

BNP trashes Khaleda Zia's parole reports

UNB, Dhaka

BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday termed 'baseless' different media reports on their chairperson Khaleda Zia's release on parole saying that there has been no decision yet in this regard.

"Several newspapers have been publishing news with different headlines on the issue (of parole) for a few days. I would like to clearly say Khaleda Zia didn't give any decision to go (abroad) for treatment on parole," he said.

The BNP leader came up with the remarks while speaking at the annual general meeting of a faction of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) at the Jatiya Press Club.

About their meeting with Khaleda at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) on Sunday, he said as prisoners are allowed to meet their relatives and friends on the special occasions like New Year, they took the chance and met their chairperson. "But there's nothing to invent from such a meeting."

Reacting to a media report on Khaleda's release on parole for going to the UK, Fakhrul said an English newspaper ran news with specific date and day of their chairperson's release on parole. "It's very unfair."

"It's also regrettable that they (the English daily) contacted me for comment, and I said it's completely baseless and untrue. Even after that, they published it prominently. We urge all to refrain from exercising such yellow journalism and not to confuse people," he said.

The BNP secretary general also called upon journalists to talk to responsible BNP leaders before running any news on important issues relating to their party.

He also observed that social media platforms are now being used for the character assassination of people, including the politicians. "It's a social crisis, and the media people should think about it."

The BNP leader alleged that a ruling party-backed quarter is controlling the media in a planned way and working to build society as per the government's desire.

He said the media is being controlled in such a way by creating an appalling situation that many popular intellectuals now cannot join television talk shows. "Now, it has become difficult to provide authentic information."

Fakhrul said many journalists who tried to present accurate information lost their jobs after the national election. "A section of journalists is now in a good position, but not majority ones while many are jobless."

He called upon all to mobilise public support to change the current situation and protect press freedom and people's rights.

The BNP leader alleged that the law-and-order situation has badly deteriorated in the country as the current government has no accountability to people. "The law enforcers have taken a position against people."

Fakhrul also bemoaned that politics has now got polluted so badly that it is difficult for good people to survive in politics.

3 girls

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Municipality premises.

Talking to The Daily Star, the victim said she agreed to ride the auto-rickshaw as Sukkur was previously known to her.

The youths recorded the rape and threatened the girl to release on social media if she shares the matter with anyone or denies to get involved in sexual relationship with them as per their desire, the victim added.

Eardous Hasan, officer-in-charge of Kulaura Police Station, said they detained one of the accused following the victim's statement and were conducting raids in different areas to hold rest of the youths.

Aman Ullah, program officer of One Stop Crisis Center at Kulaura Health Complex, said the girl was sexually abused.

Elsewhere in Rajshahi's Bagmara upazila, a 12-year-old girl was allegedly raped by her cousin on Monday night.

The accused Al Amin, 20, took the girl to an abandoned house near their home and raped the girl. Hearing her scream, locals rescued the girl and held Al Amin. Later, he was handed over to police, Ataur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Bagmara Police Station.

Meanwhile in Chattogram, a 16-year-old garment worker alleged that CNG-run auto-rickshaw driver had been raping her for a week by promising marriage.

The victim also alleged that the family members of the accused physically tortured her.

The incident came to notice after police arrested the accused Nizam and five of his family members on Monday night.

Our Cumilla, Moulvibazar, Rajshahi and Chattogram correspondents contributed to the report.



Strikers paralyse waterways

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In the latest development, the federation early today postponed the strike for 45 days following a meeting between its leaders, transport owners and officials of the labour ministry.

Afsar Hossain Chowdhury, organising secretary of the federation, confirmed it to The Daily Star at 12:57am today.

State Minister for Labour and Employment Begum Monnujan Sufian was also present at the meeting that ended around 12:45am today, he said.

The meeting decided that the workers' demands would be met through discussions between all stakeholders within the next 45 days, mentioned Afsar.

The Daily Star could not get the versions of the water transport owners and the labour ministry officials about it.

Earlier, Chowdhury Ashikul Alam, general secretary of the federation, said they had warned the transport owners and the relevant authorities on February 27 that they would go for an indefinite work stoppage unless their demands were met by March 20.

He further said they had to observe work stoppage as the authorities did not pay heed to their demands.

Transport owners, however, termed the strike "illegal and illogical", and claimed that they had not been informed about the strike beforehand.

The labour ministry on Monday held a meeting with transport owners and some labour leaders who represent a relatively small number of workers. The labour leaders agreed to stay away from work stoppage.

But the leaders of the federation, which represents more than two lakh workers, said they did not attend the meeting as many of the participants were "involved in extortion" in the sector.

SUFFERINGS

Visiting Sadarghat, the country's largest launch terminal, from 2:30pm to 5:00pm, this correspondent saw many people waiting for launches.

Only 12 launches were anchored at the terminal while scores were docked on the other side of the Buriganga.

Alamgir Kabir, joint director (marine safety and traffic management) of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), told this newspaper around 5:00pm that no launch had left the terminal since yesterday morning.

Around 80 launches operate from Sadarghat on 43 routes across 22 southern districts every day to carry about one lakh passengers, he mentioned.

Most of the 18 launches on Dhaka-Chandpur route operate in the daytime while those on other routes usually leave Sadarghat in the evening and at night, Alamgir mentioned.

Later at 7:45pm, he told this correspondent over the phone that some 10 launches had left the terminal.

Khwaza Mohib, sales officer of Green Line Water Ways, said their double-decker launch with a capacity of around 250 passengers, did not leave Sadarghat due to the strike.

There were many passengers who remained stranded at Sadarghat for hours.

One of them, Joynal Abedin, came to the capital from Borguna's Amtali upazila along with his sister and nephew for an urgent work on Monday and wanted to return home yesterday.

"We learnt about the strike after arriving here. How will we go home now?"

BUSINESSES HAMPERED

Unloading of around 12 lakh tonnes of imported goods from 30 mother vessels remained suspended at the outer anchorage of the Chattogram Port, according to the website of the

Chattogram Port Authority.

Besides, three lakh tonnes of goods were not unloaded from 16 lighter vessels at private jetties in the Karnaphuli River, Khorshed Alam, joint secretary of the federation, told this newspaper.

Transportation of goods by lighter vessels on inland water routes also came to a halt due to the strike, he said, adding that around 22,000 people are employed in the water transport sector in the port city.

No goods were loaded or unloaded at Mongla port and Khulna BIWTA Ghat, reports our Khulna correspondent, quoting a BIWTA official.

Moreover, none of the launches that operate on seven routes left Khulna BIWTA Ghat, said Sanowar Hosain, BIWTA joint director in Khulna.

Visiting the BIWTA Ghat and Roosevelt Jetty, our correspondent found that around a hundred vessels remained anchored in the Bhairab River and near the BIWTA Ghat.

Probir Bawali, a passenger, was waiting at the BIWTA Ghat with heavy luggage. He was unaware of the strike.

He came to know about the strike after reaching the terminal.

"There is no other way for me to go home with all these belongings," said Probir, who was trying to board a launch to go to Kalaboghi in the district's Dakope upazila.

The strike also spelled troubles for the businesspeople in Khulna region as they depend heavily on water transport to carry goods between Khulna Boro Bazar and Nayapara wholesale market.

In Barishal, operation of passenger vessels was suspended on 18 routes in the southern region, causing immense sufferings to hundreds of passengers.

Many of them were compelled to leave for their destinations by road, reports our correspondent.

Henry Swapon, a Dhaka-bound

passenger, said, "I need to go the capital immediately with my family, but it's not possible because of the strike."

Our correspondents from Narayanganj and Pirojpur also reported that no long-haul launches operated in the districts.

SPAT OVER STRIKE

Labour leaders said the government announced a new pay scale in 2016 with increased wages for workers following a countrywide strike.

But many owners, especially those of passenger carriers, do not follow the pay scale, alleged Mahabubul Haque, a member of the federation's executive council.

The workers have to take huge risk while working at vessels. But if a worker dies on duty, his family gets only Tk 2 lakh, he said, adding that the amount should be increased to Tk 10 lakh.

Prokash Dutta, office secretary of the federation, said they announced a work stoppage in July 2017 to press home their 21-point demands, including the current 11 points. Later, they postponed it upon assurance from the government and launch owners, but their demands have not been met.

However, Golam Kibria Tipu, chief adviser of Bangladesh Inland Waterways (passenger carriers) Association, said a group of workers called strike "only to create anarchy".

He said they increased workers' wages by 114 percent in 2016, and that according to the agreement between owners, the federation and the government, the workers cannot call any strike for additional pay in five years.

"Their strike is illegal," Tipu, also a Jatiya Party lawmaker from Barishal, told The Daily Star.

Badiuzzaman Badal, senior vice president of the association, said they were not informed beforehand about the strike.

As per the circular, if a chief judicial magistrate is not available in a district or metropolitan area for doing this job, any other "competent" magistrate can be given the responsibility.

Asked, Zakir told The Daily Star that "competent" magistrate means a male magistrate who has a good reputation in dealing with such cases.

As per the circular, if the chief judicial magistrates and chief metropolitan magistrates face any problems in complying with the directives, they have been requested to bring this to the SC's notice.

Replying to a question, Zakir said there are female judicial magistrates in all districts and metropolitan areas in the country.

He said the circular has been issued as per recommendation from the Supreme Court Special Committee for Judicial Reforms, which was formed in 2010 under the leadership of Justice Muhammad Imman Ali, a senior judge of the Appellate Division.

Other members of the committee are Justice Zinat Ara, Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed, Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury, Justice Obaidul Hassan, Justice Md Rezaul Hasan and Justice Md Abu Zafor Siddique.

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The arrestee, Md Shamim, 19, is a classmate of Nusrat, said PBI Inspector Shah Alam.

Shamim's link to the murder came up in the confessional statements of two accused -- Nuruddin and Shahadat Hossain Shamim -- recorded by a Feni court on Sunday.

Md Shamim and another youth named Shakil took position under the cyclone shelter, now being used as the madrasa's administrative building, when Nusrat was being set on fire on the rooftop of the building.

A Feni court yesterday ordered sending Shamim to jail after police produced him before the court.

With this, police have so far arrested 14 people in connection with the Nusrat murder.

Shab-e-Barat

FROM PAGE 1

The High Court on Monday did not allow a religious organisation to file a petition seeking to observe the holy Shab-e-Barat on an earlier date.

In its observation, the bench termed the issue "a sensitive matter" and said it should not be brought before the court.

It asked petitioners to wait until today's, when a committee -- formed on April 13 to resolve the confusion over the date of the holy night.

Majlis Ruiatul Hilal, described by their lawyer as an "unregistered international moon-sighting committee", sought permission from the HC to move the writ petition seeking its directives on the Islamic Foundation so that it declares that Shab-e-Barat would be observed on the night of April 20 as the Sha'ban moon was sighted in Bangladesh on April 6.

The HC bench of Justice FRM Nazmul Ahasan and Justice KM Kamrul Kader, however, did not permit the writ petition to be filed.

Shab-e-Barat is observed on the 15th night of the Arabic month of Shaban and people of Muslim Ummah offer special prayers, recite the Holy Quran and take part in other religious rituals.

The National Moon Sighting Committee on April 6 announced that Shab-e-Barat will be observed on April 21 in Bangladesh as the moon of the month of Sha'ban was not sighted in Bangladesh sky on April 6.

But there were claims that the moon was sighted on April 6 and to resolve the confusion, the government formed an 11-member sub-committee on April 13.

During today's meeting, the sub-committee prompted the National Moon Sighting Committee to uphold its previous decision.

Only female

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rape or sexual assault before male magistrates in some cases," it added.

To deal with the situation, a female magistrate is needed to record the statements from the victims so that they can narrate the incidents without any hesitation and confusion, it added further.

The chief judicial magistrates and chief metropolitan magistrates were specially requested by the Supreme Court Special Committee for Judicial Reforms to confer this responsibility on the female magistrates.

Contacted, Advocate Fahmida Akther Rinky, who has been dealing with such cases for more than a decade, said victims of rape or sexual harassment would feel comfortable giving their accounts before female magistrates. Until now, who to record victims' statements had never been an issue.

"Victim's account is an important piece of evidence in a case of rape or sexual harassment," the lawyer said, adding that more female magistrates should be recruited to ensure the comfort of the victims in describing how they got raped or assaulted.

The circular also read if a female magistrate is not available in a district or metropolitan area for doing this job, any other "competent" magistrate can be given the responsibility.

Asked, Zakir told The Daily Star that "competent" magistrate means a male magistrate who has a good reputation in dealing with such cases.

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