

## Woman alleges sexual assault on her

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kolkata

A Bangladeshi woman allegedly faced an attempted sexual assault while travelling on the Maitree Express yesterday morning.

Her husband filed a complaint with India's Government Railway Police (GRP) at Gede Railway Station over the matter.

The incident happened after the train left Kolkata Railway Station, formerly known as Chitpur Station, for Dhaka around 7:00am, according to the complaint.

Contacted, Rabi Mahapatra, chief public relations officer of India's Eastern Railway, confirmed matter.

Sources in the GRP office at Dum Dum Railway Station said one of the security personnel on board -- a Border Security Force (BSF) member -- allegedly harassed the woman when she was going to a washroom. The train was running through a place between Dum Dum and Barrackpore railway stations.

The BSF member was being quizzed, said the sources.

Rabi said the GRP will investigate the incident. The Eastern Railway will also carry out a separate probe and submit its report to the authorities concerned as early as possible, he added.

No official from the GRP agreed to comment.

## Fugitive killer of journalist Manik held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Rab yesterday arrested a fugitive killer of veteran journalist Manik Saha from Satkhira.

The fugitive, 41-year-old Bellal Bapari, was held at the Satkhira bus stand around 9:00pm, Md Bazlur Rashid, ASP of Rab-6 told this correspondent.

On November 30, 2016, a speedy tribunal in Khulna sentenced Bellal and eight others to life imprisonment in the Manik murder case.

Manik, also a freedom fighter, was killed in a bomb attack near the Khulna Press Club on January 15, 2004. Bellal, son of Sanet Bapari in Khulna city's ghat-5 area, had gone into hiding after the murder.

Manik was posthumously awarded Ekushay Padak in 2009. He had worked for the Daily Sangbad, The New Age and BBC Bangla.



Children with autism making ornaments with beads at the PFDA vocational training centre in the capital's Mohakhali DOHS area. One of the children who had been trained in baking is seen serving customers at the Angel Chef restaurant, top right. Some of the children learning how to use computers, bottom right. The photos were taken recently.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Not a lonely fight, anymore

FROM PAGE 1

and get suggestions and advice from one another in the interest of their children.

Before joining the forum, "every one of us used to think, 'I am the only mother or parent who has a child like this'," said Dipa, vice-principal of the training centre.

"We see things differently when in a group."

The forum arranges counselling of parents and helps build awareness through rallies and participation in national and international conferences.

It works at the policy level as well. Registered with the social welfare ministry, the parents' forum had submitted recommendations to the government, trying to address the rights of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs).

Many of the recommendations were implemented under the disabled persons rights and protection act 2013: persons with disabilities can now open bank accounts and have spots allocated in mainstream schools, campaigns are run in various radio and TV channels to make people aware of their rights.

The forum's achievement has so far lit up the treacherous path of the journey that the parents make with children with autism, cerebral palsy, down syndromes, and intellectual and neurological disabilities. This is what Danny wanted to do.

A two-and-a-half-year-old son diagnosed with severe form of autism was what motivated her to find a way to improve the lives of such children. Twenty years later, the son, Seeam Ul Karim, turned into an active person who loves cycling.

"I am now looking for a job," says Seeam at the PFDA's office in Mohakhali DOHS after he cycled back to the centre in the evening on January 9. He has completed O levels and a

course on baking.

A total of 169 neurologically challenged people, including Seeam, have so far received training in baking since March last year under a one-year programme funded by the International Labour Organisation.

Thirty-five of them have been employed by, among others, Shwapno chain store and Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation.

"We welcome parents of such children, irrespective of their social and financial status, caste, religion ... whatever difficulties the children have, we will turn them into stars and make their lives beautiful," Danny pledged in an interview over phone.

Indeed, some are living beautiful and dignified lives. At the eatery Angel Chef on the ground floor of the PFDA-VTC office, six children work, substantiating Danny's belief that they could be as capable as any other. All they need is opportunities to reach their potential and empathy of the broader society.

Sitting at one of the tables, Shahana and another member of the forum, Runia Mokbul, recounted the agonising days they had spent fighting to ensure even the basic care of their sons within the social and familial confinement.

"Neighbours, even relatives had scorned me as if it was my fault that my son was like this," Runia said.

"I changed one school after another [in Dhaka]. All of them said, 'Your son is mad, why don't you keep him at home?' One day my son came from school with blood oozing from an ear," she said looking at the ground to avoid being seen in tears.

After a long pause, she recomposed herself and said, "That day was my son's last day at school."

Danny too has a personal story behind her efforts to connect parents of children with ASD and to set up the training centre.

The most difficult decision she had to make was to get a divorce 15 years ago and raise Seeam alone. "He [her husband] did not accept it [the son being autistic]. Spending money or giving support to the boy seemed worthless to him ... But I didn't want to believe he was worthless. I could not give up on him [Seeam]."

During that time, there was hardly any way in Bangladesh to know what autism is and its impact. When Seeam was seven or eight, Danny flew to Bangkok with her son and found out he had an array of issues -- learning disability, hyper activity, sensory problem, sleeping and anxiety disorders.

Returning home, Danny put Seeam in all kinds of therapies and began giving him even more attention to help him learn every day chores one by one. Her own struggle, sacrifice made her realise not all parents of children with special needs had the means to support them.

She made the next big step -- quit her job at the Unicef in 2015 and work to build the training centre.

In the initial years, Danny herself funded vocational training for the children. With the success of the centre, many organisations and individuals came forward to help. She is thankful for the support she has received all along from Saima Wazed Putul, daughter of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and chairperson of Bangladesh National Advisory Committee for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders.

Parimal Das, office secretary of the PFDA, also said, "Whenever we approached the government, it responded well and extended its support."

The government has recently taken up a rehabilitation project for the children with disabilities in Keraniganj in order to ensure their safe living.

But this is not enough, as, AKM

Ahad Ullah, deputy director of the department of social services, said referring to a recent study that people with disabilities account for almost 1 percent (more than 15 lakh) of the country's population.

This is why members of the forum think projects like the one in Keraniganj should be replicated in other parts of the country.

The organisation also demands a national education policy for the special children.

Only two schools -- Kalyani and SWID Bangladesh -- for children with special needs are under the Monthly Pay Order (MPO) scheme. The forum demands all schools meant for children with special needs be given the much-needed government support.

The most important things are counselling of parents and therapy of children. More centres should be set up across the country to deliver these services, special educator Dipa said.

Sports are therapeutic and could boost the confidence of children with ASDs. Autistic Children's Welfare Foundation arranges regular sports events where children with autism take part in basketball, bowling, and athletic sports, said its founder Tofayel Ahmed.

Many children with autism are capable of studying in mainstream schools if counselling sessions can be organised for all children on a regular basis. In that case, "Children with autism will not be bullied by their peers," Dipa adds.

Above all, the children with special needs should be given the opportunities to become self-reliant. "They get monthly allowances if registered with the social welfare ministry. But we don't want that ... we want a system in place, so they can realise their potential and live a dignified life," said Parimal of PFDA and parent of a son with mild autism.

## Bomb blast at Thai food stall kills 3

REUTERS, Bangkok

A motorcycle bomb exploded in a market in Thailand's southern Yala province yesterday, killing three people and wounding 22, a spokesman for the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) said, the first such attack in the region in months.

The mostly Muslim provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala in Thailand's far south are home to a long-running insurgency by ethnic Malay Muslims fighting for autonomy in which more than 6,000 people have been killed since 2004.

"The criminals put a bomb in a motorcycle and placed it next to a market cart. The force of the explosion caused three people to lose their lives," said ISOC spokesman Pramote Promin. The ISOC is a government security force that operates in the region.

No group claimed immediate responsibility for the attack yesterday, which took place at a morning market.

Police said the motorcycle was placed near a stall selling pork, which is strictly forbidden for Muslims under Islamic Law.

It was not immediately clear whether the bomb was placed at the pork stall in a deliberate attempt to target Thai Buddhists.

The stall's female owner and a male customer were among the three people killed, police said. The bomb blew off chunks of the market's corrugated tin roof and wrecked nearby stalls.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

## Hamid likely

FROM PAGE 1

held on February 19.

As the tenure of Hamid, who took office on April 24, 2013, will expire on April 23 this year, election of the next president has become the main topic of discussion in the ruling party.

A number of AL leaders told this correspondent that the existing president would get a second term as the prime minister has already made up her mind about it.

But none of the leaders agreed to be quoted.

The presidential election is deemed crucial as the next parliamentary polls will be held at the end of this year. The next president will be elected for a five-year term which will continue till the last year of the next government.

Before taking oath as president, Hamid was elected lawmaker for seven times and also served as speaker twice.

He also became the acting president on March 14, 2013, after the then president Zillur Rahman was admitted to Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore on March 10. Zillur breathed his last at the hospital on March 20.



Vehicles are stuck in gridlock near Paturia ghat in Manikganj as ferry services on the Paturia-Daulatdia route remained suspended for nearly seven hours since 1:45am yesterday. The photo was taken around 8:00am. PHOTO: STAR

## Fog disrupts flights

FROM PAGE 1

All outbound domestic flights scheduled to fly from Dhaka in the morning were delayed by two to three hours. At least 12 flights of three airlines were scheduled to take off for different domestic destinations yesterday.

Met office has meanwhile said the ongoing mild cold wave might turn into moderate cold wave after two days.

Mohammad Shahinul Islam, meteorologist of Dhaka Met Office, said a mild cold wave is active in the country that might turn to moderate cold wave on January 26. The northern parts of the country would be the worst sufferers of the cold wave, he cautioned.

FERRY SERVICES

Ferry services on Paturia-Daulatdia and Shimulia-Kathalbari routes in the Padma river resumed yesterday morn-

ing after around seven to nine hours of suspension due to the dense fog.

The services on Paturia-Daulatdia route remained suspended from 1:45am to 9:15am said Shafiqul Islam, manager (commerce) of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) in Daulatdia.

Five ferries with passengers and vehicles were stuck in the middle of the river, five others were stranded at Paturia ghat in Manikganj and six others were anchored at Daulatdia ghat in Rajbari.

Several thousand passengers on Paturia-Daulatdia and Shimulia-Kathalbari routes were stuck for more than nine hours on both sides of the river.

People, especially women and children, have been suffering badly as ferry services were disrupted since

yesterday midnight resulting in huge traffic congestion on both routes, report our correspondents.

Ferry movement on Shimulia-Kathalbari route was also suspended for more than nine hours from midnight to 9:30am yesterday due to the dense fog, writes our Munshiganj correspondent.

Five ferries were stuck in the middle of the Padma during this time, while huge traffic gridlock was created on both sides of the river as more than 500 vehicles were stranded on both sides.

Four more ferries at Shimulia side could not start their operation due to the fog.

Manager of BIWTC Gias Uddin Patowari said they were forced to suspend the ferry services as ferries could not move forward due to the fog.

## Tigers take on Zimbabwe

FROM PAGE 1

will want to continue the brand of cricket they have played in the first two games and will not want to lose any of the momentum they have mustered.

Bangladesh outclassed their opponents in all three departments in both matches so far, beating Zimbabwe comfortably by eight wickets in the first match and then registering their biggest ODI win, in terms of runs, by handing Sri Lanka a 163-run defeat in the next game.

Bangladesh are likely to opt for the same combination that played against Zimbabwe in the first game, keeping the opposition's weakness against left-arm spinners in mind. Left-arm spinner Sunzamul Islam, who was dropped from the second game despite bowling brilliantly with the new ball and taking one for 29 from 10 overs, is likely to replace pace-bowling all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin.

The senior members of the Bangladesh team will once again have to take responsibility with the likes of Tamim Iqbal, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah

Riyad and skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza looking to guide the side much like they did in the previous two games.

"I believe every player in this squad has the same hunger for each and every match. Every international match brings an opportunity for players to score a hundred or get five wickets. All the players from this group are hungry to achieve something in the series. It's a very good sign. The remaining two matches before the final are equally important for us. If you can score a hundred or take five wickets, then it will count as well," Tamim told reporters yesterday.

From Zimbabwe's point of view, Graeme Cremer's side need to improve their batting, especially the middle order which failed to provide any resistance so far.

Craig Ervine has scored 0, 2 and 2 in his last three innings coming into bat at the crucial number three spot while openers Hamilton Masakadza and Solomon Mire, who did get starts, were unable to make it big.

It will be equally important for the

likes of Brendan Taylor, Sikandar Raza and Malcom Waller to overcome their weakness against left-arm spin, which has been the biggest concern for Zimbabwe.

Despite posting a small target of 199 in the previous game, Zimbabwe's bowlers managed to trouble the Sri Lankan batsmen, with tall pacer Blessing Muzarabani extracting substantial pace and bounce to take three wickets in quick succession.

The other two fast bowlers in Tendai Chatara and Kyle Jarvis also surprised the batsmen with some extra pace and changes of length, and they will surely look to test Bangladesh's batsmen along with skipper Cremer and Raza in the spin department.

The wicket at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium has been a mixed bag, depending on which strip is being used on the day. Zimbabwe will be hoping that they get the batting-friendly wicket that helped them beat Sri Lanka in the second match, while Bangladesh have proved that they have the tools to exploit whatever conditions Mirpur throws up.

## Diphtheria cases

FROM PAGE 1

The first recent suspected case, in a woman aged about 30, was reported on November 10 at an MSF clinic in a Rohingya camp in Ukhia. It was confirmed through a lab test on December 4.

Children are particularly vulnerable to diphtheria, a bacterial infection that causes dead tissues to build up over the throat and tonsils. The disease also produces a toxin affecting other organs. It can lead to difficulties in breathing, heart failure, paralysis and even death.

There had been no reported diphtheria case in Bangladesh for the last 35 years. But the highly contagious disease, long forgotten in most part of the world due to increased vaccination, has made a sudden comeback.

Diphtheria transmission occurs from person to person through droplets such as coughing and sneezing and close physical contact. It can be treated by drugs and prevented by vaccine.

According to published data, in Bangladesh the last case of diphtheria in throat was detected in 1976 and on skin in 1983.

Nearly one million Rohingya refugees, including more than 6,55,000 who fled Myanmar since August 25 -- live in overcrowded camps spreading over these two upazilas.

Bangladesh earlier implemented mass vaccination programmes for cholera, polio and measles in Rohingya camps and among the local communities in the area.

Meanwhile, Unicef recently warned

that hundreds of thousands of children are already living in horrific conditions in the Rohingya camps.

It also said Unicef and its partners have launched a diphtheria vaccination campaign, and are working to provide children and families with access to safe water and sanitation facilities, but overcrowding and the growing risk of extreme weather increases the risk of further outbreaks.

Misbah Uddin Ahmed, Ukhia upazila health and family planning officer, however, said, "The rate of suspected diphtheria report has fallen. Around 50-60 Rohingya children are being reported everyday but the death rate has fallen sharply. The second and third round vaccination will bring the situation under full control."