

RAMPURA HOUSE COLLAPSE

Police search for owner, case filed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rampura police yesterday filed a case against the owner of the two-storey tin structure that collapsed on Wednesday, killing 12 people in the capital's Rampura area.

The accused, Moniruzzaman Chowdhury, is also an activist of Jubo League, youth wing of the ruling Awami League, said locals and sources at police.

"We are searching for the man," said Mahbubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Rampura Police Station.

"There are some allegations against Moniruzzaman. We are trying find out whether he is accused in any other case," he added.

At least 12 people, including five women, were killed as the structure, housing around 20 families, collapsed in a marshland at Malibagh Choudhurypara.

Maj Shakil Newaz, acting director general of Fire Service and Civil Defense, yesterday said they would continue the rescue operation until the Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka

decides to end it.

"We are carrying on the salvage operation even though there is no claim for any more missing person," he said.

It could not be known how many people were inside the tin-structure, built in Hajipara Matir Masjid Jheel, when it collapsed.

Shefali Begum, one of the survivors, said her fifth grader son, Saiful Sheikh, died before her in the blink of an eye.

Shanti Begum, wife of grocer Harun Or Rashid, said her husband had gone to their home to have his lunch when the hell broke loose.

Meanwhile, all bodies were handed over to the relatives yesterday and Dhaka district administration gave Tk 20,000 to each of the victims' family.

Replying to a query, AKM Rahmatullah, local ruling party lawmaker, said: "Wednesday's collapse was just a mere accident and the rest of other such structures are not risky."

Police sources said Moniruzzaman was detained twice along with arms in 2000 and 2005. He also allegedly illegally occupied lands in Rampura area.

'CHANGES' IN LAND BOUNDARY DEAL

Dhaka surprised by media reports

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka is surprised at the Indian media reports that claimed New Delhi had decided to introduce a major change in the Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh, keeping Assam out of the purview of the pact.

Officials at the foreign ministry said though they had not yet received any official communication from New Delhi on its plan to bring changes in the LBA, "they are worried as the Indian plan may once again put the LBA into uncertainty".

Indian media reported that BJP brass considers Assam that goes to election next year a winning prospect, and these election calculations may result in delinking Assam from the LBA with Bangladesh for now.

A draft Cabinet note is being prepared keeping delinking Assam from the pact following a directive of the top government functionaries.

As agreed upon through several rounds of negotiations, Assam is set to lose land -- around 268 acres -- if the LBA is ratified. Assam giving up land is part of settling a disputed 6.5 km stretch that is been with Bangladesh since partition.

Under the transfer of areas in adverse possession, India will receive 2,777 acres of land and will transfer 2,267 acres of land to Bangladesh through implementation of the 2011 protocol. It seems Bangladesh will lose

around 510 acres of land.

As with the enclaves, India will receive 51 Bangladeshi enclaves spread over 7,110 acres of land while Bangladesh will get 111 Indian enclaves spread over 17,158 acres of land.

Following the exchange, Bangladesh will gain 10,048 acres of land from India.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, a senior official at the foreign ministry termed the Indian plan as reported by the media "ridiculous" and "imaginary".

Any change to the deal at this stage would not be possible because the two countries have signed agreement, finalised demarcation, signed and exchanged the strip maps, which fully described transfer of lands, said the official, preferring anonymity.

Asked whether India can unilaterally bring any changes, he said it was not possible to bring any change by India alone as it would then require fresh negotiation, resign the changed deal, change of strip maps etc, which are highly complex.

Moreover, he said why Bangladesh would accept the New Delhi's new plan to delink Assam for petty politics for a single state out of four.

He questioned if Assam is excluded, then what about three other states, especially the West Bengal. "Will they not ask to delink them as they will also lose and gain in land swap deal?"



Students and activists of women's and development organisations form a human chain in front of the Jatiya Press Club yesterday to protest against the assault on women on Dhaka University campus during the Pehela Baishakh celebrations. The protest was organised by "Meyeder Jonno Nirapod Nagorikatto" of Brac.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

'Nothing' found in footage

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6:00pm and 7:00pm on the day -- the time when the assault happened -- Prof Amzad Ali, acting proctor of DU, said he did not find anything relating to the assault during Pehela Baishakh celebrations.

Amzad said the footage in places suggests an aggressive person, around 30, is moving towards some men and women on the road between Suhrawardy gate and Razu Sculpture.

"It was not clear whether he was assaulting people," he said.

Abdul Baten, deputy commissioner (Ramna division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said police too scrutinised the CCTV footage but could not find any incident of assault.

Meanwhile, the High Court yesterday directed the inspector general of police and the DU vice chancellor to investigate the incident and submit separate reports by May 17.

Issuing a suo moto rule, the HC asked the authorities concerned to mention in the reports what steps have been taken against the offenders, Deputy Attorney General Tapash Kumar Biswas told The Daily Star.

Nineteen CCTV cameras were installed in the area as part of the security measures taken by Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

Baten said the footage shows that a group of youths playing vuvuzela were rushing through people near the Suhrawardy Udyan gate.

"We are not clear about any incident of sexual assault but it is true that an incident happened," he said, adding that he visited the spot and talked with people who were present there during the incident.

However, DMP Commissioner Mohammad Asaduzzaman Miah on Wednesday dismissed any incident of sexual assault on the DU campus Tuesday evening.

According to eye witnesses, some 30 to 40 youths sexually assaulted around 20 women for about an hour at the Suhrawardy Udyan gate near TSC.

They alleged law enforcers played the role of bystanders even though they were stationed within 20 yards from the spot.

During the incident, at least five offenders were caught by activists of Bangladesh Chhatra Union who came forward to rescue the women.

Tuhin Kanti Das, an activist of Chhatra Union, said he and his fellow activists handed five offenders to SI Ashraf of Shahbagh Police Station.

When they had gone to the station two hours later, they were told that two of the offenders had been released as they were students of DU. Officials at the station refused to explain what happened to the rest, Tuhin claimed.

In answer to a query about Ashraf's role in releasing the offenders, Baten said the SI had denied having detained anyone.

Contacted, SI Ashraf said no one

had turned in any offender.

Chhatra Union president Liton Nandi said masterminds of the assault must be connected to people with political influence.

THE HC RULE

In the rule, the HC asked the government and the DU authorities to explain in four weeks as to why they should not be directed to take appropriate legal steps against the perpetrators.

The home secretary, the IGP, the DU VC, the DMP commissioner, the deputy commissioner (Ramna division) of DMP and the officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station have been made respondents to the rule.

The HC bench of Justice Quazi Reza-Ul Hoque and Justice Abu Taher Md Saifur Rahman fixed May 17 for passing further order on this issue, DAG Tapash said.

The bench came up with the order and the rule following reports published yesterday in four national dailies -- The Daily Star, the Prothom Alo, the Jangantor and the Amader Shomoy -- over the incidents.

CASE FILED

Shahbagh police on Wednesday night sued unknown miscreants over allegations of the incident.

In the first information report, Abul Kalam Azad, sub-inspector of Shahbagh Police Station, claimed to have learned about the incident from a number of eye witnesses including Chhatra Union

leaders Liton Nandi, Amit Dey and Tuhin Kanti Das, and also from the DU acting proctor Prof Amzad.

Quoting the sources, the FIR stated some rowdy youths sexually assaulted women from a crowd of several thousand people.

According to the FIR, police rushed to the scene immediately but found nothing at all to establish the matter. They could not identify any victim; nor did they receive any complaint from anyone regarding the assault.

Nonetheless, after consulting higher officials, the matter was deemed an offence punishable under the women and children prevention act 2000, which led them to file the case, the FIR said.

DU SEXUAL HARASSMENT COMMITTEE

The DU committee to Prevent Sexual Harassment yesterday asked eyewitnesses to provide documentary evidence of the assault on the DU campus Tuesday evening.

"The Dhaka University Committee to Prevent Sexual Harassment launched a probe into the incident of sexual harassment that took place at the Suhrawardy Udyan gate near the TSC on Pehela Baishakh," says a press release.

For the interest of the probe, eyewitnesses were requested to provide the committee convenor Pro-vice Chancellor Dr Nasrin Ahmad's office with documentary evidences in writing by April 23.

BSF kills 2 Bangladeshis

They were tortured to death, allege families

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) allegedly tortured two Bangladeshis to death at Fatehpur border in Shibganj upazila of Chapainawabganj on Wednesday.

The victims were identified as Abdul Hakim, 35, of Thutapara village, and Sharif, 25, of Khorial village in Shibganj upazila.

Locals and family members of the victims said Hakim and Sharif were going to the Indian territory through the border to bring some cattle on

Tuesday night.

A patrol team of 20 BSF Battalion in West Bengal's Malda district detained the duo and tortured them, family members claimed.

Later, the BSF jawans left them inside Bangladesh territory at Fatehpur border point.

Locals found Hakim's dead body and injured Sharif lying at the frontier, and informed the BCB of the matter on Wednesday evening.

Sharif was rushed to Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital where he died at night, said Lt Col Abu Zafar

Sheikh Mohammad Bazlul Haque, commanding officer of 9 BCB Battalion.

Sharif's body bore several injury marks, he said.

Shibganj police recovered the body of Hakim from the border point and sent it to Chapainawabganj Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

There were injury marks on the body, said Moazzem Hossain, a sub-inspector of Shibganj Police Station.

Meanwhile, BCB in a flag meeting with the BSF protested the killing of two Bangladeshis yesterday.

China offers soft loans

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of the loans for the railway sector, said the official, asking not to be named.

At present, China charges 2 percent interest on soft loans with a repayment period of 15 years, including five years of grace period. The loan also carries 0.2 percent commitment fees and 0.2 percent management fees.

In case of such loans, the Chinese government selects the contractor, and stipulates that all materials for the projects have to be purchased from China.

On April 12, Finance Minister AMA Muhith held a meeting with Chinese Ambassador Ma Mingqiang and requested the envoy to take steps to soften the terms of the loans.

The minister later told reporters that China had assured it would lower the interest rate on the loan. But the rate was yet to be fixed.

Muhith said the Chinese ambassador told him that China had huge

funds and wanted to invest those under softer terms.

The minister said China has always assisted Bangladesh, and the cooperation reached a new height following the Bangladesh prime minister's visit to China in June last year.

He said they already gave the Chinese government a list of projects for getting loans.

On the issue, Zahid Hussain, lead economist at World Bank's Dhaka office, said, "Development of the railways is very important for building an environment-friendly internal transportation system in Bangladesh. The financial needs are massive. So in principle, getting financing from China is highly welcome."

"It will be important to make sure that the terms and conditions are affordable and transparent and that the procurement system ensures value for money for Bangladesh," Zahid told this correspondent.

Such a cowardly response from the police gave the attackers a free rein to go

The beasts in the midst of beauty

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lay on the street unconscious.

If this molestation is sickening, the police response is shocking. According to multiple eyewitnesses, the assault continued for about an hour and two cops were standing within a few yards. They did nothing, except for looking on. Just about 20 yards away was another police team. When a group of students belonging to Chhatra Union reported the incident and sought help, the cops sat on and said the place of attack was "outside our duty area".

Allegedly, police also released at least five culprits caught by the public. They will have to do some serious explaining about it in the coming days.

But first thing first -- if a trained force isn't capable of protecting fellow citizens under attack only yards away, what is it capable of then? When the men in uniform can't wake up to the call of duty as emergency as this one, maybe it's time for their officers to tell them that they weren't worthy of the uniform.

After all, who pay for the uniform? Such a cowardly response from the police gave the attackers a free rein to go

on with their grotesque raid, effortlessly and confidently. It's a telltale sign that the attackers were not your everyday sex offenders. If they were just anyone in the crowd, they would mingle in the mass and flee, not linger on, enjoying themselves as they were. Who, then, are they and what is the source of their audacity?

But something else feels seriously wrong here. For generations, the Dhaka University campus has been the epicentre of some of the Bangladesh's greatest movements and celebrations. The Language Movement, the Liberation War movement, the surrender of the Pakistani forces, just to name a few. It's where the Bangladeshis go, again and again, to protest because it somehow has come to symbolise freedom, unity and power of common men and women, or to celebrate because it symbolises festivity and joyful spirit as well.

But suddenly, it seems it is becoming a place to fear and, so, better avoid. Less than two months ago, progressive writer-blogger Avijit Roy was hacked to death and his wife badly wounded not very far from where Tuesday's barbaric attacks took place. Now, if Avijit Roys

and our mothers, sisters and daughters can't walk without fear for their lives and dignity through the campus that symbolises freedom and free-thinking (!), where shall they go?

In the past, evil forces have tried and failed to prevent us from being who we are: Bangladeshis, defiant and resilient. We remember the gruesome attack during the Pehela Baishakh celebration at Ramna Batamul in 2001 that killed 10 people. We also recall the 1999 attack in Jessore on a Udichi cultural programme that too claimed 10 lives.

But we've defied their threats and fought back. And today, more than ever, we need to be as relentless as the dark elements we are fighting.

To the naked eye, Tuesday's attack may seem an act of a few bad apples. But that's all you need for a basket-full of apple to rot. Because when cancer strikes, it strikes a single cell or a small group of cells first before it grows and grows and eventually knocks down the whole body. And if a nation is a human body, we, as a nation, seem to have been struck in more than one cell. The quicker we respond, the better our chances of survival is.

Rules broken in land acquisition

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plants, Hossain added.

In Rampal project, the land was developed even before the EIA report was prepared while the government evacuated people from the Matarbari project areas even before disposal of the cases in court.

In Matarbari, a vested quarter has withdrawn Tk 8 crore against an abandoned salt factory, he said.

Most victims of Rampal power plant are yet to get compensation. So far, just 492 of the 3,681 evicted people got the money, Hossain showed in his presentation.

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India Bangladesh Friendship Company Ltd. The Matarbari power plant involving Tk 36,000 crore is being implemented by government-owned company CPGCBL.

Sultana Kamal, chairperson of the TIB Trustee Board, said power generation was both very challenging and important for the country's development.

"We are not against these power plants. We need electricity but not at the cost of peoples' lives and livelihoods," said Sultana, also a rights activists.

She added the government should follow every rule while implementing power plants.