

He paid with his life, for only Tk 500

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

His work was for one day as a night guard at the Malibagh flyover construction site. For this, Swapan was offered Tk 500 and the amount was irresistible for him as he had just returned to the city from his village home with empty pockets.

So, he immediately grabbed the offer. What he had to do was not a big deal; alert passers-by and vehicles passing under the flyover after yesterday midnight to any possible risk.

But fate had it otherwise that he would pay with his life for relief from all his sufferings.

In the middle of the four-hour duty around 2:00am, a girder fell to the ground leaving the 42-year-old severely injured as the broken pieces hit him hard.

He was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead an hour later.

Swapan was a part-time wood-carver who worked on call from different shops and individuals. The income wasn't enough to run his family of three children and wife. So, he started working as a part-time night guard at a house close to

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Noor Nabi, a driver of concrete mixer truck, lies on the floor of Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The middle-aged man from Noakhali lost his right leg after a girder fell from the under-construction Moghbazar-Malibagh flyover yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Hotelier held for harassing US journalist

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Police yesterday arrested a hotelier in the town for allegedly harassing a US photojournalist a week ago.

The arrestee, Biswanath Saha Bishu, 56, is the owner of Kheya Restaurant and Hotel.

SM Mehedi Hasan, superintendent of Kushtia police, said Bishu was arrested from a house in the town's Choyrasata intersection around 2:30pm. He was later sent to jail through a local court.

In a GD filed with Kushtia Model Police Station, photojournalist Allison Joyce said she went to Kushtia from Dhaka on March 5 to report a story on child marriage in Bangladesh and India.

She rented a room at the hotel and checked in around 4:00pm on that day.

Around 12:30am the following day, she woke from sleep hearing people shouting outside her room.

She went out, asked them to keep calm and returned to her room.

Around half an hour later, Bishu tried to break into her room. He shouted at her using vulgar words, alleged Allison.

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No handcuff, no fetters

HC asks authorities not to produce anyone in fetters at courtrooms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday cautioned two prison officials against producing prisoners in court in fetters and handcuffs.

Prisoners can be brought to court premises in fetters and handcuffs for security, but those must be taken off before they are produced in courtrooms, the court said.

A bench of Justice Obaidul Hassan and Justice Krishna Debnath passed the ruling after Deputy Inspector General of Prisons in Dhaka Touhidul Islam and Senior Jail Super of Keraniganj Jahangir Kabir appeared before it and explained why four under-trial prisoners had been sent to the court on February 23 in fetters.

During the hearing on a suo moto rule, the bench that day summoned the prison officials to appear before it and give an explanation for the action.

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Worker's death raises safety questions

FROM PAGE 1 awfully busy public road?"

He pointed out that all three victims were involved in the construction work and that they failed to ensure their own safety.

However, Abdul Kuddus Babu, a friend of deceased Swapan, said Swapan was hired for just four hours yesterday to control traffic during a girder installation. He said Swapan was actually a carpenter.

The accident happened apparently while stressing the girder on the piers, a way of strengthening and enhancing the stability of the girder, said Prof Shamsul Hoque of Buet, who drew the layout of the Kuril flyover and Banania-Zia Colony flyover.

"Extra precautions for public safety are mandatory in cases of stressing girders along a densely populated active road," he said.

Prof Moazzem Hossain, director of Accident Research Institute at Buet, said, "Repeated accidents and loss of lives only manifest that the authorities are not serious about public safety at the project site."

Fencing off the construction site, public movement control, maintenance of equipment, keeping the road free and functional, safe traffic management and

keeping drainage clear are some fundamental safety precautions written in any civil construction manual.

"But unfortunately in case of Moghbazar-Malibagh Flyover construction work, such fundamental safety precautions are all ignored despite a court order...", he said.

"And it is not understandable why people would be underneath while a gigantic concrete girder was being lifted for stressing and placement overhead," he said.

"That the victims include an engineer, a worker and a vehicle driver of the project simply underlines the fact that the project authorities did not take safety precautions for themselves, let alone for the people," he said.

During a spot visit, The Daily Star correspondent found there was no fence to prevent people from walking underneath while workers were working on the top of the flyover at Shantinagar.

They were working in a precarious way and it seemed that a moment of distraction could cause a fatal accident.

Amena Khatun, who was walking under the flyover, said since many parts of the pavement were damaged and there was murky water on the road, she chose to walk under the construction area.

"Yes, it is dangerous," she said, adding that she was left with no better options.

Rouf Mia, a worker of the flyover, was binding iron rings to a rope, which was being pulled up by other workers. He had no helmet on, let alone other safety gear.

"I don't know who died and how," he said. "Yes, accident may happen if the rings slip," said Rouf and got busy with his work.

While a girder was being lifted on a crane around 12:50am yesterday at the Malibagh Level Crossing, workers were loosening the clamps of another girder, which had already been set up, to make room for the new one, said Swapan's friend Kuddus.

All of a sudden, the preset girder slipped and came crashing down on the road, he said.

"There was a huge bang. Dust covered the adjacent area," said Kuddus, adding that it took a few moments to figure out what had happened.

Monir Hossain, who was the on-duty gatekeeper of the Malibagh Level Crossing, said he saw the victims lying on the ground.

All the injured were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where Swapan died.

"The girder fell on the rail lines from

22 feet above. Firemen dismantled and removed it," he said.

LGED Chief Engineer Shyama Prosad Adhikari did not respond despite repeated calls and texts from this paper.

The government has formed a three-member probe committee, led by LGED Additional Chief Engineer Md Abul Kalam Azad, to find out the reasons for the girder collapse.

A High Court bench of Justice Obaidul Hassan and Justice Krishna Debnath in late March last year ordered the authorities concerned to take public safety measures in Moghbazar-Mouchak flyover construction.

Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), without mandatory approval of Dhaka transport coordination authority and without any public consultation, embarked on implementing the 8.7km flyover scheme with some gross anomalies at a revised cost of Tk 1,219 crore in late 2012.

Local Toma Constructions Ltd, Chinese firm Metallurgical Construction Overseas Company, and joint venture of Indian Simplex Infrastructure Ltd, and local Navana Construction are building the flyover.

During yesterday's spot visit, officials of the construction companies were not found.

NGO official held in Jessore

Arrest comes hours after he made allegation against SP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested Binay Krishno Mallick, executive director of Rights Jessore, at his Jessore home last night, hours after he made an allegation of harassment against the district superintendent of police.

He was arrested in a forgery case filed with Narsingdi Police Station, said Ilias Hossain, officer-in-charge of Jessore Kotwali Police Station.

A joint team of Narsingdi and Jessore police picked up Binay from his residence around 7:30pm, the OC added.

Pallabi Sarkar, wife of Binay's younger brother Nirmal Mallick, said some 10/12 men picked up Binay

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Worst year for Syrian children

FROM PAGE 1 yesterday. In addition, at least 850 children were recruited by armed factions to fight.

The number of recorded deaths in 2016 is 20 per cent higher than 2015, and nearly three times as many children were forced to take part in the conflict in 2016 than in the previous year, marking a dramatic increase in the dangers faced by what has been dubbed Syria's 'lost generation.'

Children as young as seven have been forced to fight on the frontline or as suicide bombers and executioners by several rebel groups with links to al-Qaeda, as well as Islamic state.

During 2016 the Syrian government with the help of Russian warplanes also continued to bomb civilian infrastructure such as schools and hospitals. At least 255 children were killed in or near schools, including a deadly attack in Idlib in October that killed at least 26 people.

The report said both sides showed a

"callous disregard" for children's lives.

The situation for those not caught up in the front lines is still dire: in Syria at least 1.7 million children are out of school, where one in three schools are unusable. There are at least 2.3 million refugee Syrian children elsewhere in the Middle East, with around two thirds of that number forced to work at least part time to support their families.

"I don't know how to read or write - I only know how to draw the sky, the sea and the sun," four-year-old Fares, a Syrian child living in Lebanon, is quoted as saying in the report.

"I've waited tables, I've served beans, corn, hummus, hookah pipe, potatoes and seeds. I've cleaned the shop and served ice cream to children. I don't know how to fill the cone but I help [the others] do it. I want to leave my house. It's like a prison."

The report also warns that coping mechanisms and medical care are eroding quickly in Syria, driving

more children into child labour, early marriage and combat roles. Dozens are also dying from preventable diseases and hunger or stepping on landmines or cluster munitions while playing.

"The situation for Syrian children has hit rock bottom," Juliette Touma, Unicef's regional spokesperson, said in a statement.

"The past year has been the worst since the crisis began, with children pushed right to the brink - being recruited at an ever younger age, being used to man checkpoints, being trained to use weapons, serving as prison guards. We also have reports of sexual abuse of girls by underage children, so it's very grim."

Last week, British charity Save the Children published a report which stressed that Syria's children were suffering from "toxic stress" brought on by the sheer brutality of the ongoing civil war.

At least three million Syrians under

the age of six "know nothing but war," said Save the Children, adding that prolonged exposure could lead to a number of problems, including self-harm and suicide attempts.

In the report, one father named Firas recounted how his 3-year-old, Saeed, had been affected.

"My son wakes up afraid in the middle of the night," he said.

"A child was slaughtered in front of him, so he started to dream that someone is coming to slaughter him. When a child witnesses a beheading, how could he not get afraid?"

Since the war began in 2011, an estimated 400,000 Syrians have been killed in what the United Nations is calling the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II.

All diplomatic efforts to bring lasting peace to the crisis have failed. Further talks are scheduled in the next few weeks in both Switzerland and Kazakhstan.

Addict son kills mother, neighbour

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A woman and her neighbour were hacked to death in Tangail's Madhupur upazila yesterday allegedly by her son after she refused to give him money for buying drugs.

The bodies of Minara Begum, 48, wife of Mohammad Ali of Koipara village, and Akbar Ali, 52, were sent to Tangail General Hospital for autopsies.

Locals caught the accused, Miraz, 28, and handed him over to police.

Ali and his son Al-Amin, 30, were taken into "safe custody" to protect them from enraged locals, Madhupur Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Shafiqul Islam told The Daily Star.

Miraz and Minara got engaged in an altercation in the morning after she refused to provide drug money and

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Rejoinder, our reply

FROM PAGE 1

was never communicated to NRBC Bank by the central bank. If the central bank finds any discrepancy/misconducts or any other irregularities upon conducting inspection on any bank, then it must be communicated to the concerned bank so that the bank can rectify them for necessary compliance. However, in this case, as Bangladesh Bank didn't send any such report to NRBC Bank, the authenticity of such published irregularities becomes questionable by default. For record purpose, we would like to state the true picture of what transpired as follows:

"The report said Shahidul Ahsan has drawn benefits from nearly Tk44 crore shares held by two sponsor directors in NRBC Bank violating the banking company law. This is not true. Like any other customers, Shahidul Ahsan is just another client of the bank. How come he had drawn benefits without investing in the bank? The allegation raised by the news articles involving him is preposterous and is not based on actual evidence.

"The report also mentioned that Shahidul Ahsan influenced the board of NRBC Bank. There is no scope for a client to influence the board of a bank as it runs independently. So it is irrelevant that he influenced the board to enjoy loan facilities. Rather, the board unanimously decided to sanction the loan in favour of his companies considering the feasibility and profitability of the project. The bank has sanctioned the loans and advances to Shahidul Ahsan in full for the project.

"The bank has sanctioned the loans and advances to the concerns of Shahidul Ahsan in full compliance with the guidelines and regulations laid down by Bangladesh Bank. Moreover, till date all sanctioned loans have been regular and are providing substantial returns to the bank. The concerned loan that the news report has made allegations against is an agricultural loan that was sanctioned to facilitate establishment of a technologically advanced modern factory. The loan has been fully covered with its land, factory building, all imported machineries and other material and

immaterial assets as collateral. On this ground, the allegation of having insufficient collateral against the loan is untrue."

"It is important to note here that AG Agro Industries and Begumganj Feed Mill are separate entities under different ownership. AG Agro is the concern of Shahidul Ahsan while Mahbubur Rahman is the chairman of Begumganj Feed Mill. Both are regular and performing customers of the bank. A team of Bangladesh Bank physically inspected the AG project and expressed its satisfaction. Moreover, the central bank has also given its approval for refinancing the same project as well. If all these facts are taken into consideration, then there is no room for any adverse observation regarding the financing of the AG project."

"For the past few months, an appointed observer from Bangladesh Bank is attending all meetings of the bank and observing the proceedings." OUR REPLY The Daily Star ran the news report on the basis of an inspection report of

Bangladesh Bank.

The central bank appointed an observer to the NRBC Bank at the end of December last year following detection of irregularities in its inspections.

According to the Bank Company Act, Bangladesh Bank doesn't need to send its inspection reports to the banks concerned. It takes punitive measures step by step to protect the depositors' interests. It appoints observer to a bank as the first step in taking action.

At a press briefing on the monetary policy on January 29, reporters asked questions about the inspection report on the NRBC Bank, the holding of shadow shares by the Mercantile Bank chairman and other loan irregularities.

In response, Deputy Governor of Bangladesh Bank SK Sur Chowdhury said the central bank appoints observer when financial indicators of a bank get worse.

"We have already appointed an observer to the NRBC Bank because of questions raised about its corporate governance," he said. We stand by our report.

Monk on a mission

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They had no chance to learn. For the upcoming generation, we hope to change that."

At least 30 young students gather regularly at his "Bijoyrama Buddho Bihar" education centre within the temple compound where classes are held from 7:00am-9:00am and at 3:00pm-4:00pm. Classes are free.

"I never had the opportunity to learn to read and write in my mother tongue," says one student's guardian, Tan Nan. "I send my six-year-old daughter Tameche to the temple classes so she will be able to."

"My son Chandaw studies Rakhine at the temple," states another guardian, Monanching. "The language is important for our religious education."

It's an issue close to the hearts of many. At meetings held last year by development organisation Nazrul Smriti Sangsad which, in cooperation with NGO Manusher Jonno Foundation, has been implementing a three-year social engagement project within the community, fostering the

Rakhine language was raised as a key concern.

"From community feedback last March," says the development organisation's executive director Shahbuddin Panna, "we helped to establish two language centres in May last year, where around 40 children study. More centres are needed."

Monk Utuchitta Mohathero believes the government has a greater role to play. "Government assistance in facilitating textbook supply, setting up schools and appointing teachers for Rakhine language instruction would be greatly appreciated," he says.

Already the local Kalapara upazila administration is contributing, providing a monthly honorarium of Tk 4,000 to the monk in each centre, according to upazila chairman Abdul Motalab Talukder. Text books are currently sourced from local NGO Caritas.

There are more than 1,100 Rakhines in Kuakata, from around 300 families in 23 villages, with 142 children under five years old.