

Devils in disguise

Police arrest 5 'gentlemen' robbers in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

They look like gentlemen, wearing blazers or suits or properly ironed shirts and trousers. They would suddenly appear on the street and greet you, "Assalamualaikum". You probably won't suspect anything or realise what is going on before they have robbed you off your money and valuables.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police arrested five such muggers in Paltan area on Wednesday, Mahmudul Haque, officer-in-charge of Paltan Police Station told The Daily Star.

The OC said the gang mugged people in a specific area and the people arrested -- Jitu, 49, Mizan, 35, Akhtar Hossain, 45, Ripon, 28, and Pintu Miah, 31, -- only operated in Shantinagar, Paltan, and Kakrail.

They look like employees of corporate offices or well-to-do businessmen but they carry knives or other sharp weapons in their pockets.

"Such gangs usually acquire targets at banks or ATM booths. After finding a target, they tail the person and inform other members to close in on the target," the OC said.

At a convenient spot, one of the gang members would appear in front of the target and say

"Assalamualaikum" as if he knows the target and confusing the victim-to-be whether they know the gang member.

By this time, the other members surround the victim. "Then they rob the victim and leave," the police official said.

Efforts needed

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rule of law, and appointment of the ombudsman are a must to deal a serious blow to rampant corruption.

The speakers also lamented the developing culture of acceptance towards corruption.



People at the rally addressed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Thakurgaon Government Boys' High School ground yesterday.

PHOTO: PMO

BNP's return to power means destruction

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case, she questioned why the BNP was now waging a movement against the court verdict. "The court has passed the verdict. Today, she's a convict. The fund for orphans had been plundered. What's the movement for? In the Holy Quran, Allah also keeps a provision for punishment if the orphans are not given their dues."

The premier said the fund came for orphans in 1991, but Khaleda embezzled the whole amount without giving a single penny to the beneficiaries.

Coming down hard on BNP

Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, she said he was spreading falsehood daily. "There should be a limit of spreading falsehood. Allah will also be displeased if anyone spreads falsehood the whole day."

The PM said Fakhrul was the state minister for the civil aviation during the BNP regime from 2001 to 2006 when he destroyed Biman. "They can destroy but can't create anything. They can plunder people's properties, but can't give them anything."

She went on to say, "He [Fakhrul] is a man of your area, but he shut

down Saidpur Airport in Nilphamari when he was the state minister."

Coming to power in 2008, the AL government reopened Saidpur, Rajshahi and Barisal airports, purchased eight aircraft and the process is on to procure two more, the PM said.

In her 36-minute speech, Hasina focused on various development activities of the government. "We want to develop the country and change the people's fate," she said, adding that no one will remain homeless and hungry in the country.

At the rally, the PM said a university, a special economic zone, an IT

park, a new police station and a hostel for professional women would be established in Thakurgaon.

Earlier, the PM inaugurated 33 development projects and laid the foundation stones of 33 others.

AL General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, AL Presidium Member Ramesh Chandra Sen, AL joint general secretaries Mahbubul Alam Hanif and Jahangir Kabir Nanak, and AL Organising Secretary Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, among others, addressed the rally.

Govt official stabbed in Bogra

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Criminals yesterday chased an assistant director of regional passport office to Bogra divisional forest office and stabbed him there.

Raysul Islam, office assistant of the passport office, said the incident happened when victim Shahjahan Kabir, 37, was going to Bogra-Dhaka highway, which is around 400 metres away from his office, to catch a bus to his ancestral home in Meherpur.



Injured Shahjahan Kabir

Witness Abdul Bari, office assistant of Bogra divisional forest office, told this correspondent that around 1:30pm, staffers of the office went to a mosque to offer Zohr prayers except him and a peon. Shahjahan suddenly entered the tea room of the office screaming for help as some 5-6 criminals chased him.

When he came out of his room, the attackers forced him to return his room. They then entered the tea room and stabbed Shahjahan, Bari said, adding that he did not know the attackers.

The incident took place just about 200 metres away from Koigari police outpost in Bogra town.

Nirmalendu Chowdhury, deputy director of Bogra Shaheed Ziaur SEE PAGE 17 COL 6

Turning towards turkeys

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That is when his innovative mind went to work.

Bablu began researching on incubators and turkey hatcheries on the internet. He also read several studies in this regard, which helped him to build the device.

"I was very curious. I searched on the internet and even took suggestions from a Japanese friend through social media to build the device," he said.

"Building an incubator is not very difficult. But you have to follow some techniques to attain better success rate," he added.

Bablu had been trying to build his incubator since the 1990s, when he was a student of class IX. After 28 unsuccessful attempts, his hard work finally bore fruit.

His incubator finally came into operation in December of 2017 after passing various tests.

With a capacity of hatching 54,000 eggs per month, it will start production within two months.

"Since childhood, my hobby has been rearing birds and that helped

me in my efforts," he said.

"After building the incubator, I started hatching turkey eggs thinking of expanding my business," he said.

Comparatively cheaper production cost for turkeys has attracted the country's farmers to the fowl. For instance -- turkeys like to eat green vegetables including various spinach and hyacinth plants, he added.

Bablu, who also has a farm consisting of 400 turkeys in Manikganj, said the bird's meat is more nutritious and tastier than other poultry.

According to United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), turkey meat contains higher protein but three times less fat than chicken. It also contains other nutrients, like iron, zinc and vitamins B and D, in higher amounts compared to chicken.

Bablu's facility not only produces turkey chicks, but also conducts researches on the chick production as well as for improving the incubator.

"I have already achieved the highest success rate of hatching turkey

eggs [through research]. I need to research more so that I can reduce the price," he said.

Bablu sells each one day old chick for Tk 250, which is the lowest in the market. But, he wants to reduce it further for popularising turkey farming in the country.

"I can sell the chicks at the lowest price as production cost is low and I also make less profit. My aim is to create more turkey farmers so that we can establish a particular industry for the bird," he said.

He also suggested the government go for export of turkey meat, which has a high demand in foreign markets and is very popular among Americans and Europeans.

Tapas Kanti Datta, a veterinarian and livestock expert, said consumption of turkey meat and subsequently its farming is growing day by day. At present, those in the high and middle-income brackets consume the meat.

But it will be popular among all classes if its price can be reduced -- which now stands at Tk 400-500 per kilograms -- through increasing the

bird's production, he said.

"Turkey farmers usually hatch the eggs in natural ways or by using hatcheries of other poultry. They can hatch around 60 percent of the eggs, and sell each chick aged one day at Tk 400-600," said Tapas, also the district livestock officer of Narsingdi.

Bablu's success inspired the Centre for Development Innovation and Practices (CDIP), a non-government organisation, to support him in establishing a bigger incubator and expanding the production to 54,000 eggs per month.

CDIP Director (programme) Fazlul Hoque Khan said, "The chicks Bablu produces are healthier and stronger than others, and he can hatch more than 90 percent of the eggs successfully."

"The incubator he has built is very modern. Such a machine would cost a large amount of money if imported," he added.

Innovative people like Bablu will help develop the turkey industry in the country, he said, also suggesting unemployed youths to get involved with the profitable business.

Jubo Dal leader

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Government Primary School around 3:30am after hearing the news that supporters of Awami League candidate Hekmat Shikder, also the incumbent UP chairman, had been stamping ballots there.

As the agitated people started vandalising doors and windows of the school, shots were fired at them from inside, leaving Malek of Gupta Brindaban village dead on the spot.

Residents of Kahalgaon Bazar area in Mymensingh's Fulbaria upazila spotted the Jubo Dal leader's body around 6:00am. The spot was about two kilometres away from the polling centre, witnesses added.

Ghatail police recovered the body from there around noon and sent it to Tangail General Hospital for an autopsy.

One Abdul Jalil, aged about 35, was sent to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital with bullet wounds in his leg.

Agitated people later set fire to some motorcycles of Hekmat's supporters outside the polling centre.

Hekmat, however, claimed that Malek was killed in police firing when he along with others tried to snatch ballots.

Contacted, Presiding Officer Mohammad Salahuddin, also the academic supervisor at Ghatail secondary education office, said about 150 unidentified people stormed the polling centre around 3:30am and started vandalising it.

"At one stage, the situation went out of control and the attackers snatched 800 ballots. Then I asked police to take necessary action," he told The Daily

Star.

Sanjit Kumar Roy, superintendent of Tangail police, said cops fired 12 shots to quell the trouble at the polling centre.

"Police later came to know that a man was killed there. We suspect he might have been killed in the incident. We will investigate the incident properly to ascertain what happened there," he added.

Following the violence, voting was postponed at the polling centre as per directives of the Election Commission, said Hedayet Ullah, returning officer of Sagardighi union parishad polls and also the upazila engineer in Ghatail.

"I am yet to receive any report from the presiding officer on the incident. Earlier in the morning, he [presiding officer] asked me over the phone to go to the polling centre saying that he was in trouble."

The ballot boxes and the rest of the ballots of the centre were under police custody, he said.

Law enforcers picked up seven people in connection with the incident.

Presiding Officer Salahuddin yesterday filed a case with Ghatail Police Station in this regard, accusing about 140-150 unidentified people.

Around 2,100 voters were expected to exercise their franchise at Guptabrindaban Government Primary School polling centre. However, voting at eight other polling centres in the union ended peacefully, said election officials.

Eight unions in three upazilas and a municipality of Tangail went to polls yesterday.

Many rapists escape thru' loopholes

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evidence of the prosecution."

In Dhaka Metro area alone, five special tribunals disposed of 2,057 cases out of 4,436 filed with different police stations between 2001 and 2016. Only 22 cases saw conviction, according to court and prosecution sources.

The accused escape punishment, as the court in the above case said, "When the medical report doesn't support the allegation of rape and when the evidence of the prosecution witnesses, who are partisan, are sharply contradictory and when the neighbouring disinterested [neutral] witnesses are not examined."

Though the special tribunal in Lalmonihat had sentenced the accused to rigorous imprisonment for life, it didn't hold anyone accountable for the mistakes nor did it take any action to fix them. And finally the conviction did not sustain at the HC.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PUBLIC PROSECUTOR?

Rebeka was a mother of two children when she was raped. Even immediate medical examination would probably fail to get signs of "forceful sexual intercourse" defined as rape in the penal code, which was later adopted in the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000.

In such a circumstance, "it is the legal acumen of the public prosecutor", Supreme Court advocate Khurshid Alam Khan said, to make the victim's account believable with other circumstantial evidence and social and legal perspectives.

Public prosecutor (PP) of the special tribunal-2, Dhaka, Ali Akbar said he had seen acquittal of accused in more than 90 percent of the rape cases tried at the court over the last eight

years because of medical reports not establishing rape.

Khurshid Alam disagrees with the view that rape cannot be proved at court without medical evidence.

If that were the case, he said, PP doesn't have any job to do.

"The court is the ultimate authority to judge the performance of PP and inform the authority concerned [the law ministry] of his negligence for action," the SC lawyer added.

But there has never been such an instance.

HOW SLOPPY WORK BY IO AND MAGISTRATE FAILS TRIAL

In the judgment of another rape case in Jamalpur involving an 11-year old girl, the HC pointed out that the magistrate who was a prosecution witness during cross-examination said he had recorded the statement under section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure on white paper as the required form was not there.

Thus, the statement was not considered valid and this vital piece of evidence was dismissed.

In a recent study on judgments of murder cases, including cases filed under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000, the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) found that accused got acquittal in 123 cases. Mistakes were made by investigation officials, medical officers or magistrates in ninety percent of the cases.

"The honourable judges pointed out some of the mistakes," but didn't order any action against those responsible, the PBI said in the report.

During rape cases, investigation is the foremost part of the legal procedure. Evidence should be collected sincerely and meticulously, said Kawser Ahmed, a Supreme Court advocate. "If there are mistakes by an

investigation officer in the first place, there is no way to re-do it because by that time, evidence would be destroyed," he added.

In a judgment delivered in February 2007, the HC said the victim, an 18-year-old SSC examinee, had been subjected to forceful sexual intercourse as per the medical report, but the report should not be relied upon because it was submitted 34 days after the examination.

But submission of medical reports months after the examination is not a rare thing, as suggested by advocate Fahmida Akhter Rinky, a member of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association, who worked on cases involving women and children for nearly a decade.

She has even seen investigation officer fail to mention the name of the doctor who performed the medico-legal examination.

AN UNJUST SYSTEM

If the system remains this way and there is no accountability, rape victims will not get justice, Khurshid Alam says.

"They are left just like orphans."

To address the issue of accountability, an order was passed by HC in 2016.

The High Court directed the Supreme Court registrar general to form a cell to monitor whether trials of cases under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000 are finished in 180 days.

The monitoring cell is to report to the SC and the government for taking appropriate action against judges, public prosecutors and investigation officers who will fail to assign causes for not disposing of the cases on time, read the full text of the HC verdict.

The bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice JBM Hassan deliv-

ered the short verdict on December 5, 2016 after hearing a suo moto rule on the issue.

But such monitoring is yet to happen.

NO ONE IS ACCOUNTABLE

Prompted by this, the HC asked the authorities if the special tribunals across the country, public prosecutors and police officers, were submitting such reports to them on failing to complete trial within the set timeframe. It eventually learnt that the provision had never been complied with.

The law also provides for action against the people responsible for the failure based on the reports.

To make investigation officers accountable, Superintendent of Police Mostofa Kamal, of the PBI, said they should be more skilled and a mechanism placed to monitor their actions.

Khurshid Alam echoed his view. He said the ability of PPs and IOs has to improve through interaction with judges, experts, human rights activists, academicians, researchers and through training.

In the 2016 HC judgment, the court said there is a need for a monitoring cell that would study the explanations of tribunals, public prosecutors and police officers for their failure to finish trial within 180 days.

The order, if complied with, may help plug some of the loopholes during trial.

The registrar general of the Supreme Court or the registrar of the High Court Division should play the lead role for the monitoring cell, as suggested by the HC.

Md Golam Rabbani, registrar of the HC Division, recently told The Daily Star his office was trying to find out the status of compliance with the order.

Fire at police HQ kills 68

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on authorities in Venezuela to carry out a speedy investigation into a prison fire and to provide reparations to victims' families.

"We urge the Venezuelan authorities to carry out a prompt, thorough and effective investigation to establish the cause of these deaths, provide reparations to the victims' families, and, where applicable, identify and bring those responsible to justice," the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said in a statement voicing concern at prison conditions.

Carlos Nieto, head of a prisoners' rights group called Una Ventana a la Libertad (A Window on Freedom), said that some prisoners burned to death and others choked after setting fire to mattresses and stealing a guard's gun in an attempt to break out.

The dead included two women who were visiting the jail, the attorney general said, adding that four prosecutors have been named to investigate.

Photos taken by Nieto's group showed the body of a man with burns and firefighters trying to put out flames.

Relatives of those being kept in the detention center tried to force their way in. After one officer was injured by a tossed stone, the crowd was dispersed

by police firing tear gas.

A video posted on Twitter showed dozens of people demanding information in front of police guarding the site. Women were seen crying.

"I am a desperate mother. My son has been here a week. They have not given any information," Dora Blanco told local media.

Local news correspondents wrote on Twitter that the facility was tense Wednesday night.

Venezuela's prisons suffer from dire overcrowding and a shortage of basic supplies, struggling under the deepening economic crisis that is gripping the once-wealthy oil-producing country.

Because of the lack of space in penitentiaries, convicts are often sent to police holding cells like the ones in Carabobo, meant to be used as temporary pens for suspects facing charges or court hearings, where detainees are supposed to spend a maximum of 48 hours.

Nieto's association estimated that the temporary detention centers were overfilled by five times their capacity.

And what happened Wednesday in Carabobo is not an isolated incident, he added.

"All the police stations in Venezuela are facing similar or worse conditions of overcrowding, lack of food and disease," he said.