

Schoolgirl raped in Pirojpur

Accused held, sent to jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

A Pirojpur court yesterday sent a man to jail on charges of raping a 14-year-old girl in the district's Sadar upazila on Tuesday night.

The accused is Maruf Mollah, 19, a neighbour of the victim.

Maruf along with Ayban Mollah, 20, picked up the girl from her home on Tuesday evening when all her family members were out. They took her to a nearby orchard and raped her, the girl's mother said.

The girl was later found in the orchard at night as the criminals left her there tying her hands and mouth, she added.

SM Ziaul Haque, officer-in-charge

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Don't raise prices

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edible oil during the upcoming Ramadan. It is my request to you all," she said while exchanging views with Mostafa Kamal, chairman of Meghna Group of Industries, and also the owner of Meghna Industrial Economic Zone, Sonargaon.

The PM made the same request to the owner of Abdul Monem Economic Zone, Munshiganj.

Hasina stressed the need for protecting arable land by not setting up industries haphazardly. She said the government was setting up 100 economic zones in the country to designate specific areas for industrialisation so that cropland was not destroyed.

She said Bangladesh achieved much development in the last decade due to proper planning by the government.

The government took measures to explore the local markets for locally-produced goods by increasing the people's purchasing power, the PM told the programme.

Hasina said the industrialists could catch the markets of neighbouring countries as the government was improving connectivity with them through the BBIN connectivity and the BCIM economic corridor.

Reaffirming that the main goal of her government's activities was to create jobs, she said, "No youth will remain unemployed. They will get training. We are ensuring training and education for them."

During the views-exchange with stakeholders of Mirsarai Economic Zone, the PM said she would not allow acquiring cropland for setting up economic zones or industries.

PM's Private Industry and Investment Adviser Salman F Rahman was present at the programme, organised by Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority.

An audio-visual presentation on the activities of the economic zones was made on the occasion.

The 11 economic zones inaugurated by the PM are Mongla Economic Zone in Bagerhat, Meghna Economic Zone, Meghna Industrial Economic Zone, Aman Economic Zone and City Economic Zone in Narayanganj, Abdul Monem Economic Zone in Munshiganj, Bay Economic Zone in Gazipur, Kishoreganj Economic Zone in Kishoreganj, East West Special Economic Zone in Dhaka, Karnaphuli Dry Dock Special Economic Zone in Chattogram and Srihatta Economic Zone in Moulvibazar.

The 13 economic zones of which the foundation stones were laid are Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Industrial Estate in Chattogram and Feni, Mirsarai Economic Zone-2A, BGMEA Garments Park (Mirsarai) in Chattogram, Mongla Economic Zone-2 in Bagerhat, Moheshkhali Economic Zone in Cox's Bazar, Jamalpur Economic Zone in Jamalpur, Sirajganj Economic Zone in Sirajganj, Akij Economic Zone in Mymensingh, Cumilla Economic Zone in Cumilla, Bashundhara Special Economic Zone (Keraniganj) and Arisha Economic Zone in Dhaka, and Standard Global Economic Zone and Hosendi Economic Zone in Munshiganj.

Choppers

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member committee has been formed to recommend how to ensure security checking for the people who travel by private helicopters.

The committee would also recommend how the helicopters would operate, the official said.

The issue of smuggling yaba through air routes has never come to light since passengers of helicopters did not need to go through security checking or scanning.

The law enforcers began anti-narcotics drives on May 4, last year and have brought all the routes, air and highways, under tougher vigilance since then.

Since the drives started, Airport Armed Police Battalion (AAPBn) arrested some 35 passengers of aircrafts and seized around 65,000 yaba pills at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka.



The congested multi-storey apparel market Bangabazar in the capital is one of the shopping centres marked risky, inset, by the fire department. The pictures were taken yesterday morning.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Locals face graver food insecurity

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districts in Bangladesh and the host populations face higher levels of food insecurity than the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar," the report said.

"Many have lost access to farm lands, fishing grounds and forest resources and have been deprived of their livelihoods. Many of them have been compelled to work as wage labourers, but the availability of cheaper refugee labour has made jobs scarce and pushed down daily wage rates."

According to the report, the locals also face decreased access to basic services and an increase in staple food prices because of higher demand.

Food security for host communities showed a marked deterioration, with the percentage of households with poor or borderline food consumption increasing sharply from 31 percent in 2017 to 80 percent in August to September 2018, the report said.

"Yes, there is a crisis. The crisis will

be aggravated further in the coming days. Locals are using the agricultural lands for commercial purposes as it is more profitable. The amount of agricultural land is on the decline and it will have adverse impacts on the local community," Md Kamal Hossain, deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar, told The Daily Star.

Between August 2017 and March 2018, at least 100 hectares of agricultural land in Teknaf and Ukhiya have either been occupied by Rohingya settlements or rendered useless by sandy soil flowing down from the mountain slopes, the report said.

"Local farmers in Teknaf and Ukhiya have always faced a lack of fresh water for agricultural production. However, fecal contamination levels in the affected areas has intensified scarcity of clean water for cooking and normal daily hygiene, while the population increase has massively increased overall demand for fresh water."

The report said almost 2,000 hect-

ares of forest reserves have also been damaged due to settlements, which has deprived the local community of earning a living from the forest resources.

"Around 750,000 kg of timber, vegetation and roots are collected daily from the forest for cooking fuel," it said.

Since the crisis escalated in August 2017, a ban has been placed on fishing in the Naf River for security and border control reasons.

"This prohibition has placed significant pressure on an estimated 30,000 to 3,000 fishermen and their families," the report said.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) Md Abul Kalam said, "Yes, local community is facing some problems but the crisis is not as big as the report is portraying. In the Rohingya Response programme, more than three lakh locals were included."

The worst food crises in 2018, in

order of severity, were in Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan, South Sudan and north Nigeria. These eight countries accounted for two thirds of the total number of people facing acute food insecurity -- amounting to nearly 72 million people.

According to the report, 14.7 million people facing food insecurity and in need of urgent action are from four countries in South and Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan), which accounts for 13 percent of the GRFC 2019 total.

The report warns that war, extreme weather and economic downfall in 2018 have left more than 113 million in dire need of help.

The study covered acute food insecurity data for 53 countries and excluded 13 countries and territories including North Korea, Venezuela and Western Sahara due to a lack of recently validated data.

Air pollution killed 1.23 lakh in 2017

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period 1990 to 2017, observed that life expectancy in Bangladesh would have seen the highest expected gain of nearly 1.3 years if air pollution levels met the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines.

The report, released on Wednesday by US-based organisations Health Effects Institute and Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, said South Asia was the most polluted area in the world.

Air quality in Asia remained stubbornly poor, especially in Bangladesh the entire population has remained exposed to PM2.5 levels above 35 microgram per cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) since 1990, said the third annual State of Global Air report.

The major sources of pollution, as per the study, are household solid fuels, dust from construction, coal power plants, brick production, transportation and diesel-powered equipment, among others.

Prof Abul Kalam Azad, director general of Directorate General of

Health Services (DGHS), said there was air pollution in Bangladesh, but he didn't know how the deaths were counted in the study.

"There are many diseases, including cardiovascular disease, cancer and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, which have direct and indirect links with air pollution. So it is natural that some people die from air pollution and the life expectancy decreases also," he told The Daily Star.

The DGHS chief said exposure to air pollution is high in Bangladesh as a lot of development projects are underway.

"Bangladeshis are getting exposed to air pollution as a huge number of people are living in a small area. We are aware of it and the environment, forest and climate change ministry should come forward with a specific action plan to reduce air pollution," he observed.

In 2017, air pollution was the fifth highest mortality risk factor globally and was associated with about 4.9 million deaths and loss of 147 million

years of healthy life, the report added.

In that year, annual PM2.5 exposures were highest in South Asia, with Nepal at 100 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, India 91 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, Bangladesh 61 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, and Pakistan 58 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

Particulate matter (PM) is the sum of all solid and liquid particles suspended in air, many of which are hazardous. This complex mixture includes both organic and inorganic particles, such as dust, pollen, soot, smoke, and liquid droplets.

The study found that 3.6 billion people (47% of the global population) were exposed to household air pollution from the use of solid fuels for cooking in 2017. These exposures were most common in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and East Asia.

Long-term exposure to outdoor and indoor air pollution contributed to nearly five million deaths from stroke, diabetes, heart attack, lung cancer and chronic lung disease in 2017.

Building on a fundamental understanding of how air pollution affects health, researchers quantify the bur-

den of disease from air pollution by calculating how air pollution exposures translate into numbers of deaths and years lived with disease or disability.

A BIG THREAT

According to the report, air pollution is responsible for more deaths worldwide than many better-known risk factors such as malnutrition, alcohol use, and physical inactivity. Each year, more people die from air pollution-related diseases than from road traffic injuries or malaria.

Air pollution reduces average life expectancy by almost as much as active tobacco smoking does.

The report for the first time mentioned type-2 diabetes as a major health risk of air pollution.

In 2017, about 1.5 million people died in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan due to air pollution-related reasons, the study said.

It also mentioned that nearly half of the world's population (3.6 billion people) was exposed to household air pollution in 2017.

Modi criticises

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actual age of democracy in India was barely 15-16 years as "family rule stifled talent and spread the poison of casteism" in society.

"I saw this sham manifesto (dhakosla patra) released by the Congress. It is meant to break the morale of our security forces."

"It promises removing AFSPA from disturbed areas like Kashmir. This is an attempt to render our brave soldiers helpless in the fight against terror, have their hands and feet tied." Modi told an election rally in the north Bengal town of Siliguri.

He accused the Congress of being "soft" on terror because of its "appeasement" politics, which was reflected in its governments scrapping tough anti-terror laws like TADA and POTA.

"We too scrapped over 1,400 obsolete laws from statute books. We have also withdrawn the AFSPA from some areas after peace returned there. The Congress's election promise will help those peddling terror from Pakistan," he said in Kolkata, accusing the Congress party of "playing with national security and trying to destabilise the country".

The prime minister said the manifesto showed that the Congress had no faith in the security forces and the law of the land.

"This chowkidar stands as a wall between the sham manifesto of the Congress and national security. This manifesto has come with an expiry date-- May 23 (the day poll results will be announced). On May 23, both the Congress and its 'dhakosla patra' will be gone," he said.

At both the rallies, Modi slammed opposition parties for seeking proof of the damage done by the Indian Air Force in Pakistan's Balakot where terror group Jaish-e-Mohammed's training camps were targeted to avenge the killing of 40 CRPF troopers in Kashmir's Pulwama.

"While your chest swelled with pride and you held your head high, some people began crying and shouting here," he said.

"When the wound has been inflicted there (in Pakistan), why do you (the opposition) feel the pain. The 'Didi' sitting in Kolkata felt the pain more than it was felt in Islamabad, Lahore and Rawalpindi," Modi said, taking a swipe at Mamata, who had demanded proof of the extent of damage inflicted during the IAF raids in Balakot.

The Prime Minister asserted that India was taking rapid strides towards becoming a "super power". "Be it the surgical strike, air strike or the satellite strike in space, India is rapidly marching towards becoming a super power and the world has realised this," he asserted and targeted the previous Congress governments over the "lack of political will" to execute these despite having the necessary capabilities.

He accused both the Congress and the TMC of "perpetuating family rule".

"In 55 years that a family ruled India, it stifled the talent of young people and spread the poison of casteism in society. It is being repeated in West Bengal where the aunt (Mamata Banerjee) and nephew (party MP Abhishek Banerjee) are looting people," he alleged.

The Prime Minister cautioned people against voting for the TMC which has "inherited the bomb and gun culture" from the Left.

Seeking to strike a chord with the electorate of north Bengal where illegal immigration is a sensitive and divisive issue, Modi said his government will act against infiltrators with the same toughness it had exhibited while tackling terrorists and naxalites.

"But I want to ensure you that bonafide refugees, who have suffered because of the faulty policies of the Congress, will get justice ... This chowkidar will ensure it. None of our Gorkhas will be made to suffer," he asserted.

Calling Mamata a "speed breaker" in the way of West Bengal's development, Modi said he was waiting for that to get out of the way so the state can march forward.

"I have not been able to ensure the development of Bengal with the same speed as the rest of the country. The reason for this is that in Bengal there is a speed breaker, and this speed breaker is known as Didi," Modi said, attacking the West Bengal chief minister.

He alleged that Mamata put hurdles in the way of implementation of the Centre's welfare schemes like Ayushman Bharat Yojana, PM Kisan Samman Yojana and the Real Estate Regulatory Authority Act (RERA).

World's deepest

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underwater tunnel for spectators.

Surrounding conference and training suites will also look out onto the pool's interior, as will hotel "rooms with a view."

Once it opens, Deepspot will knock the Italian Y-40 Deep Joy off the top spot. Located in the Montegrotto Terme resort area, near Venice, the pool there is the star attraction of the Hotel Millipini.

Yet if all goes to plan, Deepspot will not hang on to the accolade for long as an even deeper pool is expected to open in Britain in 2020. Currently being built in Colchester, the Blue Abyss will be 50 metres deep.

John Vickers, managing director of Blue Abyss, says his project is "more than just a super-sized pool", and will operate as a "commercial astronaut training centre... and a human performance centre helping people reach the peak of their physical capabilities."

From digital to manual

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fitness checked manually.

A vehicle inspector, two mechanics, and four to five Ansar men were seen working.

Talking to The Daily Star, one of the mechanics, said only commercial vehicles used to be checked automatically, and the machine used to provide information on emissions, headlights and brakes and also on whether the vehicle was capable of reaching 35kmph.

A sensor in the machine started throwing errors in November and all sensors stopped working in January, he said, adding that the software malfunctioned as well.

"What can we do now but give fitness clearance after checking vehicles manually?" he said wishing not to be named.

He blamed lack of maintenance expertise and overuse of the machine for the breakdown.

After the student movement for road safety in July-August last year, BRTA started automatically checking

70 to 100 vehicles a day. But officials said the machine had the capability to check only 25 to 30 vehicles a day.

The machine that went out of order was not new.

The government installed five such machines in 1997, one each at Mirpur and Ekuria in the capital, and in Chattogram, Khulna and Rajshahi.

But within a few days, BRTA stopped using them as it experienced "technical issues", said BRTA officials.

However, sources said the automated vehicle inspection project was abandoned for years as "beneficiaries of the manual inspections resisted the use of the machine."

It took the BRTA almost two decades to refurbish and resume operations of the machine at the Mirpur office. The other four are still not being used.

The machine, which was restored in 2016 under a Tk 24.17 crore project, broke down due to lack of maintenance expertise and overuse, BRTA officials said. Setting up of the BRTA's data centre and procurement of some

equipment were under the project, the officials said.

They said they were trying to have the machine fixed with the help of Korea International Cooperation Agency (KICA), which had funded the 2016 project.

They, however, could not say when it will be running again.

Vehicle Inspector Ruhul Amin said they did not get any training on how to use the machine or how to maintain it.

Training on the use of the machine and its maintenance was not part of the project, an official said.

Ruhul said by checking the vehicles manually, they were giving fitness clearance to 150 to 200 buses and trucks a day. Manual checks take less time, he said.

Kazi Md Saifun Newaz, assistant professor of Accident Research Institute (ARI) at Buet, said the BRTA offices face huge pressure of vehicles every day.

"But if you look at it from the safety perspective, some aspects like brakes

and emissions must be tested by the machine," he said, adding that the government should install more such automated machines.

"How come a VIC [vehicle inspection centre] remains inoperative for so long?"

Muhammad Morshedul Alam, assistant director (fitness section) of the BRTA, said they wrote to their higher authorities who in turn have talked to KICA.

BRTA Director (operations) Sitangshu Shekhar Biswas told The Daily Star on Sunday that they asked the ministry concerned for Tk 12 lakh to repair the machine.

"Once we get the funds, the repairs will start," he said.

Until December last year, about 38 lakh vehicles were registered with the BRTA. Of them, 24.5 lakh are motorcycles and do not require annual fitness certificates.

On average, some 6.5 lakh vehicles obtain fitness certificates every year, a BRTA official said.