



A BIWTA diver jumping into the Meghna near Munshiganj's Kalipura yesterday as part of a search operation following a boat capsized that left 20 people missing. None of the victims could be found.

PHOTO: STAR

FENI GANG RAPE

Prime accused, accomplice remanded

A CORRESPONDENT, Feni

A Feni court yesterday placed Kawsar Bin Kashem, the prime accused of a case filed over gang-raping and torturing four women in captivity, on a five-day remand.

The same court also placed Saidul Haque Chhoton, an accomplice of Kawsar, on a three-day remand in connection with the case.

Senior Judicial Magistrate Saraf Uddin Ahmed passed the order after police produced the two before the court with a remand prayer.

Four women aged between 19 and 26 were allegedly confined and raped in a house in Rampur area of Feni town for around six months.

One of the victims filed the case with Feni Sadar Police Station accusing Kawsar and some unknown people.

A total of four accused have so far been arrested with the incident. They are Md Omayar, Ariful Islam, Chhoton and Kawsar.

Missing 20 not found

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boat after swimming for almost an hour. They added that most of the people onboard were sleeping at the time.

Meanwhile, grieving families of the missing workers have been waiting on the bank of the Meghna, reports our Munshiganj correspondent.

Naval police Deputy Inspector General Sheikh Mohammad Maruf Hasan told reporters yesterday that the naval police, coastguards, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authorities and fire service officials searched the area throughout yesterday.

The rescuers would now bring in Habib, who was at the helm of the boat, from his village home so that he could help the officials identify the area where the boat sank.

No tension

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there's any misunderstandings, we'll solve it through discussions.

"If the political alliance plays a role of the opposition in parliament and holds constructive discussions, it'll be better for the government to correct its mistakes, if any."

Mostafa Mohsin, deputy assistant director of fire service, told reporters that the rescuers yesterday took the help of two survivors.

The depth of water at the point where the rescuers had been searching is 16 to 18 metres, he said.

The rescuers used side-scan sonar, a technology used to efficiently create an image of large areas of the sea or river floor, to trace the missing workers, said Shayla Farjana, deputy commissioner of Munshiganj.

HC rejects

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Commission and the government to explain why the oath taking should not be declared illegal.

The lawyer also sought necessary HC orders on the authorities concerned to prevent the new lawmakers from discharging their functions.

Meanwhile, petitioner's lawyer barrister AM Mahbubey Alam told The Daily Star that they would file a fresh writ petition with the HC challenging the same issue.

The tenure of the 10th parliament will expire on January 28 and new lawmakers will take charge on January 30.

Nobody cares about signs

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This was a mere snapshot of the violations of traffic rules taking place at a time when the fortnight-long traffic discipline programme is underway. Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan inaugurated the programme on Tuesday.

Pedestrians too were seen flouting the rules. Around 1:05pm, four Ideal College students were seen crossing the busy flyover.

"As the next destination of the bus is Shaniur Akhra, which is a far way from Sayedabad, so we take this risk to go home early," said one of the students.

Contacted, Mofiz Uddin Ahmed, joint commissioner of traffic (south), told The Daily Star yesterday, "We often conduct drives and ask bus operators not to stop on flyovers as it is risky."

"There were stairs attached to flyovers for pedestrian movement but we removed those to stop [the practice] yet pedestrian movement on the flyover continues," he said, adding they will take necessary steps.

Violation of traffic rules were also seen while visiting the capital's Kakrail, Ramna, Farmgate, Karwan Bazar and Paltan areas yesterday.

However, all violators came up with excuses. Md Mozzammel, an official of the health directorate, was driving a motorbike on the footpath near Kakrail mosque around 2:10pm. "I know it is a traffic violation but I am doing it as I need to reach office early," he said.

In some areas, three-wheeler rickshaws were seen playing on VIP roads in Kakrail, Hare road and Mansur Ali road, although the roads are off-limits for such slow-moving vehicle.

Several passengers said that they had bribed the on-duty Ansar men to use the road.

In front of Farmgate Police Box around 3:30pm, a number of people were seen jaywalking across the busy roads instead of using the footbridge a few yards away.

Traffic Sergeant Harun-ur Rashid was on-duty there at the time. Asked why this was happening, he said that they were trying their best but some people were not following the rules.

"There are still irregularities but the situation is improving," he claimed.

According to the Dhaka Metropolitan Police traffic department, a total of 13,631 cases were filed in the first two days of the fortnightly programme and

Tk 71,40,300 was collected as penalty. Another 5,472 cases were filed against motorbikes, the highest offenders, and 3,383 cases were filed against buses and minibuses.

The traffic database also shows that around 12,25,546 cases were filed in 2018 for traffic rule violation and Tk 86.09 crore collected as fine.

TWENTY-FOUR HOUR DUTY LAUNCHED

Meanwhile, the traffic department has started a night-shift duty for traffic officials recently to bring back discipline to the roads. Earlier, the traffic police remained on-duty from 6:00am to 11:00pm in two shifts.

In some cases, officials used to stay till 2:30am during the second shift but now officials will stay on the road round the clock.

Sources said the traffic department launched the 24-hour duty at 25-major points of the capital.

Mir Rezaul Alam, additional commissioner (traffic) of DMP, said they started the 24-hour duty to ensure discipline on the roads.

Asked about the irregularities, he said they were trying to bring about changes but it was not possible overnight.

'No innocent' to be sacked

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committee meeting on Tuesday, we agreed that no innocent worker will lose job. We will also hold a meeting with factory owners on Saturday [tomorrow] to discuss issues."

Talking to The Daily Star, he also admitted that a good number of workers, especially in Ashulia and Savar industrial zones, have already been dismissed for their alleged involvement in vandalism, looting and arson attacks on vehicles. He said the BGMEA didn't have the exact number of sacked workers.

"A worker may face dismissal if he is found directly involved in vandalising factories, looting or arson attack."

The BGMEA chief said a fired worker must be given service benefits under the labour law.

Visiting some factories in Ashulia yesterday, this newspaper talked to some laid-off workers. They alleged that they were not given service benefits.

"I was paid only one month's salary today [yesterday] when I went to my factory," said a sacked senior operator of a factory in Ashulia, asking not to be named. He had joined the factory a

year ago.

He used to draw Tk 13,000 a month, including salary and overtime allowance. Yesterday, he was paid Tk 11,500 as the rest of the amount was deducted for different reasons, including a deposit of Tk 500 in the workers' federation fund.

Another factory in Ashulia dismissed 17 workers yesterday, but it didn't pay the workers any money immediately as the management thought that they were involved in unrest, the workers alleged.

Some sacked workers have been contacting local labour leaders to negotiate with the factory managements so that they can get their arrear salaries and other service benefits from their employers.

Nazma Akter, president of Sammilita Garment Sramik Federation, a rights group for workers, expressed fear that many innocent workers might have been dismissed.

"We want that no innocent worker is laid off. Only the wrongdoers will have to face legal actions."

Under the labour law, a factory will

have to pay three month's salary to a sacked employee or serve a notice to him three months before termination.

However, in case of dismissal of workers over their alleged involvement in vandalism, arson attack or any other criminal activities, they would not get any service benefit, Nazma said.

"We don't want sacking of workers illogically or illegally," said Amirul Haque Amin, president of National Garment Workers Federation, another rights group for apparel workers. He, however, supported taking actions against wrongdoers.

"If necessary, we will meet labour and commerce ministers soon to express our concern as a good number of workers have already been fired," said Amin who led union leaders in a recent tripartite crisis management committee meeting.

Meanwhile, police yesterday said they have so far arrested nearly 40 workers over the labour unrest. Eleven cases were filed with Ashulia and Savar police stations against 215 named and more than 1,000 unnamed garment workers.

2Jamuna TV

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crime programme, and Tanvir Mizan, the cameraperson.

Three people -- Nur Mohammad, 38, director of the rehab centre, his employees Polash Kumar Das, 33, and Arju, 28 -- were arrested in this connection.

SM Zia said they came to know that the authorities of the rehab tortured the patients and drugs were supplied there.

He added that they went there after informing the deputy director of the Department of Narcotics Control in Bogura.

Zia alleged that when they were talking to patients, Nur Mohammad and eight to 10 others confined them to a room and snatched their camera, cell phones and removed memory card from the camera. The attackers then started to beat them up.

"While beating us up, Nur Mohamad was saying that I am a Jubo League man and bought police and Rab. If we beat you up, they can't do anything," alleged cameraperson Tanvir.

The journalists were confined there for around one and a half hours. The attackers were also capturing the incident on their smart phones and forcing them to tell that they had demanded Tk 2 lakh from Nur Mohammad, Zia alleged.

He said they took first aid at Government Mohammad Ali Hospital.

Shuvasis Podder Liton, president of Bogura Jubo League, said, "Nur Mohamad is a Jubo League activist. But he does not hold any post. If he committed any offence, he has to take the responsibility. The organisation can't take any responsibility."

SM Badiuzzaman, officer-in-charge of Bogura Sadar Police Station, told The Daily Star that hearing the news from other journalists, they went to the spot to rescue the two.

This correspondent tried to contact with Dilara Rahman, deputy director of the narcotics control department in Bogura, for her comments. She received a phone call and said, "I am now busy, I will talk to you later."

When she was phoned again, she did not receive the call.

Kamruzzaman Mia, OC (investigation) at Sadar Police Station, said the victims filed an attempted murder case against the three and some eight to 10 unknown people.

Police arrested the three, including main accused Nur Mohammad, from the spot, he added.

Ruling out

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She argued that the default position, under the Article 50 process, was that the UK "will leave the EU without a deal on 29 March"

May wrote: "There are two ways to avoid no-deal: either to vote for a deal, in particular a withdrawal agreement that has been agreed with the EU, or to revoke Article 50 and overturn the referendum result."

And she challenged Corbyn to make his choice, adding: "I believe it would be wrong to overturn the referendum result."

The claim comes despite both Jeremy Hunt, the foreign secretary, and Philip Hammond, the chancellor, suggesting MPs could -- in reality, whatever the legalities -- block a no-deal departure.

In a leaked transcript of a conversation with business leaders this week, Hammond said: "It is clear to me there is a large majority in the Commons that is opposed to no deal in any circumstances."

In her letter to Corbyn, May also appeared to dismiss the aims of a cross-party campaign, coming to a head next week, to put parliament in charge of the process.

Put forward by senior Tory Nick Boles, it would compel the government to seek an extension of article 50, until the end of 2019, if the Commons cannot pass a Brexit deal within a few weeks.

'Unpresidential'

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around the city as well as a sham website going online.

The fake front page reads "Unpresidential" with the false news that Trump would leave the White House on May 1, 2019.

It goes on "Trump hastily departs White House, ending crisis" with a second headline reading "Celebrations break out worldwide as Trump era ends".

The actual paper, owned by billionaire Jeff Bezos, was forced to tweet about the forgery, writing: "There are fake print editions of The Washington Post being distributed around downtown DC, and we are aware of a website attempting to mimic The Post's. They are not Post products, and we are looking into this."

Online people took to Twitter to say they had been handed the paper outside Union station and the White House, with some calling the move "problematic".

Crescent curse

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The Daily Star is withholding their names as it could not reach them for comments.

An investigation by the central bank had found the involvement of Janata Bank Managing Director Abdus Salam Azad in the financial irregularity. However, the Customs Intelligence report did not mention his name.

Despite repeated attempts, The Daily Star could not contact Azad for his comments.

Both the probe reports of the BB and the Customs Intelligence cited the involvement of Mohammed Fakhru Alam, the then manager of JB's Imamganj branch, in the alleged scam. Fakhru is now the deputy managing director of Bangladesh Krishi Bank.

On the other hand, the ACC said its ongoing inquiry was yet to find whether Fakhru and Azad were tied to the incident.

The Customs Intelligence and the ACC said they found out that MA Kader, chairman of Crescent Leather Products; Sultana Begum, director of Crescent Leather Products; Md Abdul Aziz, chairman of Crescent Leather Product's sister concern Rimex Footwear; and Litun Jahan Mira, managing director of Rimex Footwear, were involved in the money laundering.

FINDINGS OF CUSTOMS INTELLIGENCE, ACC

On January 1, the Customs Intelligence sent its investigation report to the chairman of the National Board of Revenue seeking NBR approval for filing a case against the accused under the Money Laundering Prevention Act, 2012.

On the other hand, a two-member ACC inquiry committee, led by Assistant Director Gulshan Anwar Pradhan, would submit a final report on the scam to the commission soon.

Talking to The Daily Star, ACC Director General (admin) Muhammad Munir Chowdhury said the inquiry was ongoing. "The real culprits will be brought to book," he said.

The graft watchdog launched the inquiry after an allegation surfaced that Crescent Group Chairman MA Kader embezzled Tk 995 crore from the Janata Bank against 653 fake export bills.

The ACC formed an inquiry team which collected the central bank's investigation report as well as relevant documents from Azad and the Crescent Group and later examined them thoroughly.

The ACC findings were similar to those of the BB but interestingly, the names of Azad and Fakhru have not been mentioned so far.

In 2015, the ACC had filed 56 cases in connection with the Tk 4500 crore BASIC Bank scam, but ironically Sheikh Abdul Hye Bacchu, the then bank chairman who plundered the institution with the help of other board of directors, was not named as an accused.

The anti-graft watchdog found that the Janata Bank didn't follow the necessary steps to verify the

Five held

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in order to collect information from across the country," Mufti said.

"After a short conversation, he used to ask for 'financial benefits' from those who spoke to him," the Rab official further said, adding that they were yet to know the exact amount of money he extorted in this way.

During primary interrogation, Faruk admitted to have promised nomination to some of the aspirants for the 50 reserved seats for women in the 11th parliament, according to Rab.

Another detainee Sabbir was the admin of the pages titled "Tarique Zia Cyber Force" and "Desh Netri Cyber Forum" and recently started sharing provocative posts on road safety and quota reform movements, said Mufti.

Rab said he was a cyber communication expert and accused in six cases, including four under the Digital Security Act.

Al Amin, an employee of a private company, was an admin of a Facebook page where he used to share fake information on the army, police and judiciary of the country, claimed the elite force.

Aminul was an activist of Islami Chhatra Shibir and used to circulate "comic items" on Facebook and Youtube, the Rab official said.

"Monir Hossain used his page 'Shotter Bishforon' to share ill-motivated posts and confusing information regarding the country's politics," Mufti claimed.

Filing of two cases accusing the five with the Savar and Hatirjheel police stations were under process.

The Daily Star, however, could not independently verify the claims of the elite force.

Hong Kong-based importers and also did not assess the report of international credit rating agencies over the buyers' financial capacity. As a result, repatriation of export proceeds remained at risk, said ACC findings.

Janata also bought export bills though the relevant Letters of Credit were not accepted by the importers, ACC sources said.

In a letter on October 4, 2017, the BB directed the Janata Bank not to buy any foreign bills without acceptance of the importer but bank officials purchased bills disobeying the instruction.

In the same case, the central bank investigation accused the Janata Bank managing director of not conveying the central bank's instruction to the respective branch about not buying foreign bills without acceptance of the importer.

The BB probe report said that the Janata MD had not notified its branches of this directive for around four months and by that time, the branch gave another Tk 334 crore to Crescent by illegally purchasing its export bills, taking the total to Tk 684 crore.

Fakhru continued to purchase the unaccepted foreign bills even after making a commitment to the central bank through a letter, according to the BB investigation report.

"As a result, it is appeared that the bank officials, in collusion with the managing director, helped Crescent group take away money from the bank and all of them are involved in the irregularities," said the report.

Of the total Tk 1,303 crore "embezzled" by the Crescent Group from the JB, Tk 765 crore was skimmed between January 2017 and February 2018.

MD Abdus Salam was the managing director of the bank from October 2014 to October 2017, while the incumbent MD took office in December 2017.

None of them has been made accountable for the scam.

CRESCENT'S RESPONSE

Contacted, Crescent Leather Products Chairman Kader denied that money was laundered from the JB branch and claimed that the entire amount remained invested in the country.

Asked about the export proceeds which were not repatriated, he said negotiations were underway with the buyers to bring back the money.

Bangladeshi

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He was on his way to meet a friend who worked at a grocery store beside the building. When he heard the woman's desperate call for help in Hindi, he looked up and saw the mother standing by a big window, holding her child.

"I looked at her. When she looked at me, I opened my arms and then she released the child who landed in my arms safely. I was in shock. I could not believe that the child had been saved until I heard the applause of the crowd, who were chanting 'thank God'," he said.

"I felt relieved and grateful. It felt like I have done something right in my life."

When a massive fire engulfed the three-storey building in Nuaimiah on Saturday night, thick and black smoke filled the flat in no time. The mother could not find a way out except through the window.

She was worried about their son who had already started to suffocate, said Mohammed Saqib, her husband who was at work when the incident occurred and got a frantic call from his wife.

"My wife Rubeena said she couldn't go through the doors and she would not survive the heavy smoke. I told her to relax and think of a way to save herself and our child," he said.

After making sure her child was safe in someone's arms, Rubeena jumped out of the window and landed on a car parked near the building. She sustained serious injuries and was being treated at the intensive care unit of Khalifa Hospital.

"I left everything I had at hand and ran towards my car to get home as quick as possible," Mohammed said.

"When I reached our home, my wife was already in hospital and my son was with people. I felt relieved when I saw that my son was saved. The people told me about the man who saved my son. I thank God and thank him for the great deed he has done for my family."

The fire was later found to be caused by an electric short circuit in the machines located in the corridor, which led to the rapid spread of thick smoke across the building.