

Hail the girl

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Certificate examinee went straight to the exam centre from the hospital and took the test on Friday.

The incident took place in Jadavpur village of Rangpur's Pirganj upazila.

With the JSC examination just a night away, she was studying at her room on Thursday evening. She was alone at home as her father had gone to a local marketplace and her mother was at her parents' place in a nearby village.

Around 8:00pm, Ekramul Haque, 22, son of local rice trader Delwar Rahman, entered her room, gagged her with the scarf she was wearing and raped her.

At one stage, she managed to get rid of the gag and started screaming for help. Neighbours rushed in and rescued the girl but the culprit had fled by then.

When her rickshaw-puller father returned home and heard this, he shut himself inside a room and tried to hang himself. Neighbours broke into the room and rescued him. He tried the same a few more times over the night, but was prevented every time.

With the help of local Chotra

union parishad chairman Mizanur Rahman Raju, the girl was taken to Pirganj Upazila Health Complex.

Raju was also the headmaster of Kanchanbazaar High School where the girl studied.

Once the medical test was over, the girl, to the astonishment of many, told Raju that she wanted to take her exam and asked him to take her to the exam centre -- Chotra High School.

He then took the girl to the centre, and ensured special arrangements so that she could sit the exam without hassles.

She went through the worst horror of a girl's life, dealt with what could be a crushing experience for others, took the examination and went home like a victor who had just conquered the life itself, said a teacher of the school.

The victim's father lodged a case against Ekramul Haque, who was on the run, with Pirganj Police Station.

Md Israil Hossain, officer-in-charge, said drives were on to catch the culprit.

They went to Ekramul's house and found all his family members had fled, he added.

Eye on \$50b

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which is now \$24 billion a year, said Mohammad Hatem, a former senior vice-president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

MA Jabbar, managing director of DBL Group, said social safety net, workers' rights and health insurance, and environmental sustainability were going to be key issues in the garment sector in the coming years.

The garment sector already knows what it would take to become safe and sound structurally and environmentally, he said at the roundtable held at The Daily Star Centre.

"Everything is there, but they are not implemented properly, although many reports have been published on the issues facing the sector, and there is also no follow up to see how much we have progressed," said the entrepreneur.

A number of speakers urged the government to make available the cash incentive facility for all exporters and make the process of getting it less cumbersome.

"We are facing hassles to get the cash incentive facility," said Hatem.

Saiful Islam, managing director of Picard Bangladesh, a leather products exporter, said Bangladesh was still reeling from the reputation crisis following the disasters in the garment and industrial sector.

"Because of the negative image, we are facing challenges in the international market..."

He said the business community needs to take some effective measures to address concerns linked to occupational health and safety, and building code.

"Had we taken any measure on the issue, the retailers and brand groups under the banner of accords and alliances would not have come to Bangladesh. This is a failure on our part."

"When we talk about the occupational health and safety, it is a question of mind-set ... whether we want to keep our buildings and factories safe and sound. It is not a question of money."

The issue of living wage, which is based on the basic needs of workers rather than set by minimum wage, now being debated in the EU as well as the United Nations, also came up during the discussion.

Atiqul said during a meeting in Berlin recently, he was told that the living wage was estimated to be \$219 for Bangladeshi garment workers.

"Many buyers have personally told me that they are against living wages. Everyone should keep in mind that the industry remains sustainable," he said.

The BGMEA chief said after fire, building safety and environmental sustainability, the next issue would be the living wage.

He said many factories were not getting direct business from buyers, which was also a major challenge for the growth of the industry.

He said there were at least 10,000 buyers' agents in Bangladesh when the number of active garment factories was 3,200.

The BGMEA boss was backed by Reazuddin Al-Mamoon, managing director of Epyllion Group, who questioned how money would be mobilised if the country went for the living wage.

He said buyers talk about paying the workers' wages by the fifth day of a month but they (buyers) were also using their 90 days' deferred payment option.

He said exporters would have to bargain more from buyers if they wanted to have the living wage system in place.

Mamoon also pointed at the tendency among international buyers to obtain the cheapest price from Bangladeshi manufacturers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure healthy politics
- Diversify products
- Fix infrastructures
- Simplify cash incentive
- Devise next course of action

Saiful of Picard Bangladesh said although the garment sector was implementing the minimum wage for its workers, improvements do not stop there.

"We hear that that is not good enough ... But we are bypassing the living wage issue out of fear. There is nothing to fear."

Abdullah Al-Mahmud, managing director of Mahin Group, said new factories were not being set up and existing ones have put on hold their expansion plans because of a lack of adequate supply of gas and electricity.

He called upon the government for support to keep the sector stable.

Luthful Bari, a director of Meghna Group, one of the biggest conglomerates, and the owning company of bicycle exporter Uniglory, said although Bangladesh was the fifth largest bicycle exporter to Europe, it was only catering for two percent of the global market worth \$46 billion.

"But the sector offers tremendous growth potential and many people are interested in it."

Luthful said his company was not being able to export beyond Europe in markets like America and the Middle East because of the lack of cash incentive facility.

Mamoon said maintaining a disciplined workforce has become the major challenge for the country, as public order is breached every now and then.

He also said skilled workforce was needed to run the sector.

David Hasanat, managing director of Viyellatex Group, said Bangladesh was still doing business over "left-overs".

"We need to take a bite at the overall business."

"Although we are the cheapest in producing garment, we are being able to drive the business at the top end," he said, adding that Bangladesh also needs to fix its perennial infrastructure problems, including electricity and gas crises.

Atiqul also said an effective one-stop service should be set up, replacing the one under the Board of Investment, so that all exporters' problems could be solved.

Saiful of Picard also said the EU was mulling tagging some conditions following the Rana Plaza and Tazreen disasters under a bill on "responsible textile".

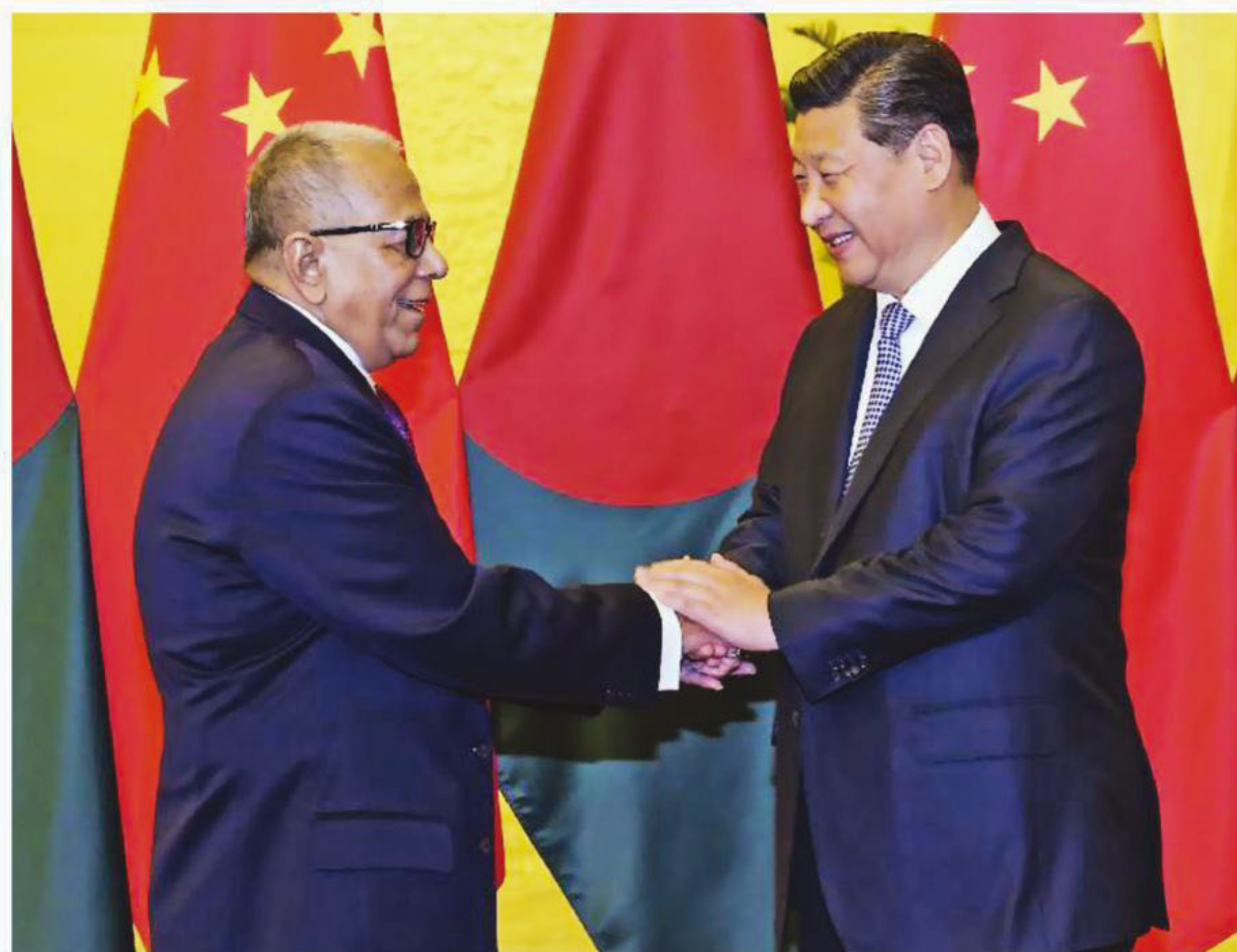
"There are discussions over the issue. We need to know whether our government and professional trade bodies are aware of the issue and whether we can resort to economic diplomacy before the bill, if it exists, is placed."

Atiqul said the BGMEA was also taking the issue of responsible textile seriously. "At the same time, buyers also need to do ethical buying as part of the responsible textile."

Atiqul expressed concern about external NGOs organising workers for trade unions. "These trade unions will destroy the industry."

Hatem said they were not against trade unions but the problem is the workers don't have any knowledge about how the labour organisations work.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said exporters should not be defensive when there is criticism about them. "Many good things have had happened in the garment sector because of the constructive criticism."



President Abdul Hamid shakes hands with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping before their meeting at the Great Hall of the People yesterday, on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Beijing.

China presses on with new Silk Road

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expanding ports and industrial parks in Asia, the Mideast, Africa and Europe.

Together, analysts have said, the plans are designed to put China at the centre of Asian trade and transport and secure more opportunities for major Chinese construction and engineering firms, writes The Wall Street Journal.

It was not immediately clear precisely how the fund would work, when it would start operations or where it would be based, though in all likelihood it would be China, reports Reuters.

According to Xinhua, it would focus on China's "Belt and Road" initiative, which aim to build roads, railways, ports and airports across Central and South Asia.

Xi said the new Silk Road fund will be used for providing investment and financing support to carry out infrastructure, resources, industrial cooperation, financial cooperation and other projects related to connectivity for countries along the "Belt and Road".

He added that the fund will be "open" to active participation by investors from both within and outside of Asia.

The summit was organised ahead of tomorrow's meeting of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders in which a host of world leaders including US President Barack Obama, his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe are scheduled to take part.

Bangladesh President Abdul Hamid, Pakistan's PM Nawaz Sharif and representatives of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) attended the meet.

Indian PM Narendra Modi was invited too but he could not make it, PTV wrote. Indian officials said Modi could not make it to the summit due to his commitments to attend next week's East Asia summit in Myanmar followed by G-20 meeting in Australia.

AIB; HAMID-XI TALKS

Xi unveiled the \$50 billion China-backed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, seen as a challenge to the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, both multilateral lenders that count Washington

and its allies as their biggest financial backers.

China has sought to allay concerns that its new bank aims to undermine the WB and ADB, saying it wants to learn from their experience and that there are more than enough projects around for all the lenders to fund, reports Reuters.

Twenty-first Asian countries -- Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Qatar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uzbekistan and Vietnam -- signed the memorandum of understanding last month in Beijing on establishing the bank.

The Chinese president yesterday morning at his meeting with Bangladesh President Abdul Hamid said Bangladesh is welcome to join AIB as a founding member.

Describing Bangladesh as an important partner of China in South Asia and Indian Ocean region, he said the bilateral relationship features friendship, trust and cooperation.

The two countries must enhance cooperation in trade, agriculture, infrastructure development and maritime industry.

China's vision to build the "Belt and Road" will create chances for both countries. Dhaka and Beijing should work together also to push the building of Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC), Xi added.

At the meeting, Hamid said Bangladesh expects to learn from China's experience in poverty alleviation and seize the chance brought by the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to promote trade and connectivity.

'ONE BELT, ONE ROAD'

Xi earlier had announced that China will accelerate the construction of the economic belt and the maritime silk road, and strengthen cooperation with the countries involved.

"We should prepare timetables and road maps for the coming years for the 'One Belt and One Road' project," he said while presiding over the eighth meeting of the Central Leading Group on Financial and Economic Affairs on Tuesday.

"We will focus on some significant projects and let the construction of 'One Belt and One Road' commence as soon as possible," he

said, adding that the cooperation between China and the countries involved would be mutually beneficial.

China-led "Belt and Road" initiatives could help solve security problems in Asia, said experts at an international forum on Wednesday.

Despite many differences and disputes, China and almost all its neighbouring countries, put economic development as their foremost goal in their policy agenda, using diplomacy to serve this goal, said Yang Xiyu, senior research fellow of China Institute of International Studies.

The two-day forum, which concluded on Wednesday, was held in Xi'an, capital city of northwest China's Shaanxi Province, to mark the International Day of Peace.

Xi'an, home to the well-known terracotta warriors, was where the ancient Silk Road started. An older name of the city, Chang'an, means "lasting stability and peace."

"A simultaneous revival of the Silk Road in different forms would mean not only trade. It could also mean that nations with trade are always going to have a better relationship and peace will automatically come about, because it is opportunity cost," said Siddhant Raj Pandey, member of Board of Directors of the Nepal Institute of International and Strategic Studies.

"If, even after thousands of years, the terra cotta soldiers can be unearthed, then I'm hopeful that the 2,000-year-old Silk Road can be revived and its modern version the maritime Silk Road as well can be developed and made more active and vibrant in the future," he said.

The "One Belt and One Road" initiatives were brought up by Chinese President Xi Jinping last year.

Different from the ancient Silk Road, which mainly focused on trade, the "One Belt and One Road" could also include the flow of financial elements, information, technology and personnel, Xia Liping, dean of the School of Political Science & International Relations with Tongji University.

Xia believes the construction of the new initiatives would help to boost mutual trust among related countries, which will consequently promote the building of security cooperation across all of Asia.

All procedures

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He added that at least a short order would be required to execute the offender.

Meanwhile, the tribunal authorities said they were yet to get the certified copy of the verdict while the jail authorities said they would formally inform Kamaruzzaman of the verdict once they received the warrant of execution.

As per section 991(I) of the Jail Code, the jail authorities will seek Kamaruzzaman's opinion about whether he wants to seek presidential clemency after receiving the warrant, Inspector General of Prisons Brig Gen Syed Iftekhar Uddin told The Daily Star.

After the verdict was delivered on November 3, a debate sparked over Kamaruzzaman's right to seek a review of the SC verdict. The defence said they had the right to seek a review while the state counsels said a war criminal did not have any such right.

The debate intensified when the law minister on Wednesday said he had asked the prison authorities to make preparations for Kamaruzzaman's execution. He also said the convict would get seven days since the delivery of the SC verdict to seek presidential mercy.

After another programme in the capital yesterday morning, the law minister said: "The time for seeking presidential clemency [for Kamaruzzaman] is not over yet."

Asked about the verdict, which has yet to reach the Dhaka Central Jail authorities, where the death row convict is kept now, the minister said: "There is nothing in Section 991 of the Jail Code that suggests a convict be informed about a verdict formally. Prison officials have told him [Kamaruzzaman] that his appeal has been dismissed and the Supreme Court has upheld his death penalty," the minister said.

When reporters asked whether Kamaruzzaman would be hanged with the deadline ending today, the minister said he did not know.

However, Iftekhar Uddin said the jail authorities had not informed Kamaruzzaman of the verdict formally as they had not received the death warrant from the tribunal yet."

He said the tribunal would issue a warrant of execution [death warrant] to the jail authorities as well as to the home ministry and the district magistrate of Dhaka.

Upon receiving the warrant, the home ministry would issue an executive order for the jail authorities and then they could be ready for implementing it, he added.

Meanwhile, the jail authorities on Friday did not allow five members of Kamaruzzaman's family to meet him, Hasan Iqbal, the eldest son of Kamaruzzaman told The Daily Star yesterday.

Kamaruzzaman, an assistant secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami who was a key organiser of the infamous Al-Badr Bahini responsible for abducting, torturing and killing freedom fighters, intellectuals and pro-liberation people in 1971, had been sentenced to death by the International Crimes Tribunal-2 in May last year.

The Supreme Court on November 3 upheld his death penalty for his crimes against humanity during the Liberation War in 1971.

Fatal play with fire

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match stick and tossed it into a bottle full of combustible substance kept for housework, causing an explosion that left them seriously injured.

They were first admitted to Chandpur Sadar Hospital which referred them to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

The siblings died on the way to the DMCH in the afternoon.

Nazmul Haque, officer-in-charge of Faridganj Police Station, said a general diary was lodged in connection with the incident.

'X-Men' mind control a reality?

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But these latest tests have improved the accuracy and effectiveness of the communication, and shown how it could soon be used in real-world examples.

To join the brains of UW student Darby Losey and Jose Ceballos, the research team used electroencephalography (EEG) and transcranial magnetic stimulation.

Losey was connected to an EEG machine, which reads brain activity and sends electrical pulses over the web in one room on the Washington-based campus.

These signals were sent to Ceballos, sitting in another campus half a mile away, who was fitted with a transcranial magnetic stimulation coil placed near the part of the brain that controls hand movements.

Losey was then told to think about firing a canon and intercepting rockets launched by a pirate ship on a video game.

Across campus, Ceballos was sitting wearing headphones in a dark room - with no ability to see the computer game - with his right hand positioned over a touchpad.

When Losey thought about firing

the cannon, the signals were sent to Ceballos, whose hand then twitched, which pressed the touchpad and fired the cannon.

In total, three pairs of students took part in the experiment to test the technology's accuracy across different groups.

Researchers found that accuracy varied among the pairs, ranging from 25 to 83 percent.

Misses mostly were due to a sender failing to accurately execute the thought to send the "fire" command.

The researchers were also able to quantify the exact amount of information that was transferred between the two brains.

"The new study brings our brain-to-brain interfacing paradigm from an initial demonstration to something that is closer to a deliverable technology," said co-author Dr Andrea Stocco, a research assistant professor of psychology and a researcher at UW's Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences.

"Now we have replicated our methods and know that they can work reliably with walk-in participants."

Dr Rajesh Rao, a computer scientist

and engineer at the University of Washington who led the work, added: "Our results show that information extracted from one brain can be transmitted to another brain, ultimately allowing two humans to cooperatively perform a task using only a direct brain-to-brain interface."

"Such devices, which have been long cherished by science fiction writers, have the potential to not only revolutionise how humans communicate and collaborate, but also open a new avenue for investigating brain function."

A separate research team, from Starlab in Barcelona, Spain, recently published results showing direct communication between two human brains.

But that particular study only tested one sender brain, instead of different pairs, and was conducted offline instead of in real-time over the web.

The technology makes it possible to control the body of another person with thoughts - something that Professor Xavier was able to do in the X-Men films and comics.

The UW research team is planning

to take the work a step further in an attempt to decode and transmit more brain processes.

They are hoping to expand the types of information that can be transferred from brain to brain, including more complex visual and psychological phenomena such as concepts, thoughts and rules.

The research, published in Plos ONE, was funded by the US Army Research Office and the UW, with additional support from the Keck Foundation.

Earlier this year, a separate research team, led by the University of Barcelona, used EEG headsets to record electrical activity from neurons firing in the brain and send thoughts between participants.

This was used to convert the words "hola" and "ciao" into binary.

In the initial test, the greeting was sent from a volunteer in Thiruvananthapuram, India to Strasbourg, France.

There, a computer translated the message and then used electrical stimulation to implant it in the receiver's mind.