

Man sent to jail over rape allegation

STAR REPORT

A man was sent to jail on charges of raping a 12-year-old girl at Sherpur's Sreebordi upazila on Wednesday. Locals said Akram Hossain, 40, raped the fourth grader inside a madrasa on Eid day. Hearing her scream, they rushed to the scene, caught Akram, and handed him over to police.

The victim's father filed a case the same day.

"Akram confessed to raping the child during primary interrogation. He was sent to jail after being produced before court on Thursday," said Ruhul Amin Talukder, officer-in-charge (OC) of Sreebordi Police Station.

Citing case details, he said the victim's family had come to their village from Dhaka to celebrate Eid. Around 2:30pm, Akram, who was a neighbour, allured the girl with biscuits to rape her.

Another rape incident was reported from Rajshahi's Godagari upazila the same day.

Police arrested Fuad Hossain, 28, for attempting to rape a woman from "Orao" indigenous community in Guni village.

Locals said Fuad attacked the victim while she was feeding cattle on a field around 10:30am. He came from neighbouring village Dhatma. Hearing the victim scream, her husband and locals went to the spot and caught Fuad. They beat him up and kept him confined, said Joy

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3.3m people fled Venezuela crisis: UN

AFP, Geneva

An estimated 3.3 million people have fled the crisis in Venezuela since the start of 2016, including one million who have left the country since November, the United Nations said yesterday.

"The pace of the outflow from Venezuela has been staggering," the UN refugee agency (UN-HCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) said in a joint statement.

Economically-devastated Venezuela is suffering from shortages of food, medicine and other essentials amid a power struggle between President Nicolas Maduro and opposition leader Juan Guaido, who has been recognised as interim president by more than 50 countries including the United States.

American actress and UNHCR goodwill ambassador Angelina Jolie will travel this weekend to a Colombian region on the Venezuela border "to assess the humanitarian response to exodus," the agency said.

Colombia is hosting about 1.3 million people displaced from Venezuela, the most of any country, followed by Peru, Chile and Ecuador.

The joint UNHCR-IOM envoy for the crisis, Guatemala's former vice president Eduardo Stein, said there is "an urgent need to support host communities" in the countries receiving displaced Venezuelans.

Ukraine leader vows 'tough response' as two soldiers killed

AFP, Kiev

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday accused Russia of violating peace agreements and vowed a tough response after two soldiers were killed in the war-torn east.

The two servicemen died as a result of artillery shelling near the village of Novoluganske, some 50 kilometres (30 miles) northeast of the main separatist stronghold of Donetsk, Zelensky's office said in a statement.

The use of heavy weaponry is banned under the terms of a peace deal.

Another eight Ukrainian soldiers were injured.

Zelensky, a former comedian who crushed predecessor Petro Poroshenko in April's election, claimed that the new flare-up meant Russia was losing its grip on separatists, who Kiev says receive military support from Moscow.

Clash of styles

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However, Mashrafe seems to place value on the part-time off-spin of Mosaddek especially as Mahmudullah Riyad is unable to bowl because of a shoulder injury.

Like against South Africa, and indeed against New Zealand, it may all come down to whether Bangladesh can play their brand of cricket successfully. Even that may not be enough against a rampant England and like Mashrafe said yesterday, with conditions and fan support favouring the hosts, the Tigers will have to be one step ahead and play better than their opposition today.



A woman cares her newborn baby who was born along the Dhaka-Tangail highway in Tangail's Bhupur upazila on Tuesday. Quoting her husband, police said the woman from Kurigram started to have labour pain when her bus remained stuck in jam for hours. As there was no hospital nearby, the mother delivered the child right beside the highway, with the help of some fellow passengers. The baby was named Sarani, after the place where she was born.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

'Protection of human rights diminished'

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The report analysed what governments have done to promote and defend human rights globally, echoing the principles and values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

"The protection of human rights and democracy in Bangladesh diminished in 2018, and a general election in December was affected by numerous credible allegations of irregularities and by significant violence," it said.

On the occasion of the report's release, UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said in a statement, "Today's report makes for sobering reading. Respect for human rights globally seems to be at an all-time low. As foreign secretary I will ensure that British diplomats continue to defend and protect human rights wherever they are."

The FCO noted that freedom of expression in Bangladesh drew

significant attention of the UK and Bangladesh's civil society following the introduction of the controversial Digital Security Act in October last year.

Bangladesh government sought to reassure the public that the law was designed to protect privacy and maintain religious harmony, but civil society saw it as a restriction on freedom of expression ahead of the general election, it noted.

The UK raised the issue with Bangladesh government and called for the law to be brought in line with the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Referring to rights body Ain o Salish Kendra, the FCO mentioned that 54 journalists were charged last year under the Information and Communication Technology Act, which criminalises posting of inflammatory or derogatory information online against the state or individuals.

Shahidul Alam, a photo journalist and human rights activist, was arrested under the act in August. Jeremy Hunt,

other UK ministers, and the high commission raised Alam's case with Bangladesh government. Alam was released in November, it said.

The report further said the UK was consistent and clear that it wanted to see free, fair, inclusive and peaceful elections, which would support Bangladesh's development as a democratic and prosperous country. Jeremy Hunt delivered this message to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in September during the UN General Assembly.

UK ministers repeatedly raised concerns about the election with Bangladesh government and opposition parties throughout 2018, it noted.

"While it was encouraging that all opposition parties eventually contested the elections, there were credible accounts of obstacles, including arrests, which constrained or prevented campaigning by opposition parties, and of irregularities in the conduct of elections on polling day which

prevented some people from voting."

The UK called for a full, credible and transparent resolution of all complaints related to the conduct of the elections.

The report pointed out that there was sluggish progress in implementation of Bangladesh's National Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking for 2018-2020.

On the Rohingya issue, it said, "Bangladesh showed great generosity in welcoming the Rohingya refugees, and conditions in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar improved in comparison with the start of the crisis in August 2017.

"However, risks remained, including sexual violence, trafficking, violent crime, abduction, exploitation, and limited access to basic services for men, women and children in the camps."

Challenging conditions and issues relating to their legal status under Bangladeshi law meant that access to justice and security remained limited, the report added.

Deaths in 'shootouts' on the rise

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that is totally unexpected in a democratic society."

He claimed that anyone could be apprehended and imprisoned any moment and that there was no rule and law. "There is nothing to protect the helpless individuals from the onslaught of the law enforcement agencies. This is not the Bangladesh we expected," he said.

"We hope that those who make policies and hold the power will sincerely look into the situation and put a halt to extrajudicial killings," Prof Mizan added.

KILLED IN FIVE DAYS

In Cox's Bazar, three Rohingya youths were killed in an alleged gunfight with police over the kidnap of a minor girl in Teknaf upazila early Friday.

Police identified the dead as Ukhiya Rohingya camp inhabitants Shamsul Alam, 35, and Nur Alam, 21, and Leda Camp inhabitant Habib, 20.

Pradip Kumar Das, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, said a three-year-old girl was abducted several days ago. The kidnappers then demanded Tk 5 lakh as ransom from her family.

After the family sought help, police launched drives to rescue her.

The kidnappers released the girl on June 2.

The Rohingya youths were arrested around 11:30pm on Thursday for their suspected involvement in the kidnapping, UNB reported, quoting the OC.

Later around 1:45am, police took them to an area behind the Teknaf's Leda Camp to recover firearms. At that time, some attackers, who were already holed up there, opened fire on police triggering a "gunfight", the OC said.

The three were killed in the "gunfight", the police officer claimed, adding that they also recovered three light guns and eight cartridges from the scene.

In Cumilla's Sadar upazila, an alleged drug smuggler, Helal Uddin, 28, was killed in a "shootout" with a patrol team of the Border Guard Bangla-desh (BGB) around 2:45am on Friday.

Tipped-off, the BGB team were conducting an anti-drug operation when a gang of drug smugglers opened fire on them. The BGB men fired back in self-defence, says a press release from BGB-10.

After the "gunfight", the BGB men searched the area and found bullet-riddled Helal. They also claimed to have recovered 3,000 yaba pills from his possession.

Helal was rushed to Cumilla Medical College Hospital where he

was declared dead.

Abu Salam Mia, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said Helal was accused in seven to eight cases, including drug smuggling.

In Thakurgaon, another suspected drug trader, Monirul Islam Babul, 35, was killed in another alleged gunfight with BGB members at Pirganj upazila early Thursday.

Lt Col Gazi Nahid Uz Zaman, commanding officer of BGB-42, said a BGB team arrested Babul on Wednesday night and recovered 112 bottles of Phensidyl from his possession.

Later, taking Babul along, the team conducted a drive in the area 2:00am to recover more drugs. But, sensing their presence, Babul's associates opened fire on them, forcing them to fire back that triggered a "gun-fight", he claimed.

At one stage, Babul was caught in the line of fire and died while others managed to flee, he claimed.

The BGB members also recovered 75 bottles of Phensidyl, one firearm, Tk 22,000 in cash and a sharp weapon from the spot, he further claimed.

In Chattogram, two suspected robbers were killed early Tuesday in what Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) claimed was a gunfight on the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway in Chhoto

Kumira area in Sitakunda upazila.

The identities of the dead aged between 25 and 35 were yet to be confirmed.

Tipped off, a patrol team of Rab-7 went to the area while a group of robbers were taking preparation to commit robbery. Sensing Rab presence, the robbers opened fire on them, Rab claimed.

Rab members retaliated with gunfire triggering a "gunfight". At one stage, two bullet-hit bodies were recovered from the spot while the other robbers managed to flee, it claimed.

The force also claimed to have recovered three guns and 31 bullets from the spot.

In Gazipur, a suspected drug trader identified as Ismail Hossain, 40, was killed in a "gunfight" with Rab in Tongi on Monday night.

"A Rab team was conducting an anti-narcotics raid in the river port area when drug dealers opened fire on it," said Kamal Hossain, the officer-in-charge of Tongi East Police Station.

"Ismail was killed during the gunfight," he said, adding that an arm, bullets and several thousand yaba pills were recovered from the spot.

[Our Correspondents in Cox's Bazar, Cumilla, Thakurgaon and Chattogram contributed to this report]

44 killed on roads during Eid holidays

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Two others -- Smrity Aktar, 22, and Aynur Islam, 20, -- were killed in separate motorcycle accidents in the district during the Eid vacation.

Eight more motorcycle riders were killed in Barishal, Faridpur, Bagerhat and Jhenaidah.

At least 1,41,129 motorcycles were registered across the country in the first four months this year, meaning 1,176 bikes are registered every day on an average, according to Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

OTHER ACCIDENTS

Five people were killed and 22 injured in a road accident on Dhaka-Khulna Highway in Dhuldi Railgate area of Faridpur's Sadar upazila on the Eid day.

The dead are Sahabuddin Mridha, 35, Nayan Sheikh, 22, Surman Mollah,

32, Malek Majhi, 48, and Shahriyar Asad, 25.

Quoting local, Joynul Islam, sub-inspector of Karimpur Highway Police Station, said, "The accident took place when the driver of a Chuadanga-bound bus of AK Travels lost control and hit a roadside tree around 6:45am."

At least five people were killed and 15 injured in separate road mishaps in Sirajganj.

Two people, including a banker, were killed when a sedan veered off into a roadside ditch at Harinchora area of Hatikumrul-Bonpara highway in the district.

The dead are Emarul Hossain, 42, and Rubel Hossain, 45. Emarul was a branch manager of Agrani Bank.

Three more people were killed in the district in two separate incidents of head-

on collisions between bus and truck on Sirajganj highway during the holiday.

In Cumilla, two children Mainuddin Jisan, 8, and Kawser, 10, were killed as a speedy sedan ran over them in front of Asha Jute Mill beside Dhaka-Chattogram highway on the night of Eid.

Two youths were killed and six others were injured as a pickup collided with a bus on Bangabandhu Bridge Salla area under Kalihati upazila.

In Pirojpur, a bus ran over a 16-month-old child in front of Rabeya Petrol Pump near Chouthaimahal bus station on Tuesday.

In Narsingdi, Mamun Mia, 20 and Abdur Razzak, 28, were killed when a Brahmanbaria-bound bus from Dhaka collided with a local bus on Dhaka-Sylhet highway on Thursday.

In Bogura, a bus driver of Karatoa bus

service Shahidul Islam, 40, was killed in a head-on collision with another bus on Dhaka-Bogura highway on Thursday.

Earlier on the day, Kashem Ali, 42, driver of a van, was killed in an accident.

At least five people, including three Rohingya refugees, were killed in separate road accidents in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

In Teknaf, a pickup van skidded off the road and fell into a ditch at Noakhalipara around 2:00pm, leaving three Rohingyas dead on the spot and 15 others injured, said Md Rabiul Hassan, UNO of Teknaf upazila.

The deceased were identified as Noor Mohammad, 40, Md Idris, 17, and Md Jubayer, 30.

In Chakaria, Roushan Ara, 42, and Sonak Pal, 27, were killed and eight others were injured when two buses collided head-on.

Outcry

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The word "Rohingya" is not used in the report, which instead refers to the community as "Muslims".

It claims automated rather than manual processing of returnees would mean repatriation will be "completed in a little more than two years".

The report praises Myanmar on efforts to ensure "smooth and orderly" returns, echoing the Southeast Asian country's view that delays in repatriation are due to bungled paperwork by Bangladeshi officials.

Bangladesh puts the blame for the setback on Myanmar and says no refugees have yet volunteered to return. 'LUDICROUS'

Amnesty International said it was "astonishing" the report failed to mention the military atrocities that drove the Rohingya out, the continued segregation of those who remained in ongoing armed conflict in Rakhine.

The rights group last week accused the military of committing new "war crimes" in the state as it battles against ethnic Rakhine rebels.

"It's ludicrous to think that returns in this context could be safe, voluntary or dignified," the group's Myanmar researcher Laura Haigh told AFP.

An estimated 400,000 Rohingyas still live in Rakhine often in conditions Amnesty has likened to "open-air prisons", languishing in camps or villages for years with scant access to healthcare or education.

The Asean report dismissed the movement restrictions as "short-term inconveniences" and also said local communities "felt safe" around Border Guard Police (BGP) units accused of helping drive the Rohingya out.

Asean-ERAT could not immediately be reached for comment.

The 10-nation bloc normally sticks to diplomatic niceties and refuses to interfere in the internal affairs of member states although Malaysia has openly condemned Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya.

Critics accuse Myanmar of playing for time by choosing to bring in Asean on the issue of repatriation -- a bloc more sympathetic than the West or the UN.

But Asean will not "enhance the (global) credibility of the process in a significant way," said Soe Myint Aung from the Yangon Centre for Independent Research (YCIR).

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has opened a preliminary probe into military abuses against the Rohingya

The UN refused to comment on the report before receiving it officially. 'CONDITIONS MUST IMPROVE'

In light of the repatriation deal, some 300 Rohingyas can return to Myanmar per day, said Bangladesh's Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Abul Kalam.

This means it will take about a decade for all of the nearly 1 million Rohingyas to go back home, he told The Daily Star.

Expansion of logistics and other facilities can be negotiated with Myanmar, but that is not the major issue here, he said.

The major issues that Rohingya demand are guarantee of citizenship, freedom of movement and safety once they return home. They also want to return to their places of origin, not to temporary camps, he added.

On the claim of delay from the Bangladesh side, the official said there was no reason for Bangladesh to do so. The only thing that Bangladesh wants is sustainable and safe repatriation so that they are not forced to flee to Bangladesh again.

"The conditions in Myanmar must improve for Rohingya repatriation," he said, adding that the forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals raised this issue when the first batch of Rohingyas was scheduled to return in November last year.

Gas surges globally as green groups cry foul

AFP, Paris

2018 was a "golden year" for natural gas with demand surging worldwide, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said yesterday, prompting concern from environmental groups over the climate impact of the world's new favourite fuel.

Demand for gas grew 4.6 percent last year -- the fastest rate since 2010 -- and gas accounted for nearly half of the total increase in worldwide energy consumption, according to the IEA's annual report on the fuel.

The surge in natural gas, which while cleaner than coal remains a fossil fuel that contributes to manmade emissions, was put down to ballooning production in the US and an insatiable demand for alternatives to coal in China.

"In 2018, natural gas played a major role in a remarkable year for energy," the IEA's executive director Fatih Birol said.

"Global energy consumption rose at its fastest pace this decade, with natural gas accounting for 45 percent of the increase, more than any other fuel."

The IEA, the global authority on energy, said that gas had helped play a role in reducing air pollution and limiting the rise of greenhouse gas emissions.

But environment and energy sector analysts said the gas boom could have dire effects on Earth's climate, as scientific warnings of the need to slash fossil fuel use grow ever stronger.