantle the networks and bring suspects to justice.

In the Masum Billah murder case, only four suspects had been arrested in eight months, while those identified in video footage remained at large, according to information gathered for this report.

A similar picture emerged in the courthouse double-murder case. Most of the accused remained fugitives when the chargesheet was submitted on November 4. B Company member Miraj Hossain alias Kauwa Miraj was listed as absconding, while another accused, Ejazul, secured bail after four months.

Sheikh Jahangir Hossain Helal, Khulna-2 (Sadar) MP and secretary of Khulna Metropolitan Jamaat-e-Islami, said the nine criminal groups had existed in some form for years but had recently become more aggressive, with the increasing use of firearms and open criminal activities particularly alarming.

He said the administration already had information about the groups, their operations and those providing them with shelter and political patronage. Jahangir urged the home ministry to deploy a specialised force or launch joint operations to contain the violence.

Copper wire upgrade behind US flight suspension

Says transport secretary; FAA expects normal air travel today

AGENCIES

A nationwide US ground stop that triggered thousands of flight cancellations and widespread travel disruption was caused by a technical fault linked to a copper wire upgrade, Transport Secretary Sean Duffy said.

Speaking at a news conference on Saturday evening, Duffy said authorities were investigating whether the issue, which prompted air traffic controllers to halt departures for four hours on Friday, stemmed from contractor error or faulty equipment.

Duffy said maintenance work on US air traffic control systems involved replacing copper wiring with fibre-optic cable, a project being carried out by technology contractor L3Harris.

Meanwhile, air travel was expected to return to normal later yesterday or early today, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said.

FAA chief Bryan Bedford said that 12,000 flights were canceled on Friday, while tracking website FlightAware showed more than 6,600 canceled flights on Saturday, reports AFP.

Speaking at a news conference in Washington on Saturday, Bedford said that he expected airline operations to largely return to normal by late Sunday. He also apologised for the disruption, adding that the system remains stable.

Tim Johnson, consumer director at the UK Civil Aviation Authority, said although US flights have resumed, there could be "some follow-on disruption" as airlines re-book passengers and get all services back to normal.

At LaGuardia airport, some travellers were more sanguine than others about the continued disruption of their flights.

The ground stop not only plunged US air travel into chaos -- it also raised serious concerns about the country's aging infrastructure.

Duffy appealed for $50 billion in funds to upgrade and modernize the air traffic control system, and called for Congress, which controls the purse strings of the US government, to "meet this moment."

BNP plans busy December to stay on streets

FROM PAGE 12

counter-programmes against the programmes currently being announced by the Awami League nor prevent them from holding their programmes.

"We must remain politically active on the streets ... Plans have been made for our party and its affiliated organisations to organise programmes to ensure that no one can create unrest or destabilise the country."

Another BNP leader alleged that the AL was attempting to create instability. The BNP plans to respond by remaining politically active.

Party sources said the leadership had also decided against organising neighbourhood patrols similar to those the AL used to deploy in an attempt to obstruct BNP programmes when it was in power.

The decision comes at a time when leaders and activists of the AL and its affiliated organisations have reportedly been carrying out various activities in the country.

BNP sources said several important national and party occasions are in December, providing the BNP with opportunities to organise programmes.

These include Martyred Intellectuals Day on December 14 and Victory Day on December 16. December 25 will mark the first anniversary of Tarique Rahman's return to Bangladesh, while December 30 will be the first death anniversary of former prime minister and BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia.

BNP acting Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, party leader Shahid Uddin Chowdhury, Habib-un-Nabi Khan Sohel, Khairul Kabir Khokon, Emran Saleh Prince and Abdus Salam attended the meeting.

The conveners and member secretaries of Chhatra Dal, Jubo Dal, Swechchhasebak Dal, and the BNP's Dhaka Metropolitan North and South units also took part.