

RAPE ON BUS Police finally record case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It took a minister's influence for the police to finally record a case against the bus driver who reportedly raped a passenger at the city's Mohakhali bus terminal early Wednesday.

But the victim's medical examination remains to be done, compromising forensic evidence against the suspect. The chances of getting evidence from the victim's body fades with every hour as experts say that the evidence should be collected within 24 hours of the incident.

Sub-Inspector Abu Bakar Siddique of Banani Police Station told The Daily Star about receiving the victim's statement yesterday afternoon.

"We will send her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for medical examination tomorrow [Saturday]," said Siddique.

It would be three days after the incident if she is sent to the hospital today.

Law enforcers of Banani Police Station and Tejgaon Industrial Police Station had wasted time debating over in whose precinct the alleged crime had been committed.

The debate ensued after the traumatised 20-year-old victim told Tejgaon Industrial Police Station that

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Govt call

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Convention 107 for Indigenous People.

The Press Information Department (PID) on Thursday issued a release (reference No 2704) urging the media, experts, university teachers and civil society members to avoid the word, Adivasi, at discussions and talk-shows on International Day of the World's Indigenous People.

It also said the word is used while celebrating the UN's indigenous day in Bangladesh though as per the 15th amendment of the constitution indigenous (Adivasi) people "do not exist" in this country. The amendment rather incorporates the term, "small ethnic groups or tribes", it mentioned.

However, the press release was not found on the PID website yesterday.

The international indigenous people's day is observed on August 9 each year to promote and protect the rights of the world's indigenous people. This year's theme is "Bridging the gap: implementing the rights of indigenous peoples".

"The press notification shows how the government has taken a position against the indigenous people," said Sanjeeb Drong, the secretary general of Bangladesh Forum for Indigenous People.

"I think, it would make our marginalised indigenous people even more vulnerable."

Regarding the fifteenth amendment that says, "The State shall take steps to protect and develop the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities", Sanjeeb Drong said the constitution of a country does not necessarily mention everything.

"My question is if a state has any right to change someone's identity," he said.

Earlier in 2011, the government sent secret letters to administration not to use the word "indigenous" in official papers though Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself used the term "Adivasi" in her goodwill message on the Indigenous Peoples Day in Bangladesh. The term was also found in the election manifesto of Awami League.

No consolation for victim families

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"They [his parents] were inside the hull at the time of the accident. Minutes before the capsized I took my sister to the upper deck of the launch and jumped into river when it started to turn over," said Akram, a chauffeur by profession.

He now waits for the bodies of his parents at the Pachchar Government Primary School.

Of the 40 bodies recovered so far, the bodies of 35 passengers were taken to the school as of yesterday noon. The bodies of 24 victims were handed over to family members after identification. Eleven were buried unidentified. Five bodies would be kept at the school for the next 24 hours for identification.

The air of the school is heavy with the stench of five-day-old corpses and the sadness of family members. It was very difficult to identify the decomposing bodies. Family members of the victims were relying on the clothes on the bodies to identify their loved ones.

Nilufar Begum has been at the school for the last two days waiting for the body of her 16-year-old daughter Afroza, a student of Motijheel Ideal College in the capital.

Nilufar, her daughter and niece Ima were returning to their Munshiganj home after a visit to her sister's in Madaripur. Nilufar found Ima's body



The mangled wreckage of the bus after it had a head-on collision with a truck on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Sitakunda. Four people died in the accident.

13 more lives

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The accident occurred when a Dhaka-bound passenger bus, a Sylhet-bound microbus and a motorbike collided with each other.

The injured were admitted to Habiganj Sadar Hospital and Sylhet Osmani Medical College and Hospital, the police official said.

Meanwhile, two people were killed in two separate road accidents in Habiganj district yesterday.

In Lakhai, a man was crushed to death under the wheels of a truck in the morning when he was crossing the road, said Ali Farid Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Lakhai Police Station.

The victim is Dewan Ali, 30, of the same upazila.

Hours later in Nabiganj, a bus hit a CNG-driven three-wheeler auto rickshaw, killing Sahidul Islam, a night guard in his 60s, said Liakat Ali, officer-in-charge of Nabiganj Police Station.

Our Chittagong correspondent reports, four people, including a woman, were killed and 10 others injured when a bus and a truck collided head-on on Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Sitakunda upazila yesterday morning.

Drivers of both the bus and the truck -- Abul Kashem, 30, and Obaidul Haque Pramanik, 32, respectively -- were killed on the spot.

The other two deceased passengers of the bus are Jarina Begum, 52, and Nazmul Hasan, 23.

Syed Zakir Hossain, officer-in-charge of Baro Aulia Highway Police Station, said the accident took place at around 6:25am as the truck, carrying corrugated iron sheets, tried to overtake another vehicle and hit the bus coming from the opposite direction.

"I suggested my wife to take a direct bus of a renowned company, but she chose to travel in this local bus as the fare was cheaper," said Abul Hossain, Jarina's husband.

Meanwhile, a driver of a pick-up van was killed at Khulshi area of the port city yesterday.

The deceased is Nasir, 25, of Comilla.

Nasir got injured when a vehicle hit his van at around 12:00am, said Nur Uddin, sub-inspector of Khulshi Police Station.

He was rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead, said police.

180 Bangladeshis

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"After a month, my brother informed me that they had been held hostage at their workplace without enough food and water," added Jabed.

Family members of the migrants could not confirm why their relatives were confined at the workplace.

The agency took Tk 4 lakh from each of the jobseekers. Though the recruiter had said the employer would pay project engineer Siddique \$1200 per month, he didn't receive a single penny as yet.

As a conflict erupted in Iraq in June between Sunni rebels and the Iraqi government forces, the company management left the project site, leaving the Bangladeshis confined there.

None of the Bangladeshis can contact the families at home as they don't have access to phone or internet, Jabed said quoting his brother as saying.

Mother of another migrant Zakir Hossain of Jessor, Aklima Begum said her son wanted to return home, but he could not. "He asked me to do whatever is needed to rescue him from confinement," she added.

Aklima had borrowed a big amount from a local NGO to send her son abroad and now she has been left clueless about what to do.

Jabed in the mean time contacted Rights Jessor to rescue his brother from confinement. The NGO last month communicated with the expatriates' welfare, foreign affairs and home ministries, and also the Bangladeshi embassy in Baghdad to seek assistance in this regard.

Binoy Krishna Mallick, executive director of the rights platform, said they were yet to receive any response from the government authorities concerned.

Asked about the ordeal of the Bangladeshis in Iraq, Begum Shamsun Nahar, director general of Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, said they didn't receive any complaint from any sources in this regard.

"Upon receiving a complaint, we'll investigate the matter and take measures accordingly," she told The Daily Star.

Despite repeated attempts, this newspaper could not reach the recruiting agency and the Bangladeshi embassy in Baghdad over the phone.

Meanwhile, Rights Jessor held a press conference at Jessor Press Club yesterday to disclose the suffering of the confined expatriates before the media.

Over 20,000 Bangladeshis are now working in Iraq, according to the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry.

Against all odds

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coming here from Myanmar and their increasing presence is affecting our lives," said Menleng Mro.

Menleng Mro, president of Cramadipara musical group, said Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), an NGO, has been helping them hold on to their indigenous ways of life.

The MJF first reached the village in 2010 through a local NGO named Humanitarian Foundation to help found "Rice Bank" to save the Mro families from severe food crisis between April and June, time for sowing seeds.

A granary of rice has been set up in the village and whenever a family faces food crisis, they borrow food grain from there and return it after the harvest, Mro said.

The MJF is also helping them get their traditional dresses called Longki for women and Longki-Ben for men.

With its support, the Mro community are also making their traditional musical instruments like Tomma, Klin-cha, Lang-Meng-Sa and Plung, which is made of bamboo and dried skin of gourds, Menleng said.

Changes have occurred in other aspects of life of the second largest indigenous community, following the Marmas, as well. Currently, over 28,000 Mros are living in Bandarban

alone, according to the district portal.

They no more pursue their traditional religion in which they would worship nature and celebrate cow-slaughtering festival. They now follow monotheist Crama religion, which was introduced by Menleng Mro, a Mro priest who disappeared in the forest in 1984, said Menleng.

These 750 Mro families were evicted from their ancestral villages to make way for a firing range in the areas for security forces.

"I was a student of Dhaka Notre Dame College back then. I came to my village on a vacation but found nobody in the village. Only some pigs were roaming around. I was totally lost. Later, in the evening I found my family members with other villagers hiding in the forest after being evicted," Singpart said as he recalled the fateful day of 2006.

"Interestingly, the place where our village once stood is still empty. Nothing has been built there after our eviction," he said.

Against this backdrop, the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is being observed today. And indigenous Mro people of Bangladesh like Menleng and Singpart hope that they would get back their peaceful and harmonious way of life someday.

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