

RAPE, REPRESSION

HC blames it on moral degradation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing concern over the rape and repression of women across the country, the High Court yesterday observed that the moral degradation reached such a situation that these kinds of incidents are taking place repeatedly.

There were previous reported allegations against Sonagazi madrasa's principal Siraj Ud Doula of sexual assaults on female students, but the governing body of the institution did not take any action against him, the HC said, adding that if it took action then student Nusrat Jahan Rafi would not have faced such deplorable consequences.

The HC bench of Justice FRM Nazmul Ahasan and Justice KM Kamrul Kader said children and mothers were becoming victims of rape and such incidents were taking place all over the country.

All concerned authorities, including politicians, teachers, students, guardians and governing body members, have to be aware and must play roles to prevent such incidents, the court said.

The bench came up with the observation while hearing the writ petition filed challenging the local administration's inaction and failure to take legal action against the people responsible for the rape and suicide of a woman in Noakhali's Subarnachar upazila in

March.

Advocate Muntasir Mahmud Rahman submitted the writ to the HC on March 4 following newspaper reports published on March 3 saying that a woman named Poly Akter, 22, in Subarnachar "died by suicide after she was raped by one Alauddin".

Yesterday, the HC issued a rule asking the respondents to explain in four weeks why their inaction and failure to take action against those responsible for the rape and suicide of Poly Akter, and instead holding an arbitration to settle the incident, should not be declared illegal.

LGRD secretary, deputy commissioner of Noakhali, officer-in-charge of Subarnachar Police Station, and the chairman and members concerned of Mohammadpur union parishad have been made respondents to the rule.

Advocate Muntasir Mahmud Rahman told The Daily Star that local union parishad members and local "influential people" detained Alauddin, held arbitration and fined him Tk 60,000 after he allegedly raped Poly Akter on March 1.

The following day, Poly drank poison and doctors declared her dead after she was taken to Noakhali General Hospital, he added.

Deputy Attorney General ABM Abdullah Al Mahmud Bashar appeared for the state.

DIVORCE ISSUES

Why not formulate guidelines for Arbitration Board

HC asks govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday ordered the government to explain in four weeks why it should not be directed to formulate a set of guidelines for the Arbitration Board to ensure child custody, alimony and other expenses in the spirit of the holy Quran and international conventions after one gets a divorce notice from their spouse.

In the rule, the court also asked the respondents to explain why they should not be ordered to make the arbitration board effective to solve these issues.

The Cabinet Division, law ministry, women and children affairs ministry, LGRD ministry as well as the Law Commission's chairman have been made respondents to the rule.

Justice FRM Nazmul Ahasan and Justice KM Kamrul Kader gave the ruling following a writ petition filed by

Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association Secretary Seema Zahur and its lawyer Kazi Muruful Alam.

They submitted the petition after Bangla daily Prothom Alo published a report on August 27, 2018, headlined "One divorce per hour in Dhaka".

Under the Muslim Family Act 1961, a divorce becomes effective in 90 days after issuance of a divorce notice if the husband or wife does not resolve the matter among themselves or apply for its withdrawal, said petitioners' lawyer Fawzia Karim Feroze.

The Arbitration Board calls the husband and wife thrice during this period and if none of them respond, the divorce becomes effective.

But the issues such as child's custody, alimony and other expenses remain unresolved. This is why many people file cases that take long to be resolved, Fawzia said.

No sign of arson

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"Our job today is to monitor the structure and its movements," said fire service spokesman Gabriel Plus.

The fire swiftly ripped through the cathedral's timbered roof supports, where workmen had been carrying out extensive renovations to the spire's wooden frame.

The Paris prosecutor has opened an investigation into "involuntary destruction by fire". Police yesterday began questioning the workers involved in the restoration, the prosecutor's office said.

Hundreds of stunned onlookers had lined the banks of the Seine river late into the night as the fire raged, reciting prayers and singing liturgical music in harmony as they stood in vigil.

It was at Notre-Dame that Napoleon was made emperor in 1804, Pope Pius X beatified Joan of Arc in 1909 and former presidents Charles de Gaulle and Francois Mitterrand were mourned.

Messages of condolence flooded in from around the world.

Pope Francis, the leader of the Catholic Church, was praying for those affected, the Vatican said, adding: "Notre-Dame will always remain - and we have seen this in these hours - a place where believers and non-believers can come together in dramatic would always remain a symbol of French national unity."

Britain's Queen Elizabeth expressed deep sadness while her son and heir Prince Charles said he was "utterly heartbroken".

Chinese President Xi Jinping said yesterday that his country was "deeply saddened" by the fire that ripped through the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris in a message to Macron.

VOW TO REBUILD

President Emmanuel Macron promised to rebuild Notre-Dame, considered among the finest examples of European Gothic architecture, visited by more than 13 million people a year.

Notre-Dame is owned by the state. It has been at the centre of a years-long

row between the nation and the Paris archdiocese over who should finance badly needed restoration work to collapsed balustrades, crumbling gargoyles and cracked facades.

It was too early to estimate the cost of the damage, said the heritage charity Fondation du Patrimoine, but it is likely to run into the hundreds of millions of dollars.

The rival billionaire owners of France's two biggest luxury fashion empires, Francois-Henri Pinault of Kering and Bernard Arnault of LVMH, pledged 100 million euros and 200 million euros to the restoration respectively. Oil company Total pledged 100 million. The city of Paris said it would provide 50 million.

Paolo Violini, a restoration specialist for Vatican museums, said the pace at which the fire spread through the cathedral had been stunning.

"We are used to thinking about them as eternal simply because they have been there for centuries, or a thousand years, but the reality is they are very fragile," Violini said.

RELICS, ARTWORKS SAVED

The company carrying out the renovation works when the blaze broke out said it would cooperate fully with the investigation.

"All I can tell you is that at the moment the fire began none of my employees were on the site. We respected all procedures," Julien Le Bras, a representative of family firm Le Bras Freres.

Officials breathed a sigh of relief that many relics and artworks had been saved. At one point, firefighters, policemen and municipal workers formed a human chain to remove the treasures, including a centuries-old crown of thorns made from reeds and gold, and the tunic believed to have been worn by Saint Louis, a 13th century king of France.

"Notre-Dame was our sister, it is so sad, we are all mourning," said Parisian Olivier Lebib. "I have lived with her for 40 years. Thank God that the stone structure has withstood the fire."



PHOTO: RAJIB RAHMAN

Despite the risk of landslide in rains and consequent casualties, some families keep living in these tin houses at the foot of Tankir hill of Chattogram. More than 5,000 people are dwelling in the hills of the port city under landslide threat, according to a survey of the district administration.

Clear risky hills

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published on local dailies and advertisements would be telecast on tv channels to raise awareness on landslides.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Mohammad Delwar Hossain, member secretary of the hill management committee and also additional deputy commissioner (revenue) of Chattogram, said that they asked hill owners to remove the families living under threat within one month.

He said, "There is no such place where we can relocate them [the families] permanently. The best solution for them is to go back to their respective areas."

He added that if they rehabilitate them permanently, more and more people will move to the hills to be rehabilitated and that can't be a solution.

Mohammad Rubel, a resident of a

home on slope of Batali Hill -- one of the risky hills, told The Daily Star that asking them to relocate without solutions for rehabilitation appears to be an injustice.

"We understand the threat to our life. We don't come here to live happily. We live here because it is affordable comparing to our income. If they care about our lives, they need to take more responsibility," he said.

The district administration survey found a fall in the number of hills at risk which was 28 last year, but a rise in the number of families living under threat of landslides which was 684.

The administration issued letter in February to the government organisations and the other private owners to remove the settlements from their respective hills.

RECOMMENDATIONS IGNORED

In the aftermath of the 2007 massive

landslide in Chattogram, that claimed 127 lives, a high-powered committee formed by the government made 36 recommendations including rehabilitating the families permanently to safer place.

The recommendations included relocation of the families prone to landslide, rehabilitation to safer place, prohibition of any housing within five kilometres of hills, construction of a wall to protect the slopes and stopping indiscriminate sand extraction from hills among others.

The authorities, including Chattogram district administration and Chattogram City Corporation, could not comply with the recommendations even 12 years after the massive tragedy.

Another massive landslide in 2017 claimed at least 167 lives in greater Chattogram.

Demolition or drama?

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Although equipped with such heavy demolition machinery, the Rajuk team appeared unsure of how to go about the mammoth task of pulling down the gigantic structure.

Despite the HC's deadline being already crossed, Rajuk officials yesterday allowed the occupants seven hours until 5:00pm to take their belongings.

At 5:00pm, Rajuk officials sealed off the building and left.

Continuing to occupy the building after expiry of the deadline is a violation of the court order, said Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, which conducted the case as amicus curie.

NO ONE HAS ANSWERS

Scores of television and print journalists, who had gathered to cover the event, wanted to know from the officials how and when the demolition would start.

These questions led to another round of confusion among the officials.

Khandaker Oliur Rahman reacted angrily as to why reporters were speaking to Rajuk Executive Magistrate Jesmin Akhtar, since she was "not authorised" to speak to the media.

Media personnel then requested Oliur to explain what was going on. He first said Rajuk Chairman Md Abdur Rahman would come to the scene and talk to the media.

Afterwards, he backtracked and said the chairman was busy and would not turn up.

Then at 12:00pm, he said there were some preparations needed before the demolition could begin, for example, disconnecting electricity and water lines.

"There are still occupants in the

building with their belongings. There are some bank vaults. We have to first empty the building of possessions and [then] go for demolition," said Rahman.

Asked whether they had not made sure the building was vacated before coming to demolish it, Oliur said, "Reality is something different. We have to consider it."

While Oliur was answering questions, Rajuk Chief Engineer ASM Raihanul Ferdous suddenly appeared in the scene and opposed Oliur's actions.

"You cannot talk to the media," Ferdous told Oliur.

"Of course I can. I am the director and magistrate in charge of today's demolition work," Oliur replied.

He then went back to answering queries.

"Once vacated, we will disconnect electricity supply to the building and keep all the floors locked-up," said Oliur.

Asked when they would demolish the building, Oliur said, "I don't know exactly...it will take time."

Asked why they had mobilised heavy equipment if they had not intended to demolish the building yesterday, he said, "I will talk to you in this regard later."

Outgoing BGMEA President Siddiqur Rahman could not be reached for comments despite repeated attempts by this newspaper.

The then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina laid the foundation stone of the building on 28 November 1998.

Later on 8 October 2006, the then Prime Minister Khaleda Zia inaugurated the 15-storey BGMEA building.

Afterwards, the highest court found that the building was constructed

illegally.

Following a news report on October 3 in 2010, an HC bench issued a suo-moto rule on the authorities as to why the building should not be demolished.

On April 3 2011, an HC bench ordered the demolition of the illegal building but two days later the Appellate Division stayed the verdict for six weeks and asked BGMEA to file a leave to appeal against the verdict.

On 19 March 2013, the HC in its verdict ordered the relevant authorities to demolish the much-discussed about illegal building in three months.

In its verdict, the court directed BGMEA to refund money to the buyers of floor space in the 15-storey building within a year.

In April last year, the appellate bench of the Supreme Court ordered the BGMEA building be demolished after April 12 this year.

The court termed the building "a cancer in the Hatirjheel project" as it blocked water flow between Hatirjheel lake and Begunbari canal.

Mymensingh

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Mymensingh AL. He was also the ex-mayor of the now defunct Mymensingh municipality.

Our correspondent reported that Jahangir, also president of the Mymensingh JP unit, announced his withdrawal from the election as a show of "honour to the AL president Sheikh Hasina and for the greater unity of the grand alliance".

Organising Secretary of Mymensingh JP Mosharraf Hossain, among others, was present at the press conference.

Five candidates filed nomination papers. The scrutiny of the papers was held on April 10, during which the papers of three independent aspirants were declared invalid for loan default and faulty papers, said Md Alimuzzaman, returning officer for the election.

The candidates are Abu Musa Sarker, Biswajit Bhaduri and Shahidul Islam Swapon Mondal.

On March 25, the Election Commission announced the election schedule for the maiden MCC polls.

A total of 258 aspirants for 33 ward councillor posts, including 70 for 11 women councillor, posts are in the race. Electronic voting machines (EVMs) will be used in all 130 voting centres in 33 wards.

On April 2 last year, the government recognised Mymensingh as the country's 12th city corporation.

AL mayoral candidate Atiqul Islam won the Dhaka North City Corporation by-election, boycotted by the major opposition parties.

Last year, AL candidates won the mayoral positions at Khulna, Gazipur, Barisal and Rajshahi city corporation elections while the BNP candidate won in Sylhet.

Myanmar cops 'abduct' four Bangladeshis from Naf river

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Four Bangladeshi fishermen were kidnapped allegedly by Border Guard Police (BGP) of Myanmar from the Naf River in Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar yesterday.

The fishing trawler they were on was also seized.

The victims -- Azim Ullah, Mohammad Abdullah, Abul Kalam and Mohammad Hasan -- are residents of the upazila's Shah Porir Dwip, our Cox's Bazar correspondent report quoting trawler owner Aman Ullah and locals.

Aman Ullah said his cousin Azim and three other fishermen took his trawler and went to the Naf river near Jaliapara area in the early morning to catch hilsa.

At one point, a team of BGP troops on a speedboat approached the fishing trawler and took away the fishermen at gunpoint, he alleged.

Around 7:00am, one of the fishermen called him over mobile phone from Myanmar saying some "BGP members" had abducted them and wanted Tk 3 lakh as ransom for their release, Aman Ullah claimed.

He said he informed the matter to the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

Contacted, Foysal Hasan Khan, director of BGB Battalion-2 in Teknaf, said, "We learnt about the incident of kidnapping. We are trying to contact BGP high officials."

EC decides to decentralise NID services

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission has decided to decentralise a number of services related to National Identity (NID) cards from January next year to reduce hassles of the citizens across the country.

The responsibilities of correcting and issuing duplicate NID cards will be distributed among different field level officials, including upazila election officers, district election officers and regional election officers.

"Reducing hassles is a challenge for us. We are decentralising the services keeping that in mind," said Brig Gen Saidul Islam, director general of EC's NID wing.

As part of the plan EC will start issuing duplicate NID cards from April 20 this year to the citizens who have lost their original ones.

"We also have plans to issue new NID cards from upazila offices" he added.

Baten also said upazila and district election offices are already equipped with sufficient manpower and machineries.

"We will also monitor whether there is any kind of malpractices at the field offices while providing the services" he added.

Charges framed

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2012 to February 2015. During his tenure, 1,414 acres of land was acquired in Moheshkhali upazila for the power plant, court sources.

In the process, Tk 19.82 crore was pocketed from the land acquisition fund, the sources added.

Later, local businessman AKM Kaisarul Islam Chowdhury filed a case against Ruhul Amin, his deputy Jafor Alam and others in 2014.

The ACC submitted the charge sheet in April 2017.

Mujibnagar Day

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Quamaruzzaman were named cabinet members.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issued separate messages on the occasion.

In his message, the President said, "Independence is the greatest achievement of the Bangalee nation. It's our moral duty to present the proper history of our struggle for independence to the young generation. On the historic Mujibnagar Day, I hope the young generation would know the true history of Liberation War apart from involving themselves in nation-building inspired by patriotism."

In her message, the Prime Minister urged the people of the country to engage themselves in building Bangladesh to make it free from hunger, poverty and illiteracy as dreamt by Bangabandhu.

Awami League and different socio-economic organisations have chalked out elaborate programmes on the occasion.

The ruling party's programmes include hoisting of the national flag and party flags at Bangabandhu Bhaban, party central office and all of its district unit offices at 6:00am.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will place a wreath at the portrait of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Bangabandhu Bhaban in the city at 7:00am.

The AL leaders will place wreaths at the Memorial Monument at Meherpur's Mujibnagar at 10:00am.