

RMG worker 'gang-raped', five held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Five men have been arrested over an alleged gang rape of a garment worker at two hotels in Kuakata.

The arrestees are Saiful Islam, 57, Alamgir Hossain, 42, Rubel Chowkidar, 35, Khalilur Rahman, 35, and Saidur Rahman Sumon, 26, local police said at a press briefing yesterday.

The victim, a resident of Dinajpur's Parbatipur upazila and a mother of two, works at a readymade garment factory in the capital, said Mainul Hasan, superintendent of police in Patuakhali.

Jalal Uddin Ahmed, additional SP (Kolapara circle), said the victim had developed a relationship with one Shahidul Islam over phone.

"Shahidul took her to a relative's place after she reached Kuakata Sunday morning. He asked his friend Alamgir to help her get back to the capital and left.

"But instead, Alamgir took her to Bengal Guest House and confined her to a room," the SP said, quoting the victim.

Alamgir, Saidur, manager at Bengal

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

KHALEDA APPEAL

HC annoyed as defence lawyers show up late

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A High Court bench yesterday expressed dissatisfaction with the lawyers representing BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia as they did not appear before it on time for placing arguments on her appeal against the trial court verdict in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case.

The lawyers for Khaleda did not even appear before the court or submit any written arguments on her appeal despite having asked the court for time to do so, the HC bench said.

The bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman also said the lawyers appeared before them on time to ask for an extension of Khaleda's bail in the case.

Justice Enayetur said they have a time limit to conclude the hearing of the appeal as the Supreme Court Appellate Division had asked them to dispose of it by October 31.

Lawyer AJ Mohamad Ali, who argued for Khaleda, did not respond to the dissatisfaction expressed by the HC bench, Anti-Corruption Commission's lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star.

Khaleda filed the appeal challenging the trial court verdict that sentenced her to five years' imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case.

The court fixed 10:30am today (Wednesday) for resuming the hearing on the appeal.

Khaleda has been in jail since she was sentenced on February 8.

Yesterday, another HC bench

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

In droves, they come for bail

FROM PAGE 1

Luckily for Mannan, the HC granted his bail appeal.

Like him, nearly 1,000 people ran through the HC corridors seeking bails in cases that they claim are false. They came from everywhere -- Jessore, Kushtia, Sylhet, Chandpur, Manikganj, Narayanganj, just to name a few districts.

These cases were filed over the past few months, mostly against BNP leaders and supporters at all levels, sending panic among the BNP rank and file.

In BNP's estimation, 4,135 cases have been filed against 85,604 identified and 274,703 unidentified BNP leaders and activists from September 1 to October 4 across the country. During the same period, police arrested 4,650 BNP men in those cases.

Media reports, including The Daily Star's own reporting, suggest dozens of these cases are full of loopholes: either the alleged incident did not happen or the accused were nowhere near the scene. In many cases, the accused were, and still are, abroad. At least two of them are long dead.

The matter seemed so serious that it prompted Mohammad Javed Patwary, the inspector general of police, to order the "unit commanders" to launch some sort of investigations into the filing of the cases themselves.

At a recent meeting with the deputy inspector generals, the police boss asked senior police officials to look into how dead people, expatriates, hajj pilgrims and paralysed men came to be accused in cases, police sources said.

The BNP claims all of these cases are aimed at keeping the party men on the run so they cannot take part in polls activities.

ABROAD YET ACCUSED
More than 1,000 people "framed in fictitious cases" started crowding the High Court premises since morning. They were waiting in groups under the trees to protect themselves from the blistering heat.

Some were standing, some sitting and some others were lying on the grass. Concern, grief and anger were visible on their faces.

Many came to the court on Sunday and waited the whole day for bail, but



Exhausted by the long bus journey from Jashore's Monirampur to the capital, Abdul Rahman Sardar falls asleep in a field in front of the High Court yesterday. Like many others from the south-western district, the farmer has travelled to Dhaka to seek bail in a "ghostly" arson case filed by police. Inset, an accused looks at documents of bail prayers in the area.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

the court did not hear their petitions though those were on the cause list.

Some of them had no clue as to how they were implicated in the case in the first place.

Rezaul Karim is one of them. He is an accused in a case filed with Abhaynagar Police in Jessore over an incident that happened when he was in India.

According to the case statement, Rezaul is one of the 164 named and 500 unnamed accused who took part in vandalising and torching a local Jubo League office on September 30.

He arrived in Bangladesh on October 1 from India, according to his travel documents.

"Our only fault is that we are with the BNP. Police will continue to file

cases against us even after our deaths. I am at a loss for words," he said, as he waited on the HC premises for bail.

His name was mentioned twice in the case -- as accused No. 14 and 31. Names of two other accused were also



Abdul Mannan, 85, left, and Nurul Haque Molla, 78, came from Sylhet and Jessore to seek HC bail in cases they both claim are false.

mentioned twice, exposing the manner in which the case was filed.

The two are Shahidul Islam, who has been named as accused No. 9 and 113, and Abdul Majid Biswas, who is named as accused No. 8 and 32.

'ABDICATED BNP POST 5YRS AGO'

Nurul Haque Molla, 78, chairman of Abhaynagar upazila in Jessore, is also an accused in the same case.

He has been coming to the HC for the last three days to secure bail. He is afraid that he may have to languish in jail at this stage of his life.

Nurul was seen walking on the court premises with the support of a young man. In the case statement, police said he was 65.

He did not get bail yesterday.

Revise Digital Security Act

FROM PAGE 1

"We stand ready to assist the Government," said Ravina Shamdasani, the spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), at a press briefing in Geneva yesterday.

Earlier on Monday, President Abdul Hamid signed the bill into law amid wide-spread concern, criticism and protest against it both at home and abroad.

Shamdasani anticipated that the new law would seriously impede freedom of expression as well as the right to liberty of the people.

"The Act could have a severe impact on the work of journalists, bloggers, commentators and historians but [it] also penalises the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression by any other individual, including on social media," she said.

The law contains vague provisions that could impose long-term prison sentences up to seven years or a fine

for any statement posted online that might disrupt the law and order situation, hurt religious feelings or ruin communal harmony, said the spokesperson.

Any kind of propaganda or publicity against the "Spirit of the Liberation War", national anthem or national flag is punishable by imprisonment up to 10 years on first offence and/or a fine of Tk 10 million (nearly \$120,000).

Provisions linked to digital offences under the colonial-era Official Secrets Act carry penalties of 14 years' imprisonment, and life imprisonment for repeat offenders.

"The Act gives the police wide powers of search and arrest without warrant. Many of the offences in the Act are unobtainable. This is of particular concern given concerns about due process in Bangladesh," said Shamdasani.

The Act also provides broad powers to the government to restrict and intercept digital information, she

added.

Shamdasani told the press briefing that the law as it stands does not meet Bangladesh's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including provisions to respect and protect the right to be free from arbitrary arrest under Article 9; to protect from interference with privacy and correspondence under Article 17, and to guard freedom of opinion and expression under Article 19.

During the Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council on September 20, the day after the act was initially adopted by Parliament, the government of Bangladesh agreed to recommendations relating to the freedom of expression and bringing national legislation in compliance with its international obligations.

However, Shamdasani said despite pledges to revisit the problematic provisions of the Act, it was signed into law.

5 BCL men suspended

FROM PAGE 16

resigned from their administrative posts following an incident involving two teachers and the BCL leaders.

However, all 56 teachers withdrew their resignation letters yesterday noon, said Pinaki Dey, general secretary of the university teachers' association.

On Sunday, some BCL leaders put pressure on two teachers of the Physics department to let a student take a third-year exam although she had failed 2nd-year semester finals, campus sources said.

When the teachers told them she could not take the exam, the BCL men allegedly hurled abuses and even tried to assault them, they added.

The authorities formed a committee to probe Sunday's incident.

It was also decided that the university cell for prevention of sexual harassment would investigate another allegation that a teacher of the department made "inappropriate advances" towards the girl.

"I abdicated the post of president of the upazila BNP five years ago as I am ill and cannot take part in party activities. Yet police made me an accused," he said.

He claimed police implicated BNP men even though the local Jubo League office was vandalised during a clash between two AL groups.

FATHER ARRESTED FOR SON
Another accused of the case, Masum Billah, said police arrested his 65-year-old father Abdul Latif from their village home at Pathalia in Kushtia on October 1, failing to arrest him.

His father was not a named accused, but he was implicated as an unnamed one.

"Police did not spare even my ill father though he was not accused in any case," Masum lamented.

COUSIN'S FUNERAL
Bakhtiar Rahman Moral was in a great dilemma. As he was running from one room to another, he was not sure if he should attend the burial of his cousin who died yesterday or pursue his bail for a crime he claims he did not commit.

"My brother died at 7:30am today [yesterday] at a city hospital following a heart attack. I cannot go to Jessore to bury him as police are looking for me," he said.

According to the case statement, BNP-Jamaat men vandalised vehicles and set fire to those on September 30 to foil the 21 August Grenade attack case verdict and the upcoming general election to impede development and make Bangladesh a dysfunctional state.

Bakhtiar claimed he had nothing to do with the incident.

Over the last one week, hundreds of people, mostly BNP leaders and activists, are coming to the HC for anticipatory bail as the charges of these cases are cognisable offences and police can arrest them anytime.

Asked about such cases, Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general (media) at the Police Headquarters, said "some sort of errors" may occur while filing cases.

"The chiefs of the respective units have been directed to look into such cases that came to the attention of the Police Headquarters," he told The Daily Star last night.

All set for verdicts

FROM PAGE 1

highest punishment. Defence lawyers, on the other hand, maintain that the prosecutors failed to prove the charges and hope their clients will be acquitted.

Judge Shahed Nuruddin of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 will pronounce the verdicts.

Security measures have been beefed up in and around the court area and across the country.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan assured the countrymen that no untoward incident would take place.

"No one will be on the roads to save criminals," BSS quoted him as saying.

"We firmly believe that the court will give exemplary punishment to the perpetrators and masterminds behind the attack and the nation will be freed from another stigma with the delivery of the verdicts."

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia told a discussion at Rajarbagh Police Lines that officers were monitoring the overall situation to ensure security.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader told reporters that Tarique Rahman was the mastermind behind the attack.

His BNP counterpart Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir was quick to declare that Tarique and other party leaders were falsely implicated by the government.

The grenade attack, allegedly masterminded by several BNP leaders, is one of the most shocking crimes in the country's history.

The attack and steps taken by the then BNP-led government in its after-

math left a deep scar in the country's politics as it sharpened the division between the AL and BNP.

The BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, the parties that shared power at the time, had allegedly made efforts to bury the truth and protect the masterminds by derailing the investigation. They even tried to put the blame on the AL.

But further investigation into the cases revealed that the attack was an outcome of a collaboration between the militant outfit Huji, influential leaders of the BNP and Jamaat, and a band of senior officials of the home ministry, police, Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), National Security Intelligence (NSI) and Prime Minister's Office.

ACCUSED PLANNERS
Besides then prime minister Khaleda Zia's son Tarique, eight others accused of conspiring and approving the plan of the attack include former BNP leaders and top government officials of the time. If found guilty, they may be awarded up to death sentence.

They are: former state minister Lutfozzaman Babar, former deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu, former prime minister's political secretary Abul Harris Chowdhury, former lawmaker Kazi Shah Mofazzal Hossain Kaikobad, former DGFI director Brig Gen (retd) Rezaqul Haider Chowdhury, former NSI DG Brig Gen (retd) Abdur Rahim, owner of Hanif Paribahan Mohammad Hanif, and BNP leader Ariful Islam Arif.

The attack was executed by Huji men and their accomplices.

GRENADE ATTACK ON AUGUST 21, 2004	
Total killed:	24
Case filed:	August 22, 2004
Total accused:	49
In jail:	31
Absconding:	18
First charge sheet by CID:	June 11, 2008
Charge framed against 22:	Oct 29, 2008
Court ordered further investigation:	Aug 3, 2009
Supplementary charge sheet:	July 3, 2011
Fresh charge framed against 30:	March 18, 2012
Re-trial began:	March 27, 2012
Trial completed:	September 18, 2018
Working days for arguments:	120
Total Witness:	591
Testimonies of witnesses:	225
Defence witnesses:	20

LONG ROAD TO JUSTICE

Two cases -- one for murder and another under the Explosive Substances Act -- were filed with Motijheel Police Station.

The then BNP-led government formed a one-member judicial inquiry commission led by a High Court judge. Besides, the US Federal

Bureau of Investigation (FBI) came to Dhaka to probe the grenade attack.

But, a few months later, senior CID officials made up the farcical Joj Mia story. They detained Joj along with 20 other petty criminals. Joj and two others were forced to give false confessions.

The real identities of the detainees were later revealed by the media and the ludicrous nature of the investigation was exposed by the end of 2004.

After a caretaker administration took over, the CID submitted two separate charge sheets in June 2007, accusing 22 persons including Mufti Hannan and Abdus Salam Pintu. The charge sheet hints at the involvement of some high-level government and security officials in the plot.

The trial began after charges were framed against them in October that year and the court recorded testimonies of 61 prosecution witnesses.

But, following the prosecution's petition, the court in August 2009 ordered further investigation and a new investigation officer was assigned.

The CID in July 2011 submitted supplementary charge sheet accusing 30 more individuals, including Tarique and Babar, taking the total number of accused to 52.

Of them, Mufti Hannan and Sharif Shahedul Alam Bipul were executed in a case filed for attacking the then UK high commissioner to Bangladesh Anwar Choudhury.

Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, who was the secretary general of Jamaat and a minister, was hanged for committing crimes against humanity in 1971.

The re-trial in the two cases started concurrently in March 2012. The prosecution produced 225 witnesses to prove the charges while the defence produced 20.

The court completed the trial last month.

OTHER ACCUSED
Huji founder Abdus Salam and leaders Maulana Sheikh Farid, Maulana Abdur Rouf, Maulana Abdur Hannan Sabbir and 25 others, mostly militant outfit leaders, were accused of murder. If convicted, they may get maximum death penalty.

Former IGP -- Ashraf Huda and Shahudul Haque -- have been charged with assisting the killers financially and administratively. They may face up to life-term imprisonment if found guilty.

Khaleda's nephew Lt Commander (retd) Saiful Islam Duke, former DGFI officials, former high-ranking DMP officers are also accused.

ARGUMENTS
According to the prosecution, the grenade attack on Awami League rally was the outcome of a criminal conspiracy which was finalised at Hawa Bhaban, and at the residence Pintu with Tarique giving the ultimate endorsement.

Hawa Bhaban, the BNP chief's political office during the four-party rule in 2001-06, had become the alternative centre of power of the government.

The accused came together to have their common interest served by killing the AL chief.

Tarique and his cohorts intended to assassinate Hasina and other AL leaders so that the then government

could remain in power "permanently", the prosecution said. Executed militant leader Mufti Abdur Hannan and his cohorts wanted to establish "fanatic Islam" in the country.

The ministers or lawmakers involved in the plot wanted further promotion and police and intelligence officials looked to be in the government's good books.

They said the grenades were brought from Pakistan by Pintu's brother Maulana Tajuddin. Before August 21, the accused held meetings in at least 10 places in the capital, including Hawa Bhaban, attended among others by Tarique, Babar and Pintu.

After the carnage, the prosecution said, police were reluctant to find out the real culprits, rather destroyed evidence and misled investigation by staging the Joj Mia drama. Detectives and people close to the then government helped Tajuddin flee.

The defence counsels on the other hand termed the incident tragic, but alleged that investigators failed to unearth the mystery and find out the perpetrators.

In the name of further investigation during the AL rule, BNP leaders, police and intelligence officials were falsely implicated, they added.

The defence also said the prosecution solely depended on Huji leader Mufti Hannan's second confessional statement, which was given under duress.

Punishing the accused on the basis of that statement and without having any other independent evidence would be a blunder, they said.