

PURCHASE OF 'FAULTY' BUSES, TRUCKS BRTC to start probe soon

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The authorities will finally start investigating the purchase of "faulty" buses and trucks from Indian manufacturers for the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation.

The BRTC has formed a probe committee last month, almost three months after the Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader directed the officials concerned to launch an investigation.

"We will start the investigation very soon and complete it within the shortest possible time," BRTC Chairman Ehsan-E-Elahi told The Daily Star on Sunday.

Buet has yet to send the name of its representative in the probe committee, he said. "We will start investigating within one week after getting the name."

Duration of the probe would be fixed once the committee members held their first meeting, he added.

The government brought 600 buses and 500 trucks from different Indian makers with Tk 559 crore in multiple phases last year. The funds were lent by the Indian government. The vehicles have already arrived in Bangladesh. Farid Uddin Ahmed was the chairman of BRTC at that time.

After the vehicles arrived, especially the buses, it was reported in the media that some of the non-AC buses had leaky roofs and several double-decker ones were not what their spec sheets mentioned.

On September 16, Quader at a programme at the BRTC head office said, "There must have been experts among those involved in bringing the buses [from India]. They [Indian companies] supplied us vehicles full of defects."

"I am directing the [BRTC] chairman to launch a proper investigation to find out whether anyone [from our officials] accepted the defects willingly or they had been tricked."

Quader, also general secretary of the Awami League, had also mentioned that those who supplied the vehicles had taken the responsibility and promised to fix the issues.

In last October, the Road Transport and Highways Division

(RTHD) directed the BRTC to launch the investigation and asked BRTC chairman to form the probe committee with representatives from different bodies, officials said.

Led by Ehsan-E-Elahi, the committee will have representatives from the RTHD, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and mechanical engineering department of Buet.

Besides, the BRTC director (administration and operation), who was the project director of purchasing the 500 trucks; director (technical), who was the project director of purchasing the 600 buses; deputy general manager (maintenance) and general manager (technical) were also included in the committee.

The general manager (technical) will be the member secretary of the committee.

The probe committee does not include anyone from the RTHD.

The committee will check whether the buses and trucks delivered are the ones mentioned in the contracts and will provide its opinion, BRTC chairman said.

However, the inclusion of BRTC officials, who were involved in the purchase, in the committee has raised eyebrows.

Transport expert Prof Shamsul Hoque said those officials should not be in the probe committee.

"It will raise questions about the probe," he said.

Asked, BRTC Chairman Ehsan said, "We will check the technical specification of the vehicles in person. So, their inclusion in the committee will not affect the investigation."

The vehicles include 300 double-decker buses (Tk 90 lakh each), 100 non-AC buses (Tk 49 lakh each), 100 AC city buses (Tk 67 lakh each), 100 AC intercity buses (Tk 72 lakh each), 350 (16.2 tonne) trucks (Tk 20 lakh each) and 150 (10.2-tonne) trucks (Tk 21 lakh each). The prices include VAT.

Indian makers Ashok Leyland supplied the double-decker buses, AC city buses, AC intercity buses while Tata Motors supplied the non-AC buses and 10.2-tonne trucks. VE Commercial Vehicle supplied the 16.2-tonne trucks.



CID officials collecting forensic evidence near the capital's Kurmitola General Hospital yesterday, hours after a second-year student of Dhaka University was raped in the area on Sunday night. Inset, a police official carrying a bag containing evidence.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

DU erupts in protest

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She was raped and tortured there, some of her friends said, quoting her.

After regaining consciousness around 10:00pm, she somehow went to her friend's home and her friends then took her to the DMCH.

DU Proctor AKM Golam Rabbani visited her at the hospital early yesterday while Vice Chancellor Prof Akhtaruzzaman later in the morning. Talking to reporters, the VC said the university authorities would do everything necessary so that the victim gets justice.

Later in the day, DU students as well as members of different socio-cultural organisations came to the streets on the campus. They demanded that the government bring the rapist(s) to book immediately.

Many took to social media to express their anger at the lack of women safety in the country.

Rights body Ain O Salish Kendra condemned the rape incident and demanded legal steps against those involved.

In a statement, the ASK said, "Increasing violence against women has become one of the major concerns in our lives."

"It is undoubtedly a weakness of the state that it cannot ensure the environment conducive to women's safe movement."

The rape took place days after the ASK said the number of rape incidents in Bangladesh doubled last year from the previous one.

A total of 1,413 women were either gang-raped or subjected to rape last year. Of them, 76 were killed after rape and 10 others died by suicide, the rights body said in its annual report released on December 31.

THE SCENE
Police identified the crime scene based on the victim's statement.

The place is several yards off the pavement of the busy Airport Road. It is about 150 yards north to the Kurmitola General Hospital's gate and 30 yards south to the gate of a golf club there.

The scene is outside the boundary net of the club and surrounded by bushes, several officials told this correspondent at the spot.

A guard stationed at the club told our correspondents that many people use the pavement during the daytime, but the number of the pedestrians go down at night.

Asked, he said he was not on duty when the incident took place.

EVIDENCE
Kazi Shahan Hoque, officer-in-charge of Cantonment Police Station, told this newspaper that they visited the scene around midnight Sunday, after being informed by the victim.

Finding some pieces of evidence, they informed the CID's crime unit, which collected them yesterday morning.

The evidence, included a gabardine pants, a piece of undergarment, a pen, a notebook, a key ring, two inhalers, a wrist watch, and some medicines (for common cold-related disease), CID Inspector Aminul Islam told this newspaper.

Ban single-use plastics

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findings of the National Geographic Channel, an American television channel, 300 different types of plastic goods end up in the Bay of Bengal via the Padma river.

The National Geographic study covered an area of 2,575 square kilometres from the Padma to the Bay of Bengal to reach this alarming conclusion, the rights organisations said in the writ petition, adding that in 2018 the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) had reported the dumping of 73,000 tonnes of plastic waste into the Bay of Bengal through the Padma, Jamuna and Meghna Rivers.

In the petition, they stated that according to a 2015 study by the

"We have already sent those to lab for tests," he said.

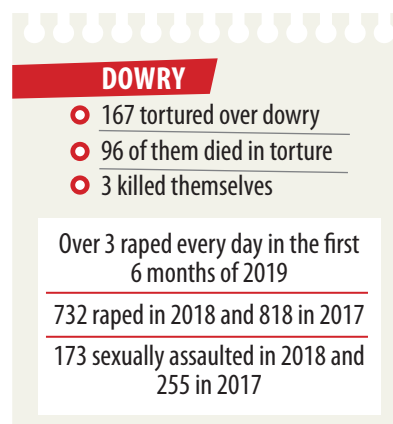
Sudip Chakraborty, deputy commissioner (Gulshan Division) of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said apart from police personnel, members of other agencies were also working to find the culprit(s) and solve the case.

OC Shahan said the victim's statement suggest that she was raped by a single person.

Talking to this correspondent early today, he said they were yet to identify any suspect and that they collected the footage of the CCTVs installed in the area for investigation.

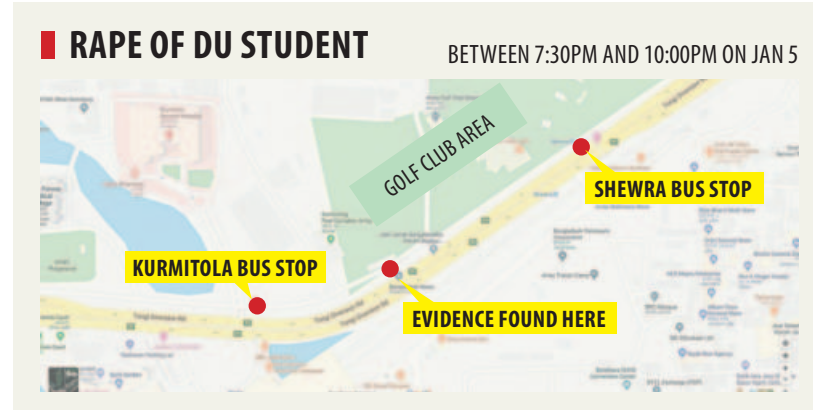
He added that the case was handed to the Detective Branch of police.

VICTIM'S CONDITION
DMCH Director Brig Gen AKM Nasir Uddin said they formed a seven-member medical board, headed by



they staged a sit-in blocking capital's Shahbagh intersection for an hour.

Speaking there, Ducsu VP Nurul Haque Nur issued a 48-hour ultimatum to the DU and other



obstetrics and gynaecology department chief Salma Rouf, for the victim's treatment.

There were several injury marks on the victim's face and throat, he said, adding that she had been traumatised since the incident. He also said the victim has breathing problem.

Dr Sohel Mahmud, associate professor of the hospital's forensic medicine department, told reporters that they found evidence of rape after conducting forensic test on the victim.

He said they found injury marks on her throat and it suggested someone tried to strangle her.

"We've collected samples from her body and sent them to DNA and microbiology labs for tests," he added.

PROTESTS
DU students, including members of different student bodies, started their demonstration in the morning. Their number increased as the day progressed.

Nearly a thousand leaders and activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League formed a chain in front of Raju Vashkorjo in TSC area around 10:45am, demanding arrest and punishment of the rapist(s).

Central BCL President Al Nahian Khan Joy demanded law amendments to hand capital punishment to rapists.

A group of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal men also staged protest at the foot of Aparajeyo Bangla during the same time.

Santrash Birodhi Chhatra Oikya, a new alliance of 12 student organisations of Dhaka University, brought out a procession on the campus around 11:00am. At one stage,

authorities concerned for the arrest of the rapist(s).

"We will announce tougher programme if the rapist is not arrested within 48 hours," he said.

Around 200 students went to the Kurmitola area in university buses and formed a human chain blocking the Airport Road near the crime scene. The demonstrators left after 40 minutes.

In another development, Sifatul Islam, a student of DU's philosophy department, started a hunger strike at 3:30am yesterday in front of the Raju Sculpture, demanding punishment of the rapist.

He was later joined by two other students -- Saiful Islam Rasel of soil, water and environment department, and Mostafizur Rahman of information technology institute.

In a statement, Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta) yesterday demanded immediate arrest of the rapist(s) and urged the government to ensure their exemplary punishment.

Last night, DU students, under the banner of Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducusu), held a candlelight vigil on the premises of Central Shaheed Minar to press for the arrest of the culprit(s).

Later, a group of Ducsu leaders, led by Assistant General Secretary Saddam Hossain, submitted a memorandum to Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, demanding that the culprit(s) be identified in 24 hours.

Talking to reporters after a programme earlier in the day, the home boss said the culprits would be brought to book within the shortest possible time.

Raped, sixth grader dies by suicide

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A sixth grader died by suicide in Panchagarh Sadar upazila yesterday, hours after she was allegedly raped by her neighbour.

Morium Khatun, 13, of Mollapara village, was a student of Vatapukuri Girls' High School.

After the incident, the victim's mother filed a case against Md Palash, 20, who was arrested later.

According to the case statement, the girl, along with her widowed mother, lived in a thatched house. Palash used to stalk the girl.

When the victim's mother recently informed local influential people about it, Palash became angry.

On Sunday night, Palash entered their house and raped Morium when her mother was sleeping, added the case statement.

In the morning, the mother noticed that her daughter was not at home. Later, she found her daughter's body hanging from a tree adjacent to the house.

On information, police rushed to the spot and sent the body to Panchagarh Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Contacted, Manjurul Islam, sub-inspector of Panchagarh Sadar Police Station, said they were investigating the incident.

BCL leader held over rape of woman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police yesterday arrested the organising secretary of Chattogram South District Bangladesh Chhatra League on charges of raping a mother of two.

The arrestee is Akibul Islam Akib, 27, of Chattogram's Anwara upazila.

Quoting the case statement, Moin Uddin, inspector (investigation) of Bakalia Police Station, told The Daily Star that the woman, a divorcee, was in a relationship with Akibul, who introduced him as a police officer.

Promising her marriage, Akibul had raped her for the last five months, he said.

The victim also alleged that he took Tk 10 lakh from her.

She filed the case against Akibul with the police station in the morning.

Police arrested him around noon and produced him before a Chattogram court that sent him to jail, the police official said.

The woman was sent to the One Stop Crisis Centre at Chattogram Medical College Hospital for medical tests.

Contacted, SM Borhan Uddin, president of Chattogram South District BCL, told this correspondent that they would take disciplinary action against Akibul.

'GUNFIGHT' WITH BGB 2 Rohingya 'drug dealers' killed in Cox's Bazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Two Rohingya men, suspected of being drug peddlers, were killed in a "gunfight" with members of Border Guard Bangladesh in Cox's Bazar early yesterday.

The dead are Mohamamad Ismail, 28, and Helal Uddin, 20, inhabitants of block-22 in Ukhiya Rohingya Refugee Camp.

Ali Haider Azad Ahmed, commanding officer of 34th BGB battalion, claimed they conducted a raid in Palongkhali area of the district's Ukhiya upazila around 5:00am on information that a consignment of drugs would be smuggled through the area.

Sensing BGB members' presence, the criminals opened fire, forcing them to retaliate, he added.

At one stage of the "gunfight", two drug peddlers sustained bullet injuries. They were rushed to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital where on-duty doctors declared them dead, he further added.

The bodies were sent to the hospital's morgue for autopsies, said the BGB officer.

BGB also claimed to have recovered 20,000 pieces of yaba pills, a locally-made firearm and two cartridges from the spot.

Abul Monsur, officer-in-charge of Ukhiya Police Station, said a case was filed with the police station in connection with the "gunfight".

Egypt to meet four European countries on Libya crisis

AFP, Cairo

Egypt announced yesterday that it will hold a meeting with four European Mediterranean countries about developments in neighbouring Libya after Turkey began deploying troops in the war-torn North African nation.

The talks -- to be held in Cairo on Wednesday -- will bring together foreign ministers from France, Italy, Greece and Cyprus, Egypt's foreign ministry said.

Liberation Leader

IN COLLABORATION WITH



FROM PAGE 1

But the nation was worried as well. Because the man who had led the nation to freedom was still detained in the Pakistani jail.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the undisputed leader of independence of Bangladesh, had been put in solitary confinement for nine and a half months. Soon after December 16, he was moved from the jail to a more remote place.

On December 24, he was brought by a helicopter to the compound of a police academy at Shihala, not far from Rawalpindi of Pakistan.

Soon after his arrival, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the president of Pakistan, came to meet him. Bangabandhu asked him if he had also been placed in detention.

In reply, Bhutto told him that he had become the president of Pakistan.

"How have you become president when I got twice as many seats in the National Assembly?" asked Bangabandhu, laughingly.

Embarrassed, Bhutto responded that Bangabandhu could become president if he desired.

"No, I do not desire it, but I desire to go to Bangladesh as soon as possible," replied the father of the nation.

Bhutto then told him that he would make necessary arrangements but needed a few days. Bangabandhu told him that he had gathered, from the conversation between the lawyers who had attended his trial some months earlier, that Dr Kamal Hossain was also held in custody awaiting trial.

On Bangabandhu's request, Dr Kamal was also brought to Shihala.

According to a secret telegram sent from US Embassy in Pakistan to Secretary of State, the USA, on January 3, 1972, Bhutto shared with the US ambassador in Pakistan his conversation with Bangabandhu.

"Mujib had been virtually cut off from all outside sources of information while he (Mujib) assumed that a war of some major proportion had gone on, and that "perhaps a part of East Pakistan had been occupied by India," he had no idea of the magnitude of the "tragic defeat" which Pakistan had suffered," said the telegram.

It added that, "...Mujib seemed "almost stunned" by the changed circumstances in which he found himself, and appeared highly despondent to learn that Indian troops occupied all of the East. Bhutto also noted that during his conversation the Sheikh, referring to Indian occupation

and domination, repeated time and time again that he would not be one to accept alms."

The next few days were spent in pursuing the request for arrangements to go to Bangladesh. It was clear that since over 90,000 Pakistani military personnel were prisoners of war in Bangladesh, this would ensure Bangabandhu's safety and early return.

Bangabandhu and Dr Kamal were told that they would be flown to London within the next few days; the night of 7 January was specifically indicated.

They were also informed that Bhutto would like to host a dinner for them at the President's Guest House before they leave.

Bhutto arrived and, after initial greetings, he requested Bangabandhu to maintain links with Pakistan.

"After what has happened, and the blood spilt which could have been avoided had you listened to us. Instead you unleashed a brutal armed assault. I cannot see how any relation with Pakistan is possible other than as between two sovereign states," Bangabandhu replied.

After Bhutto kept pressing him to consider his appeal, Bangabandhu said he would give him a reply after returning to Bangladesh.

Then Bhutto came up with an unexpected suggestion: that the departure be delayed till the following morning when the Shah of Iran was due and would like to meet Bangabandhu.

Bangabandhu turned to Bhutto and said that he should ensure permission for their flight to leave that night; insisting that he did not wish to meet the Shah, and that they should be transported back to jail immediately if their departure could not take place after dinner as scheduled.

Realising the annoyance caused, Bhutto said that a plane would be instructed to be flown over from Karachi to ensure their departure after dinner.

Bangabandhu and Dr Kamal Hossain were driven to the airport. Bangabandhu was escorted by Bhutto up to the plane. They were briefed that no announcement would be made about the plane journey until they were an hour away from London.

As they approached London, a message would be sent to the British authorities to say that Bangabandhu was due to land at London's Heathrow airport around seven in the morning.

[The report is based on the autobiography of Dr Kamal Hossain titled "Bangladesh: Quest for Freedom and Justice, and US State Department cable]