



Family members of slain Rifat Sharif break into tears at a human chain on Barguna town's Sadar Road yesterday, demanding speedy trial and exemplary punishment of those involved in the murder.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

## Court turns down

FROM PAGE 1  
including Minni's statement before a magistrate.

A group of lawyers from rights organisation Ain O Salish Kendra and Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust also stood for Minni at the hearing.

This was the first time, Minni, the key witness to the daylight murder, had legal representation in court. No lawyer stood for her when police produced her before the court, seeking her remand on July 19.

Twenty-five-year-old Rifat, an internet services provider, was hacked to death in broad daylight on June 26 in Barguna town. A video footage of the incident shows Minni trying in vain to save her husband from the attackers.

The prime accused, Sabbir Hossain Nayan, also known as Nayan Bond, was killed in a so-called gunfight with police on July 2 in Barguna.

Police have so far arrested 15 suspects, including Minni who was made an accused during the course of the investigation.

Minni, a student of Barguna Government College, was arrested on July 16 following a 13-hour questioning at Barguna Police Lines.

Police claimed she admitted her link with the attack on her husband, whom she had married just months ago.

Her father Mozammel Hossain, however, claimed his daughter gave the statement under duress.

Yesterday, the court sat at 11:15am and the hearing continued for about half an hour. Minni's father Mozammel and Rifat's father Sharif were present there.

Talking to reporters later, Mozammel said those who created "Nayan Bond" are trying to divert the case.

He claimed that he was feeling insecure and could not move freely.

Contacted, Abir Mohammed Hossain, officer-in-charge of Barguna Police Station, said police will give Mozammel protection if he feels insecure and seeks protection.

**SATURDAY'S MEETING**  
Minni's lawyer Aslam, Barguna District Bar Association President Abdur Rahman Nantu and Assistant Public Prosecutor at the Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court Aktaruzzaman Bahadur met local lawmaker Dharendra Debnath Shambhu at his chamber on Town Hall road on Saturday night.

The meeting lasted for about an hour, said sources.

Asked, Aslam said he and Rahman often meet the MP for association-related issues.

Sometimes, the MP invites them to meetings, he said.

"The MP called us last night [Saturday night]. When we went to his [Shambhu] chamber, we saw his son Sunam Debnath and the assistant public prosecutor [Aktaruzzaman] there. We talked about a different issue and there is nothing wrong here," said Aslam.

"There was no discussion on the [Rifat murder] case at the meeting," he claimed.

Despite repeated attempts, this newspaper could not reach Shambhu for comments.

**SPEEDY TRIAL DEMANDED**  
At a press conference at Barguna Press Club yesterday noon, Rifat's father Sharif demanded speedy trial of the murder case.

Later, he and his relatives formed a human chain in front of the press club, demanding capital punishment of the killers.

[M Jahirul Islam Jewel and Sohrab Hossain contributed to this report]

## Trafficked into nightmares

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small huts.

Take the case of victim Bonya (not her real name).

The 17-year-old girl used to live with her parents in the capital's Mirpur and was looking for a job after completing higher secondary education. She left home after a woman, her neighbour, promised her a better job in India.

On January 28, 2017, she went to Jashore by bus with the woman's boyfriend. From Jashore town, they went to Benapole by motorbike.

"For the next five days, the man kept me in a small hut with a TV, almirah and small bed," Bonya said, talking to The Daily Star in Jashore town after her rescue.

"The man asked me to stay inside the hut and went away. I was not allowed to go outside for security reason, and a woman gave me food timely."

Bonya came back home in March last year with the support of Rights Jessore, a human rights organisation.

"On February 5, the man came back early in the morning and took me near Putkhali where a boat was waiting for me," she said.

"After crossing the river, I found a man with a motorbike. He drove me into a dense forest. One hour later, I saw a locality."

In the area, Bonya was kept at a house and forced to sleep with some men, she said. "After a few days, I was being taken to a brothel area. On the way, I ran from them and went to the local police."

Police then sent Bonya to a shelter home in West Bengal, and she finally made contact with Rights Jessore from there.

This reporter recently visited Putkhali in Benapole, and posing as a client, met a person called Sagar with the help of a local man.

During the conversation about how to cross the border without a passport, Sagar said he could make the arrangement, but it would cost Tk 5,000 because "border security has been heightened recently."

When asked if there were two persons including a woman, Sagar grinned and said he could arrange that too, but the cost would go up to Tk 16,000. "We charge extra for women because it is risky, and it takes time."

After the correspondent agreed, Sagar said, "You need to stay near the

border for one day or two. We will first clear the border for you and then help you cross it."

Sagar demanded an additional Tk 300 for every overnight stay and Tk 200 for food at the hut. He also advised the correspondent to carry some additional cash to buy sweetmeat or fruit on the way.

**CONTROLLING BORDER POINTS**

Locals and law enforcers said each of the border points is run by local ruling party men. They pay hefty amounts to law enforcers to run the trafficking activities smoothly.

Executive Director of Rights Jessore Binoy Krishna Mallick said, "We have learnt from rescued victims and our local network that some people are leading the nexus at border points using political identity."

At present, one Ghana Biswas oversees the Putkhali point, Ashok Sen the Boro Achra point, and Jahidul Islam the Sadipur point of Benapole, The Daily Star learned after talking to some accomplices of the gangs and sources of law enforcement agencies.

They all are supporters of the Awami League and involved in human trafficking for years, but they never got arrested, the sources said. Locally, they are known as farmers but they have luxurious multi-storey homes in nearby Sharsha upazila, they said.

The Daily Star tried to communicate with them but their phones were found switched off.

Rights activists said the gang sells a woman or girl to Indian brothels for Tk 25-30 lakh.

Asked about the alleged complicity of the ruling party men, Awami League's Benapole unit President Enamul Hoque Mukul said some may get involved, but they are doing it very secretly.

"We take strict action against whoever is found guilty."

He said the law enforcers have tightened security, and the situation is improving now.

Asked about AL men's involvement, Lt Col Selim Reza, commander of Border Guard Bangladesh-49 (BGB), refused to give a direct reply.

He, however, said they take action against those found involved in the crime. "The situation has got better now, and the number of trafficking incidents has come down to almost zero for our increased vigilance and action."

Salauddin Sikder, additional

police superintendent of Jessore, said trafficking through the border declined in recent years although there were still some reports of trafficking.

He said he had no specific information about law enforcers' involvement in the crime but warned of action if any member of the force was found guilty.

**NEW TECHNIQUES**

In recent times, the traffickers have changed techniques. Now they get their prey across the border using the "legal" channel.

"For a woman, the traffickers make fake documents like a marriage certificate and a passport. Then they cross the border like a couple going on a trip to India," Masud Karim, officer-in-charge of Benapole Police Station, told The Daily Star.

"In the same way, the traffickers get passports for underage girls. They identify them as children or siblings while making fake passports and documents," said the OC, who claimed to have got the information after interrogating victims.

Now few victims cross the border illegally, he said. "Some are still doing it without passports, but most of them have relatives in India, or they are sick and poor."

Asked about raiding the border huts, the OC said they often conduct drives and take action against the criminals. Sometimes, they also rescue victims from the huts.

**FAKE RELATIONS**

There are some cases in which traffickers marry a girl before selling her to a brothel in India.

On January 18 last year, a Jashore court sentenced one Shohag Hossain of Narail for life and fined him Tk 50,000 for selling his wife to a brothel in Mumbai.

Shohag married the girl of Jashore Sadar upazila on July 7, 2007. Later, he told his in-laws that he would take his wife to India for a better job. The girl's family refused but he kept insisting, the victim family told The Daily Star in May last year.

Finally, Shohag went to India with his wife on April 15, 2009, without letting anyone know. When her family found him missing, they filed a complaint with police and went to Rights Jessore. A few days later, Shohag came back home alone, and said his wife went missing in India.

Rights Jessore rescued the girl from a Mumbai brothel on May 7, 2010, using its network.

## Never-ending trauma of the victims

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over into Kolkata on June 30, 2014, she realised that she became a victim of transnational trafficking gang.

"But it was too late," said Mitu at her Jashore house after a Bangladeshi NGO rescued her from a shelter home in India on August 21, 2017.

"I was sold to pimps who took me to different brothels in Kolkata, Mumbai, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, where I was forced to have sex with customers almost every night," she said as tears welled up in her eyes. "If I ever disobeyed them, they kept me confined to a small dark room and beat me up."

She was rescued by police on January 19, 2015 from hotel Chawla Palace in Nagpur, where a pimp named Rashid Khan Rehan had kept her captive.

Officials later sent her to a shelter home from where she was brought back to Bangladesh.

**UP FOR SALE!**  
Like Mitu many other local women were trafficked to India through different border points of Jashore.

Rights Jessore, which is working to prevent human trafficking and provide service to victims, brought back around 1,117 people from India since 2009 to April this year.

According to police database, around 7,040 victims were rescued from different countries between 2013 to June 2018. Of them, 5,367 were male, 1,138 female and 535 children.

The Daily Star managed to talk to four victims who were rescued from various shelter homes of India from January to April last year by the organisation. Mitu is one of them.

She faced no trouble in the first couple of weeks after going to India with traffickers. One day, the owners of the house in Madhya Pradesh where she was staying made her wear some short dresses and placed her before a businessperson named Bobby.

"As Bobby refused to buy me, Joly and her husband [the owners] got angry and they confined me to a small

dark room. For the next three months, I was given an injection every day but my meals became irregular," she said.

"Within a couple of months, my body turned bulky and they took me to a residential hotel. They forced me to have sex with an elderly man."

"Every day, I was made to sleep with different people and they kept giving me different types of medicine. I used to pass my days crying until Indian police rescued me from a residential hotel a year after continuous torture."

Mitu was trained in tailoring at the Indian shelter home and now she is using the skill to be self-reliant. Happily married again, she doesn't want to look back and her husband doesn't know she was a trafficking victim.

**NEVER-ENDING TRAUMA**

A 14-year-old school student was abducted near her residence in Magura Bus Stand area on April 18, 2017 while returning home after attending a tuition.

Some four abductors pressed something against her mouth making her unconscious. Waking up, she found herself at Howrah Station of Kolkata.

As she shouted for help, a young man came forward and "rescued" her and took her away with him, saying he would shelter her in his apartment and then send her back to Bangladesh.

"A couple of days later, the man came to my room and did bad things," she said with tears in her eyes.

"After that, it became regular and the man also tortured me every night," she said, adding that he used to lock the apartment door from outside whenever he went out.

"One day, after a couple of months, I found the door open and ran away from the apartment. Later, I saw a police station and shouted for help."

Police then sent the girl to a shelter home from where Rights Jessore brought her back in March last year.

The girl is now in the comfort of her house with parents but still she cannot sleep well. She often cries out in sleep, said her father while talking to this

correspondent on May 4.

Executive Director of Rights Jessore Binoy Krishna Mallick said most of the victims trafficked to India landed directly in different brothels. They faced unspoken torture that still keep them traumatised, he said.

He believes human trafficking may stop if the perpetrators face capital punishment. Besides, there has to be awareness building among people in border areas to stop the heinous crime.

**REHABILITATION?**  
AS Mahmood, director of Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum, told The Daily Star that some NGOs are working on rehabilitation and counselling of trafficked children but on a small scale.

"The government should take permanent measures for rehabilitating trafficked victims, otherwise the situation will not improve," he added.

Ferdousi Akhter, project manager of Bangladesh Counter Trafficking in Persons Programme under Dhaka Ahsania Mission, came up with a similar view.

She said the organisation has been providing support to trafficking victims since 1997. "But we do it under different projects which are not adequate," she said.

"Once a victim is rescued, we keep them in shelter homes under close observation. We arrange counselling for them and their family members," she said, adding that they also provide support in their livelihood process.

"We work jointly with the department of youth development and woman affairs of the government to provide livelihood support to the victims," said Ferdousi.

"But we often found the trafficked victims became victim of re-trafficking as the society in some cases did not accept them. Besides, victims were often not happy with low income from the jobs we arranged for them."

If the government makes a long-term and comprehensive plan for the rescued victims, it would be helpful and effective, Ferdousi added.

## Three held for beating woman dead

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Renu used to live in Dhaka since her childhood. She was married, but the couple separated two years back.

They have two children -- Tahsin Al Mahin, 11, and Tahsin Tuba, 4. The boy used to live with the father while the girl was with Renu.

Family members said Renu wanted to go to USA where one of her brothers lived. She had taken preparations for it, but it was to be yet another unfulfilled dream.

Renu's family yesterday demanded immediate arrest of those involved in her killing.

Nasir Uddin Tito, a nephew of the victim, said, "We want justice. Police

can easily identify those in video footages [of the incident]." He urged police to investigate into the motive behind the killing.

"She had no enmity with anyone. She had only gone to the school for her child's admission. Why would she be mistaken for a kidnapper," he said, adding she had gone to the school after her daily morning walk.

Titu filed a case against 400 or 500 unknown people with Badda police station on Saturday night.

Videos taken on mobile phones and CCTV footages from nearby buildings show some youths kicking, striking and trampling the 40-year-old woman, amid a gathering of

several hundred people.

Most of the people seen in the video played the part of silent spectators when the mob descended upon Renu.

The incident comes a day after three people, including a woman, were beaten by a mob in Thakurgaon.

The Police Headquarters said it was aware of a rumour being spread about human sacrifices needed for the construction of Padma bridge, which may have led to the attacks.

"Lynching on suspicion is a criminal offence ... Spreading rumours that destabilise the environment is an anti-state act," it added.



Participants at a roundtable on "Realising the unfinished agenda of ICPD Bangladesh: Key recommendation for accelerating change and achieving the SDGs", held yesterday at The Daily Star Centre.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Waste no time, seek treatment

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weeks at the unit he is in charge of. Overall, the public hospital is estimated to have got around 1,300-1,400 adult patients until now.

Children and pregnant women are considered to be most vulnerable to fatalities stemming from the disease. Adults who have health complications like diabetes, high pressure, kidney or respiratory problems are more likely to suffer more if infected with dengue.

For children and elderly people with health complications, it is best to get doctor's advice on the first day of a fever, even before dengue is confirmed, experts said.

A dengue patient's health condition is considered alarming when they get abdominal pains, seizure, surface bleeding, lethargy and nausea, and they urinate less, seizure.

For children, excessive crying should also raise the alarm.

Any delays in seeking treatment, can result in serious complications.

Somridhi, a six-year-old girl from Uttara, was admitted to Shishu Hospital yesterday afternoon, three days after she got fever. Her temperature was below 100 degrees Celsius and it didn't seem worrying at the time.

Yesterday, her gums began to bleed, said Kinkar Ghosh, an epidemiologist of the public hospital.

Kazi Jabunnahar also went through a similar situation. The 39-year-old had fever for three days before she was taken to a nearby hospital from her Banasree residence about a week ago.

Two days later, her blood pressure dropped drastically and she got seizures. She has been on a saline drip and at the same time has been drinking

fluids. More than a week later yesterday, her health condition became stable.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), 6,544 people have so far been infected with the virus between January 1 and yesterday. Five of them died.

The number of dengue patients between January and July last year was 1,374, meaning it is almost six times higher this year.

As many as 285 patients, including children, were admitted to public and private hospitals across the country in the last 24 hours.

"Last year people were infected with serotypes 1 and 2 but this year they have been infected by serotypes 3 and 4, which is why we are getting a higher number of patients with shock syndrome," Kinkar observed.

The condition may lead to deaths if not addressed immediately.

Lutful Ehsan Fatmi, head of the child health department at Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College and Hospital, said almost all the patients admitted there with dengue suffered hemorrhagic fever.

Most children were suffering from haemorrhagic dengue, which means they bled from their organs. "It is quite dangerous," he said.

In most cases, the treatment is to ensure that the amount of fluid drained out is being injected into the body, according to Robed Amin from the DMCH. If the treatment begins earlier, patients will suffer less and recover faster.

A set of national guidelines have been issued and around 2,000 doctors have been trained and instructed to follow them.

Against the backdrop of the recurring dengue epidemic every year between July and October when humidity is high along with rainfall, it is feared that the dengue situation will become more severe each year.

The only way to control this is to control the vector, which in this case is Aedes mosquito.

Awareness has to be built at the individual level and at community, corporate and state levels so that breeding places for the mosquitoes, such as stored still water, is not stored anywhere.

## ACC sues

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Power Plant.

People suffered power disruption due to the coal crisis for nearly two months.

Others charged in the case are former general managers Shariful Alam, Abul Kasem Pradhania and Abu Taher Nur-uz-Zaman Chowdhury; managers Masudur Rahman Hawladar, Anifur Rahman, Shoyebur Rahman, Ashok Kumar Haldar and Syed Imam Hasan; deputy managers Muhammad Khalilur Rahman, Morsheduzzaman, Habibur Rahman and Zahedur Rahman; assistant managers Satendra Nath Barman and Moniruzzaman; and suspended deputy general manager AKM Khaledul Islam and Deputy General Manager Jobayer Ali.

The ACC dropped charges against managers Mosharaf Hossain Sarkar and Jahidul Islam, Deputy Manager Ekramul Haque, former general manager Abdul Mannan Patwari and General Manager Gopal Chandra Saha.