

'DEFAMATORY' SPEECH Court issues arrest warrant for Khaleda

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday issued an arrest warrant for BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia in connection with a case filed for making a "defamatory statement" on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Khaleda is now in jail after she was convicted in February last year in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case. She was also convicted in the Zia Charitable Trust graft case.

After taking cognisance of the charge, Metropolitan Magistrate Md Ziaur Rahman passed the order and directed the officer-in-charge of Gulshan police to submit a report on the execution of the arrest warrant by April 17.

Earlier on June 30 last year, Inspector Zafar Ali Biswas of Shahbagh police submitted a probe report on the issue, saying he found authentication of the allegation against Khaleda.

On January 25, 2017, AB Siddique, president of Bangladesh Jananetri Parishad, filed the defamation case with the Court of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Abdullah Al Masud.

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A student protester writes "no licence" on the windshield of a police vehicle in the capital's Shahbagh intersection yesterday afternoon after the driver allegedly failed to produce its papers.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Culprit driver

FROM PAGE 1
The difference between the two accidents was just 10 minutes, according to the case statement.

The vehicle bearing the number plate -- Dhaka Metro-Ba-11-4135 -- hit a college girl Synthia Islam Mukta, 20, in Shahjaddpur's Banshtala area around 7:20am, Aminul Islam, inspector (operations) of Gulshan Police Station, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The bus driver was driving recklessly to flee the scene after hitting Synthia and eventually ran over Abrar when he was crossing a road through a zebra crossing near Bashundhara Residential Area at 7:30am, said the police official.

Aminul added that they were trying to contact Synthia, who returned home after receiving treatment at a Shahjaddpur hospital, and her family members.

Synthia, who lives with her family in the capital's Bhatara area, was going to her college in Mirpur on Tuesday morning, said police.

In another development, a Dhaka court placed bus driver Sirajul Islam, 24, on a seven-day remand in the case filed by Abrar's father Brig Gen (ret'd) Arif Ahmed Chowdhury.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Debdas Chandra Adhikari passed the order after Aminul, also the investigating officer of the case, produced Sirajul before the court with a 10-day remand appeal.

Abrar's father lodged the case with Gulshan Police Station against the bus driver, helper, conductor and owner.

In the case statement, the complainant mentioned that Abrar went to the main gate of Bashundhara Residential Area from the B-block house in a private car. Then Abrar was crossing the road through a zebra crossing to catch his university bus, but a bus of Suprobbat Paribahan ran over and killed him on the spot.

The case was lodged under four sections of the penal code, including that of 304, which carries up to life sentence.

In the remand appeal, Aminul mentioned that the accident took place as Sirajul was driving recklessly and involved in a race to take passengers. So, it needs to interrogate him to

know the reason behind it. Sirajul did not say anything at the court. But his lawyer told the court that it was an accident, said court sources.

Quoting Sirajul, investigation officer of the case told journalists that he had not slept the night before. So, he was not in sound mind. First, he hit a girl and sped up the bus to flee the scene. Afterwards, he ran over another passerby (Abrar). His head was crushed under the wheels of the bus. Later, traffic police arrested him.

Meanwhile, Sirajul's mother Nasima Begum and younger sister Hafiza Begum met him at Gulshan Police Station yesterday morning.

Hafiza told The Daily Star that her



Sirajul's driving licence shows that he is permitted to drive light vehicles only.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

brother had been driving bus for the last three years. But he got the driving licence around 15 days ago.

Sirajul was enrolled in class one, but did not continue his education, she added.

According to the latest road safety act, the minimum educational qualification for a person to get driving licence is class eight. But the act is yet to be effective.

Police said Sirajul was driving the bus with a licence for light vehicle.

Lokman Hossain Mollah, director (engineering) of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), told this correspondent that drivers could not drive this type of bus with light vehicle licence.

The BRTA on Tuesday suspended registration and route permit of the bus involved in the accident and driving licence of the driver.

Police are trying to arrest the bus helper, conductor and owner. They went into hiding, said Inspector Aminul.

The same old promise

FROM PAGE 1
Many bus owners rent out their vehicles to drivers on daily contracts. In this system, drivers pay a specific amount to the owner and to maximize profits, they drive recklessly to make as many trips as possible in a day, say road safety campaigners.

This contractual operation creates an unhealthy competition among buses for passengers, which often results in accidents.

One such race is blamed for the tragic death of two college students in the city's Shewra on July 29, last year.

The incident touched off an unprecedented student movement for safe roads. Later on August 8, DRTOA pledged to abolish the system of daily contracts with drivers and their helpers to prevent races among buses.

Around 2,100 transport owners supported the DRTOA executive committee's decision raising their hands in the air at a meeting on September 17 last year at the same venue.

But things have not changed much. The contract system continues and lives keep perishing on roads.

On Tuesday, Abrar Ahmed Chowdhury, a student of Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), was run over and killed by a bus racing with another near Bashundhara Residential Area.

The incident, which happened while the 20-year-old was reportedly using a zebra crossing, led to fresh student protests in the capital for the last two days.

Even at yesterday's programme, several transport owners and workers admitted that many buses run on contracts, making the roads "a dangerous place".

Dhaka Sarak Paribahan Malik Sramik Oikya Parishad, a platform of Dhaka-based transport owner and workers, organised the meeting to reconstitute their committee, but issues relating to road fatalities dominated it.

At the beginning of the meeting, Enayet Ullah threw a number of questions: "Will such accidents continue to occur? Will indiscipline continue to rule the road? Will student protests go on? Can't we do anything in this regard?"

Shahidullah Shahin, a transport workers' leader, said many owners still rent out their buses to drivers on daily contracts, leading to an unhealthy competition among the vehicles for passengers.

Those owners give their vehicles to drivers' assistants and their contractors, instead of skilled drivers, he said, adding, "Please don't do it to satisfy your greed... I request all owners to stop doing it right now."

Karam Ali, general secretary of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers' Union, said zebra crossings were supposed to be safe for pedestrians.

"How could the accident [which left Abrar dead] take place on a zebra crossing? The responsible person should face actions," he said.

Karam said on several occasions, they had asked owners and workers not to run the daily contract system, but only five to 10 percent of them paid heed.

Enayet Ullah said, "I don't go to TV talk shows anymore. Why? It's because I have nothing to say. We are the guilty ones."

"Why the bus did not stop at the zebra crossing? Will you be able to show any excuse?"

He said they would take some strict decisions. "Oikya Parishad will be on the streets to bring discipline there... We will not spare anyone."

Enayet said if any company rents out their buses on contract basis, they would recommend that Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) cancels its registration. "After that, the association will acquire all the buses of that company," he said.

However, such decisions are not new as well.

On August 8 last year, when announcing his association's deci-

sion to abolish the daily contract system, Enayet had said, "Vehicles of no company can operate under contract system from tomorrow [Thursday]. If anyone does so, legal action, including [recommendation for] cancellation of registration of the company, would be taken."

The association did not make any such recommendation until yesterday, one of its leaders told The Daily Star last night.

He said after the August 8 announcement, they had formed five teams to conduct drives against vehicles operating on contract basis and take actions, including stopping their operation until they would change the system.

According to the transport leader, almost half of the buses on the city streets run under the daily contract system.

"Actually owners are forced to follow the system, because fare collection is a tough job," he added.

BUSES INVOLVED IN MOST ACCIDENTS

According to the Buet's Accident Research Institute (ARI), a total of 699 people were killed in 666 accidents in Dhaka city between March 2016 and December 2018.

Buses were involved in 354 of the accidents (53.15 percent), according to the ARI, which prepared the report on the basis of newspaper reports.

ARI Assistant Professor Kazi Md Saifun Newaz said although the number of buses in the city was comparatively smaller than that of other vehicles, buses were linked to the highest number of road accidents.

Unhealthy competition for passengers among buses, reckless driving and indiscipline in the sector are the main reasons for the crashes, he told this newspaper.

Currently, there are some 366 routes in Dhaka and adjacent areas while the numbers of approved buses and minibuses are 6,167 and 2,805 respectively, said a BRTA official.

FATE OF NINE-POINT DEMAND OF ROAD SAFETY MOVEMENT, AUGUST 2018

1. The reckless driver involved with the airport road accident must be given capital punishment; the capital punishment has to be included in the law.
- Trial of the accused driver is going on. Parliament passed Road Transport Act 2018 in September last year keeping provision of five-year imprisonment and Tk 5 lakh fine or both as maximum penalty for causing death to a person by reckless driving; The government is yet to make the law effective.**
2. Shipping Minister (at that time) Shajahan Khan should apologise unconditionally.
- He apologised.**
3. Setting up of a foot-over bridge near MES on airport road or ensuring an alternative safe way.
- Foot-over bridge not constructed, but a designated person helps pedestrians cross the busy road.**
4. Establishing speed breakers in every accident-prone area.
- No Progress.**
5. Government should take responsibility of the injured and deceased students in the road accidents.
- Families of two victims got compensation.**
6. If students give signal to get on the bus, they should stop and take them in.
- No progress.**
7. Bus fare for students across the country must be halved.
- No Progress.**
8. Vehicles without fitness and drivers without licence should not be allowed on road.
- Little progress despite continuous drives.**
9. No extra passengers should be allowed in buses.
- No progress.**

Commuters

FROM PAGE 1
and continued demonstrations till around 4:00pm. In Nodda, the protest went on till 7:00pm.

They took to the streets on Tuesday morning following the death of Abrar Ahmed Chowdhury, student of Bangladesh University of Professionals. He was killed after a bus ran him over while he was crossing Pragati Sarani.

This is the second time students have been staging major protests in the last eight months, demanding road safety.

In August last year, students had launched countrywide demonstrations following the deaths of two college students in the capital's Khilkhet area.

Yesterday, tailbacks on many city streets stretched for several kilometres and spilled over to nearby lanes.

Ziaul Hoque, employee at a private firm, said, "It usually takes an hour to reach my Farmgate office from Uttara. But today [yesterday], it took more than two and a half hours to travel the distance by a motorbike."

Many commuters were seen walking and taking rickshaw rides to their workplaces as they could not get any transport.

Ainal Hossain, a government employee, was caught up in a tailback near the Science Laboratory intersection around noon.

"Finding no public transport, I hired a rickshaw from near my Jigatola home to go to office in Motijheel," he told The Daily Star.

Another city resident, Amir Ahmed, was worried about whether he would be able to go to a job interview in Mohakhali at noon.

"I reached Science Laboratory intersection at 10:00am. I am at a loss as to what to do now as it is 11:00am. It's not possible for me to reach Mohakhali by noon even if I start walking. No ride-sharing service operator is responding to my call either," he said.

Abdul Jalil, helper of a bus driver, said it took more than three hours for their vehicle, which runs on Gulistan-Abdullahpur route, to reach Khilkhet from Mohakhali Bus Stand due to long tailbacks. Usually it takes half an hour to travel the distance.

"Due to a long delay, almost all passengers have got down from the bus and we had to return them the fare," he added.

In the evening, many commuters were seen waiting in Farmgate area for public transport.

Dhaka city

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with the Awami League.

In preparation for Bhutto's arrival, military was disposed in the airport.

Soon after his arrival, Bhutto met Yahya, who apprised him of the talks he had been having with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman since March 16.

Before holding meeting with Pakistani President Yahya Khan for the fifth time, Bangabandhu met lawyer AK Brohi in a short dialogue and Tajuddin Ahmed was present during the meeting between Bangabandhu and Yahya Khan.

On the same day, the junta let it be

known to the Awami League that a draft proclamation had been prepared, a copy of which was made available to the party.

The Awami League thought the draft proclamation had quite a few serious loopholes in it and therefore made its own suggestions, the gist of which was that the proclamation should come into force seven days after it was issued or seven days after five new governors for the provinces took the oath of office.

[Sources: Liberation War Museum, Bangladesh Genocide Archive and The Daily Star archive]

Quader's surgery

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Quader to Singapore.

After surgery, Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, has been kept at post-operative care, said the BSMMU physician after briefing of Kumaraswamy on Quader's health.

The minister's family sought blessings from the country's people for

Quader's early recovery.

On March 3, Quader was admitted to BSMMU following breathing complications, but tests revealed that he had three blockages in the coronary artery.

He was flown to Singapore the next day for treatment at the Mount Elizabeth Hospital.

Daylong protest over unsafe road

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if their demands are not met by then.

The protest for safer roads began on Tuesday after a BUP student was run over by a Suprobbat Paribahan bus, which was reportedly in competition with another bus of the same company, in the capital's Bashundhara area.

Similar student protests rocked the country in July last year, after two college students were killed near the airport by a Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan bus, which was also competing with another.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority yesterday suspended operation of all the buses of the two operators -- 167 of Suprobbat Paribahan and 29 of Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan.

Earlier in the day, several thousand students from different educational institutions blocked key points of different city roads at Shahbagh, Science Laboratory Intersection, Bashundhara, Farmgate, Roy Shaheb Bazar, Uttara and other places on Mirpur road.

Traffic at some points came to a complete standstill for hours as a result.

Students of Dhaka University, Jagannath University, North South University, Brac University, Independent University, American International University, Eastern

University, East West University, Dhaka University, Shaheen College, Dhaka College, Dhaka City College, Tejgaon College, Ideal College, and Govt Laboratory High Schools are among those who staged protest in the capital.

In Sylhet, students of Shahjalal University also demonstrated over the same demands.

At Shahbagh and Science Laboratory in the capital, students were seen maintaining traffic and checking driving licences and registration papers of vehicles, bringing to mind last year's road safety protest.

Traffic police who were on duty at Nilkhet, New Market, Elephant Road and Science Lab intersection left their post as students began controlling the traffic.

Students found some government vehicles, including those of police, without licence and other valid papers.

They wrote different slogans on those vehicles such as "Fake, fake".

Meanwhile, the High Court yesterday ordered the Suprobbat Paribahan owner to give Tk 10 lakh in seven days to the family of Abrar Ahmed, who joined last year's road safety protest.

"Most of the demands we placed during last year's road safety movement have not been met yet. They just

make promises after an accident but forget them afterwards," said a student of Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College, that was at the heart of last year's protest.

Both the students killed last year near the airport were from this college.

"We, the students, have shown how to manage traffic smoothly during last year's campaigning. You are trained, professional force members but why are you failing to do so?" a student said pointing finger at the law enforcers.

FOOTBRIDGE INAUGURATED
Before the meeting with student representatives, the DNCC mayor inaugurated the construction of a footbridge where the accident happened.

Atiqul said all the demands placed by the students were logical. "I want to meet the all demands today, but meeting some of the demands will take some time."

"We also want justice. I want justice.... I don't want loss of a single life on the city streets."

The DMP commissioner also expressed solidarity with the students, but the students shouted at him, saying "We want implementation of our demands, not solidarity."

Some students also called him "fake".