

AGONY AFTER ARBITRATION

Rape victim kills herself

AMANUR AMAN, Kusthia

Denied justice by the law, society and her own family, a rape victim in Kusthia killed herself early yesterday.

The thirty-year-old housewife from Hashimpur village in Kumarkhali upazila was raped allegedly by a quack on Sunday when she went to his chamber in the village bazaar to abort her 3-month old pregnancy, according to police.

Once in the chamber, quack Rafiquzzaman Jhantu injected her with a sedative for the abortion process but started raping her when she fell unconscious. But soon she regained consciousness and screamed for help. She was then rescued by people at the bazaar and sent home with assurances of justice, police said. However, her cries for justice only met with obstacles and further insults.

The first blow came when she went to Kumarkhali Police Station the next day and police refused to take her case. Instead, they sent her to Abdul Hannan, general secretary of Jagannathpur union Awami League, to seek justice.

According to locals, Jhantu has close ties with Hannan.

After the victim's husband Shahjahan met Hannan on that day, the latter arranged an arbitration on Tuesday where the rapist was fined Tk 50,000 for the crime.

"The victim, who was present at

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Culprits left

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filed or not... As there is no assessor at the Marine Court, the accused often file appeals with the higher courts and secure acquittal," he pointed out.

Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan said it takes years to dispose of a case at the lone Marine Court. The court lacked mandatory marine experts due to a shortage of such specialists, he claimed.

All the Marine Court verdicts drag for years in appeals with higher courts, said Jahangir.

According to shipping ministry statistics, there had been 393 launch accidents in the country in the last 25 years, including the sinking of Pinak-6 in the Padma on Monday. The disasters claimed around 3,700 lives while another 490 went missing.

However, private organisation National Committee to Protect River, Road and Railway, put the death toll at around 5,500 and 1,500 missing in 658 launch tragedies over the last two decades.

The government so far filed 308 accident cases with the Marine Court. The accused in 187 cases were either handed imprisonment or fine, while the rest of the cases were either dismissed or pending.

According to Inland Shipping Ordinance, 1976, the court can hand down a convict a maximum jail term of five years or a maximum fine of Tk 50,000.

The government formed over 500 probe committees, but only three probe reports have been made public, said official sources.

On making the probe findings public, the shipping minister said the government will publish all the reports if anyone asks for it.

The probe committees had been invariably dominated by non-technical bureaucrats. Besides, the bodies included no independent technical experts despite the fact that the entire issue of vessel capsizing is technical in nature.

Any technical person either at the shipping department or Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) is involved somehow or the other in the approval and operation of a vessel. So they are not supposed to reveal their own faults, said a BIWTA official.

He added: If any probe report holds the negligence and malpractice of some officials responsible for a launch accident, the accused start lobbying with the committee members and department high-ups or reach some underhand deals with them to shelve the report.

BIWTA Chairman Md Samsuddoha Khandaker said, "I've to look into the office records to say how many accident probe reports have been shelved and why."

The government, said the shipping minister, this year has identified 21,000 unregistered passenger and cargo vessels plying the waterways in six districts alone. The government doesn't take any responsibility for loss or damage of life and property from those vessels, he added.

Saudi men

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or is sterile," Al-Qurashi said.

However, no official announcement has been released by the Saudi Arabian government till yet.

The largest oil exporting nation is home to an estimated 9 million expatriate worker, constituting 30 percent of the total population.

The highly conservative country has been the subject of global condemnation for its bad record in granting equal rights to women in the country.



Luggage of the missing and dead passengers of Pinak-6 are piled inside a shop, left, for families to identify and claim. The bags were found floating on the river.

Family members of the missing give police photos, right, of their loved ones for identification.



Aleya in tears, left, as her aunt tries to comfort her. She lost her mother and two sisters in Pinak-6 that went down at Mawa on Monday. Ignoring the strong wind and heavy rain, and the fact that a larger launch sank only a few days ago, people still cross the mighty Padma on small vessels, right, yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Waiting for the dead

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seeing their loved ones alive, but they wished to get at least the bodies.

Many of them gave the names of their missing family members to the information centre set up by the district administration at Mawa Ghat yesterday. Some of them provided the centre with photographs of the missing.

Some of them were busy checking the luggage that was fished out of the river, trying to figure out whether any of those belonged to their loved ones.

Briefing reporters around 7:00pm, Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan said a total of 19 bodies had been recovered so far. Of those, eight bodies were handed over to their relatives.

The minister, however, didn't give the identities of the victims or say where the bodies had been found.

But the information centre said 22 bodies had been recovered so far. Of those, two were found on Monday, one on Tuesday and the rest yesterday. Identities of eight victims could be ascertained so far, said officials at the centre.

The body of Fahad, 24, of Jhalakathi was recovered in Bhola on Tuesday.

The bodies of Jannatul Lucky, 20, of Shariatpur, Jamal, 27, of Faridpur, and Mizanur, 35, and Ima Akter, 18, of Madaripur were recovered from Sureshwar of Shariatpur yesterday, while the body of Rita Akter, 25, of Faridpur was found in Chandpur.

Of the 13 unidentified bodies, three were recovered at Mawa, five in Bhola, two each in Barisal and Chandpur, and one each in Shariatpur and Laxmipur, said the centre.

Police confirmed the deaths of two female passengers -- Hasi Begum and Nusrat Jahan Hira -- within an hour of the launch disaster.

At least 137 passengers were still missing, according to officials at the centre.

The double-decker vessel, which was on its way to Mawa from Kewrakandi, was carrying more than 200 passengers against a capacity of 85. It sank in the face of strong waves and high winds in



This is the last photo of the three nieces of Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan. They boarded Pinak-6 minutes later. One of them died and the other two are missing and presumed dead. This selfie was taken on their way to Kawrakandi terminal.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

the mighty river near Louhajang around 11:00am on Monday.

Meanwhile, all government agencies concerned held a review meeting at Mawa Ghat in the afternoon. The shipping minister briefed the reporters in the middle of the meeting.

He said a joint intensive search was carried out with side-scan SONAR machines yesterday, and it would continue until the launch was located.

Apart from this, the fire service would continue its efforts to locate the launch, said Shajahan.

The minister said survey vessel Kandari-2, which can locate a sunken launch even if it is covered in silt, would join the operation.

The vessel reached Mawa Ghat from Chittagong at about 12:10am today.

Shajahan said survey vessel Jarip-10 would be used in the operation if Kandari-2 fails to locate the ill-fated launch. Jarip-10 has side-scan SONAR and GPS systems that are used in ocean surveys.

Gazans battle for survival

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"Israel has no problem extending the ceasefire unconditionally," an official told AFP on condition of anonymity. The current truce, which came into effect Tuesday, is due to expire at 8:00am local time tomorrow.

There was no immediate comment from Hamas. But it is expected to accept an extension of truce amid growing international pressure.

Earlier, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu launched a vigorous defence of Israel's month-long conflict "justified" and "proportionate", blaming Hamas for the heavy Palestinian civilian death toll.

"I think it was justified. I think it was proportionate and that doesn't in any way take away the deep regret we have for the loss of a single civilian casualty," he told a news conference in Jerusalem in response to a question from the US news channel CNN.

Gaza, which enjoyed its first full day of peace yesterday, has lost 1,875 people, the vast majority civilians killed as they hid from Israeli bombardments. Its ill-equipped hospitals hold thousands of patients, many suffering from horrific injuries.

But Israel's destruction of homes

and infrastructure will ensure that the possibility of Gaza having a normal existence is a distant prospect.

Its only sewage plant, built with funding from KFW, the German development agency was put out of action by three tank shells. The result is that raw sewage routed through the plant is now being dumped untreated into the sea.

For the halt to waste treatment is only part of a much wider water and sewage problem. Oxfam said on Tuesday night that the destruction by bombing of wells, pipelines, and reservoirs, caused contamination of scarce fresh water with sewage and that 15,000 tons of solid waste had seeped into Gaza streets. "We're working in an environment with a completely destroyed water infrastructure that prevents people in Gaza from cooking, flushing toilets or washing [their] hands," the agency said.

Frode Mauring, the UN Development Programme's special representative said that with 16-18,000 homes totally destroyed and another 30,000 partially damaged, and 400,000 internally displaced people "the current situation for Gaza is devastating".

UN Middle East envoy Robert



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



bodies? The authorities could not locate the launch even three days after the disaster. We believe the bodies are stuck in the hull," said Shahidul Islam, whose wife, daughter and niece remained missing.

Shahidul, who was also on board the ill-fated launch, jumped into the river and survived.

Recalling the horrifying moments, Shahidul said they were inside the hull when the double-decker started going down. His wife Ayesha Akter held his hand when the launch was tilting to the left side.

But her hand slipped from his clutch as the passengers jostled to escape.

He was then pushed towards a window, and he got out of the hull.

Ali Abbas of Narayanganj whose wife and two daughters were missing said, "I want the bodies of my wife and daughters. That will be my consolation. I want to bury them."

Some aggrieved relatives of the victims assaulted several journalists for what they said was misleading people with wrong information. They also hurled brick chips at a makeshift control room of Munshiganj police and a camp of the Red Crescent Society.

Subhan linked to mass killing

Pabna freedom fighter testifies at war tribunal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A freedom fighter yesterday linked Jamaat-e-Islami leader Abdus Subhan to a mass killing of more than 100 people committed at Sujanagar upazila in Pabna during the Liberation War in 1971.

SM Shamsul Alam, 22nd prosecution witness in the case against Subhan, told the International Crimes Tribunal-2 that he had seen Pakistani army shoot four people to death immediately after Subhan's conversation with them at Fakitpur village in Sujanagar on May 12.

"He [Subhan] was the ameer of Pabna Jamaat-e-Islami during the Liberation War. He, in conjunction with the Pakistani army, tried to eliminate the pro-liberation people in our area [in 1971]," Shamsul told the tribunal.

The Jamaat's naye-e-ameer faces nine charges, including genocide, committed in Pabna during the nine-month-long war. The accused, however, pleads not guilty before the tribunal.

During his 65-minute testimony, Shamsul of Tarabaria in Sujanagar said he had heard gunshots from a nearby village around 6:00am on May 12, 1971 and found people fleeing citing attacks by the Pakistani army.

The 66-year-old witness said he also had hidden inside a sugarcane field beside their Union Parishad office in

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Form broadcast

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Asked about objectionable matters in the policy, he stressed the need for an independent commission comprising all stakeholders, which would address those issues.

Members of the organisation would soon meet the information minister and raise their reservations about the policy before him, said ATCO Chairman Mossadek Ali, who is also chairman and managing director of NTV.

Managing Director of Ekattor TV Mozammel Haq said they had reservations about what the policy said in reference to the armed forces, law enforcement agencies, government officials and talk shows.

"Nobody wants to demean them and we give our utmost efforts to maintain a balance on the talk shows," he said, adding that the media had come to the present state after overcoming many hurdles.

"We want to move forward, not backward," Mozammel said.

The weekly cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina approved the policy on Monday.

Many involved in the broadcast media said the government might misuse it in the name of maintaining standards in news, programmes and advertisements in the electronic media.

The policy did not mention any timeframe for the formation of the commission. Taking advantage of the situation, the government may dilly-dally over constituting the commission and allow the information ministry to enforce the policy, they added.

The policy will be in force once the ministry issues a gazette notification, which is scheduled for today. The authority for implementing the policy will be conferred on the commission after its formation.

The information ministry will place a bill in parliament to enact the National Broadcast Act, which will have directives on the formation of the commission.

BNP to finalise

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During her meeting with the chiefs of the BNP-led 20-party alliance, a roadmap of their movement might be finalised, insiders say.

Earlier on July 18, Khaleda approved a 56-member convening committee of BNP's Dhaka city unit led by Mirza Abbas and Habib-un-Nabi Soheli aimed at strengthening the party's crucial chapter for waging a tougher movement in the capital.

Many in the party believe last year's movement of the opposition to stop the January 5 election failed due to BNP's failure to wage movement in the capital.

Khaleda during her Saudi Arabia visit last month discussed this issue with her elder son and her party's second-in-command Tarique Rahman, who also flew to that country at the same time from the UK, where he has been living since 2008.

During their one-week stay in Saudi Arabia, Khaleda and Tarique worked out the 20-party alliance's possible programmes and strategies to force the government to concede to their demand for a fresh election, the insiders add.

Khaleda is likely to elaborately discuss the movement plan with her party's policymakers and the alliance leaders to finalise it.