



VOICES RAISED FOR RAPE VICTIMS

A number of organisations from different parts of the country yesterday came to the streets, to denounce the recent spate of rape and violence against women -- particularly in Sylhet and Khagrachhari. Cultural activists of Sylhet held a rally in front of MC College, where a girl was raped by six youths on Friday, *top*. In the capital, *right*, activists of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, Bangladesh Chhatra League and a citizens' group held human chains in front of Jatiya Press Club, Raju Bhaskorjo at DU and National Museum respectively.

PHOTO: STAR



A submerged city

Almost entire Rangpur under water following record rainfall

KONGKON KARMAKAR

Since Saturday night, almost all areas of Rangpur city got inundated in record-breaking overnight rainfall in the district, causing untold sufferings to thousands of residents. More than 50,000 people have been stranded due to the incessant rain. There's hardly any area in the city that was not waterlogged.

The main thoroughfare, almost all the alleys and lanes went under rainwater.

Frustrated residents took to the social media, blaming the Rangpur City Corporation (RCC) for their inaction to resolve the issue.

The Meteorological Department in Rangpur has recorded 433mm rainfall in the district from 10pm Saturday to 10am yesterday. This is the highest rainfall in the shortest duration in 100 years, said officials. They forecast more rainfall in the next 48 hours.

During a visit to different city areas, this correspondent found that all the roads and thoroughfares were under waist- to knee-deep water.

People were seen wading through filthy water to go to their destinations. Some were busy protecting their homes and shops from water while others were trying to drain and scoop water out.

People in low lying areas were the worst sufferers. In an city of 203 sqkm, most areas including Shapla Square, Hajipara, Chamrapatty, Karanjai, Senpara, Newsenpara, Adarshapara, Babukha, Kamarpara, Jummapara, Keranipara, Alamnagar, Hanumantola, Munsipara, Mulatol Amtola, Goneshpur, Babupara, Lalbag KDC Mor, Bus Terminal, Shalbon, Mistripara, Kamalkasna, Mahiganj, Kolabari Darshna, Medical Pakarmatha, Jolkor, New Jummapara and Khatkhotia went under water.

Many had to seek shelter elsewhere as their homes got inundated.

Chandana Karmakar, a resident of the Palpara, said her neighbourhood is under waist-deep water. She said the

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Prime Minister's birthday today

BSS, Dhaka

Today is Prime Minister and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina's 74th birthday.

The eldest of five children of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Begum Fazilatunnesa was born on this day in 1947 at Tungipara of Gopalganj.

Like previous years, Awami League and its affiliated organisations will be celebrating the day by organising various events. On the occasion, milad and doa mahfils will be held across the country.

Special prayers will be offered at different places of worship seeking good health and long life of the premier.

Hasina spent much of her childhood in the village where she was born. In 1954, when Bangabandhu was elected legislator, the family relocated to Dhaka.

In her student life, she actively took part in the six-point movement of 1966 and the student movement of 1969, which saw the

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'Govt trying to sell public-owned jute mills to pvt sector'

Says Zonayed Saki; LDA leaders at rally demand reopening of mills by September

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is conspiring to sell the public-owned jute mills to the private sector, Zonayed Saki told a protest rally yesterday.

The chief coordinator of left-leaning political party Gonosamhati Andolon made the remark at the demonstration organised by the Left Democratic Alliance (LDA) in front of the Jatiya Press Club, protesting the government's decision to shut down all state-run jute mills.

Chaired by Bazlur Rashid Firoz, central leaders of left wing political parties spoke at the protest rally.

"At first, the government had said the jute mills would be reopened through public-private partnership; now they are saying the jute mills will be leased to industrialists. Actually, the government is conspiring to sell the public-owned jute mills to the private sector," Saki added.

Sajjad Jahir Chandan, assistant secretary general of Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), said, "While hundreds of thousands of people in Bangladesh have already been unemployed by Covid-19 pandemic, the 'fascist' Awami League government has made 51,000 jute mill workers unemployed by shutting down the jute mills. Some four crore people of the country who are directly or indirectly involved with jute industry will be affected by this decision. The government must reopen the jute mills under state-ownership within September."

Moshrefa Mishu, noted garment workers' leader and general secretary of Ganatantrik Biplobi Party, said, "According to the government, the mills were incurring heavy losses. The reasons behind the loss were unrestrained corruption of mill authorities and age-old machineries. The government did not take any step against the corrupt officials or to modernise the equipment. Instead, they sacked thousands of workers."

The protesters later marched towards the ministry of jute and textiles, where they were stopped by police. The rally ended there, with the announcement that the prime minister's office would be 'besieged' on October 5 with the same demand.

The government closed all 25 jute mills run by Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) on July 1, laying off 24,886 permanent and 32,000 substitute or temporary workers. Although the minister for jute and textiles had initially said the jute mills would be reopened through public-private partnership or government-to-government agreement or through lease process, BJMC and ministry officials have recently said they are more interested to lease out the mills to the private sector for short term.

A race against time to get tested

Saudi expat gets Covid-19 report in 9hrs with luck on his side, manages to fly out in time

RASHIDUL HASAN

Around 2pm on Saturday, Mir Abdus Salam was frantically explaining to sample collectors why he needed his Covid-19 test report in less than nine hours. He had a flight the very same day and had to be at the airport by 11:30pm, which means the Saudi expatriate only had that much time to give samples, get them processed and collect the report, a highly unlikely outcome.

As it turned out, it was Salam's lucky day, as the sample collectors stationed at Mohakhali DNCC Market rose to the occasion and accomplished to do just that. Due to this extraordinary service at the lone sample collection centre for overseas passengers, Salam managed to catch his flight and land in Riyadh yesterday.

"The Saudi-bound worker [Salam] came to the centre when we were scheduled to stop our activities," said Dhaka Civil Surgeon Dr Moinul Ahsan.

But Salam told staffers that he got his ticket a few hours ago, and his flight is scheduled to depart at 3:30am, he told The Daily Star.

"Usually, we are supposed to get 48 hours to carry out tests of overseas passengers, as per the guidelines of Saudia [Saudi Arabian Airlines]," he said. "But due to our respect for remittance earners, we took Salam's case as a challenge. We immediately collected his sample and sent it to National Institute of Laboratory Medicine and Referral Centre through a special messenger."

Both the staffers and Salam were quite lucky. At that very moment, a machine that has the capacity to process 94 samples simultaneously was being prepared to start processing. As per instructions, Salam's sample was included, as there was room for it, Moinul added.

Immediately after staffers got the report, they completed other related work and handed it over to Salam around 11pm.

"We got information that he reached the airport by 11:30pm and caught his flight," Moinul said.

The civil surgeon said Saudia should issue tickets and allocate flight schedules in a way that allows staffers to get

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Blind date with a book!

LABIBA KABIR, Star Books Desk

In the fourth instalment of "Blind Date with a Book", online bookstore PaperCut Books are once again sending out pre-packed book bundles. The catch is those who place orders will not know what titles await them until unpacking their delivery.

"When you read and buy a lot of books, it [can get] boring eventually. We love surprises and books as gifts, and that's where 'Blind Dates with a Book' comes in," says Tahmina Habib, founder of PaperCut Books, who launched the initiative with her partner Sheikh Abdullah Aal Mamun in 2019.

Each time PaperCut receives a new shipment, they set aside 10-20 of the new "local copies" for the blind date series. They make sure not to promote those titles online. The books are packed with a free custom-made bookmark; the deliberately chosen plain brown packaging offers minimal hints.

Customers, however, get to pick from a selection of genres, spanning poetry, graphic novels, contemporary nonfiction and others. To further cater to their areas of interest, phrases such as "festive short stories" and "about people who disappear in search of a better life" are mentioned. Each package costs between Tk 200-400.

Extra precautions, including two layers of packaging, have made preparing for the series more time-consuming during the pandemic, but response from customers is still staggering.

"It was a big risk, because people might already have some of the books in their collection. But once the reviews hit, we sold out most of the packages in a day and even had to turn down a few customers. It was heart-warming to see all our books sell out without us mentioning authors or titles," Tahmina says.

Amrina Ahmed, who recently bought one of the blind date packages, points out, "We often buy books based on the title or cover, but when it's covered up this way, we can't make that judgment."

"I was particularly satisfied with the book I received and its quality. It was one I hadn't heard of before," adds Rafid Saleh, another customer.

Based on reviews, the initiative seems to be bringing back elements of the reading experience that are often diluted amidst the media hype surrounding books—like the whimsy and adventure of approaching a book with a fresh mind, discovering books that one otherwise might not have tried, and reading for reading's sake only.

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Verdict in arms case against Md Shahed today

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The judgement in the arms case filed against Regent Group Chairman Mohammad Shahed is set to be delivered by a Dhaka tribunal today.

Judge KM Emrul Kayesh of the Special Tribunal-1 of Dhaka is scheduled to read out the judgement around 2pm, Additional Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Tapash Kumar Pal confirmed to The Daily Star.

Earlier, the prosecution and defence completed their arguments in the case.

The prosecution told the tribunal that they have been able to prove the charges against the accused and sought highest punishment -- life term imprisonment -- for the accused.

The defence, however, told the tribunal that the prosecution has failed to prove the charges in the case. They sought acquittal of their client.

Shahed was arrested on July 15 from Satkhira when he was trying to leave the country on a boat.

He was later remanded in a case filed over issuing fake Covid-19 test results and charging patients unfairly for testing and treatment.

On July 19, a team of DB police found Shahed's private car in front of a house in Sector-11, in the city's Uttara Paschim area. They then seized a pistol with a round of bullets from the car and later a case under the Arms Act was filed against him.

DB Inspector Md Sairul Islam on July 30 submitted the charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka, showing 13 people as prosecution witnesses. The Special Tribunal-1 of Dhaka framed charges against Shahed, accused in over 60 cases, on August 27 in the case.

Eleven prosecution witnesses, including the case's complainant, so far gave their depositions before the tribunal.



The Shah Amanat Bridge on river Karnaphuli in Chattogram wears a gleaming new look, as the Roads & Highways Department last week completed decorative lighting on the bridge. Officials said the work was undertaken marking Mujib Borsho, and was halted for a few months due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Lake Road to come under speed limit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Authorities will set speed limit for vehicles on Lake Road, which passes through Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban and Crescent Lake at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, to stop rough driving on the VIP road.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) gave the proposal and Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) will set the limit at 40 kilometres "soon", officials said.

"We agreed on principle to set speed limit at 40km. We will take the final decision after talking with Public Works Department, which has constructed the road," said BRTA Chairperson Nur Mohammad Mazumder.

DMP on August 22 gave a proposal to restrict speed after incidents of road crashes and rough driving were reported recently, said BRTA Director (Road Safety) Mahbub-E-Rabbani.

A meeting over the proposal was held on Thursday, presided over by the BRTA chairperson.

The road, around 1.4 km, starts from south-west end's boundary of Gono Bhaban to north-east end's boundary of Jatiya Sangsad.