

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Headmaster suspended

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The headmaster of a government primary school in Patuakhali has been suspended as a probe found him guilty of sexually harassing female students.

Barisal Education Board served the suspension order to Rezaul Karim, headmaster of Omedpur Government Primary School, on Sunday.

Abul Bashar, education officer (acting) of Kalapara upazila in Patuakhali, said they received the suspension order, signed by SM Faruque, deputy director of Barisal Divisional Primary and Mass Education Department, and took action accordingly.

On August 24, parents of a student submitted a written complaint to Kalapara Upazila Education Office against Rezaul who served the school as headmaster for nine years.

In the complaint, parents of the student alleged that their daughter was sexually harassed by the headmaster.

After finishing classes, the headmaster used to call on girls and confine them in a room with closed doors and windows and sexually harass them. At times, he also threatened the students so that they did not share their experiences with anyone, the complaint added.

Parents of four more students also brought the same allegation against the teacher.

Receiving the complaint, upazila education officer Abul went to the school and investigated. He then submitted his report to the higher authorities.

The Daily Star, however, could not reach Reazul over phone after repeated attempts.

‘I am a kid at war’

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In June, Lilly won her first victory: she persuaded Central, a major supermarket in Bangkok, to stop giving out plastic bags in its stores once a week.

“I told myself that if the government did not listen to me, it would be necessary to speak directly to those who distribute plastic bags and convince them to stop,” she explains.

This month some of the biggest brands, including the operator of the ubiquitous 7-Eleven convenience stores, pledged to stop handing out single-use plastic bags by January next year.

Mindsets have started to shift this year with the deaths of several marine mammals whose stomachs were lined with plastic, stirring emotions.

The demise last month of a baby dugong was mourned on social media, reviving discussion in the government over a proposed ban on most single-use plastics by 2022.

In the heart

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announcement came. “Maru jhar,” the loudspeaker blared out. The two words had a calming effect.

Soldiers came out from the bunker and rushed to strategic points with guns, ammunition and took safety measures to search and detect the whole area.

Maru Jhar is a code which means the situation is stable and the soldiers should go for the next step to protect the camp.

Soon, the situation became normal.

“We need to be a hundred percent sure. This is a very risky area. We have to be on our toes all the time because anything can happen at any time. You never know when a mortar shell might come and hit you,” Lieutenant Colonel Morshed Ahmed Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

Mali is considered to be the most dangerous country for peacekeepers. In the last six years, a total of 123 soldiers have died and more than 350 have been wounded during counter-insurgency operations, according to the UN.

Gao, where the camp is located, has been among the most restive parts of the country with at least 213 incidents of violence and conflict reported in the last few years, which account for more than one fourth of all such incidents in the country.

“Statistics cannot justify the true gravity of the danger. The Mali mission is different from all others because terrorist attacks have been multidimensional and dreadful,” said Colonel M Khair Uddin, contingent commander of Bangladesh Battalion-6.

Everyone in the camp has to wear helmets and bulletproof vests all the time. Even this reporter had to put on safety equipment.

For the Malian people, the threats are almost part of a daily routine, which is compounded by an ever-deepening humanitarian crisis as violence and insecurity have escalated to unprecedented levels in parts of Mali and its neighbouring countries.

The UN Security Council established the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) on April 25, 2013 to support the local polity, help maintain security and establish stability so that the country could ease into a transitional roadmap.

Pay hike for journalists unrealistic

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only create a multi-faceted crisis that the industry was incapable to embrace.

The Noab came up with the reaction following the publication of the gazette on the “Ninth Wage Board Award” for journalists and employees of newspapers and news agencies on September 12.

Following is the full text of the statement by Noab:

The Noab has noticed with great sadness the publication of a gazette notification on the recommendations of the 9th Newspaper Wage Board which did not take into consideration the opinion of the newspaper owners.

This is more agonising that a writ is pending with the Supreme Court challenging the legality of the Wage Board formation. All scales have been increased by 80 to 85 percent in the gazetted notification, which is way above other corresponding scales in the industrial sector of the country. The Noab considers the new scales as unrealistic and therefore, unacceptable.

In a meeting held on Monday 16 September 2019, Noab termed the 9th Wage Board unrealistic and said that no newspaper is capable of implanting the 9th wage board. The meeting was attended by Tasmina Hossain, editor of daily Ittefaq, AK Azad, publisher of Dainik Samakal, Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, Matiuur Rahman Chowdhury, editor in chief of Dainik Manabzamin, Tarik Sujat, printer of Bhorer Kagoj, Dewan Hanif Mahmud, editor and publisher of the Daily Bonik Barta, Shah Husain Imam, editor of The Financial Express, Altamash Kabir, editor and publisher of Dainik Sangbad, ASM Shahidullah

Khan, chairman of Editorial Board, New Age, and Matiuur Rahman, editor and publisher of Daily Prothom Alo.

Although the pay scale for journalists is determined by the government-formed Wage Board, newspaper industry have to earn by itself to meet the cost of its implementation. Pertinent to mention that the government does not provide any special assistance or grant to meet the increased cost of implementation of this.

Newspaper owners have always tried to ensure the financial security of the journalists and pay the increased salary and allowances in the past. Even then, some newspapers have tried their level best to implement the government announced Wage Board Royedad.

However, the newspaper industry is passing the hardest time in the history of the country. Both circulation and income from advertisement have been sliding down continually.

On the other hand, government advertisement rate has always been very low. Besides, a large amount of advertisement revenue always remains pending with the government departments.

The industry has to pay tax and VAT in every step as well. It is struggling to survive now; many are running on subsidy from the owners or even failing to pay regularly.

In this backdrop, implementation of 9th wage board shall only create a multi-faceted crisis that the industry is incapable to embrace. Over these years, Noab has communicated this crisis verbally and in writing to the Ministry of Information, Wage Board and Cabinet Committee.

The Noab is not against the

Wage Board for journalists. Despite a plethora of problems, we have participated in the Wage Board activities. We have requested to make it realistic both for journalists and the owners. But sadly pay scale and allowances have been increased from 80 to 85 percent. Among the government recognised 42 industries, pay scale of 38 industries are not even nearer to the 8th wage board. The 9th wage board has increased the pay scale significantly. It is even higher than the government employee pay scale.

Under the 9th Wage Board, the lowest grade is Tk 35,670 while the comparable government scale is Tk 15,360 with a difference of over Tk 20,320. This is very unrealistic in the context of Bangladesh.

A journalist having a bachelor or master’s degree will draw a gross salary of over Tk 67,112 in Grade-3. A government officer enters into service in Grade-9 with a salary of Tk 35,600 while a university lecturer gets Tk 37,305. Having the same academic degree, a journalist will get Tk 30,000-31,000 more compared to a first-class gazetted officer. Journalists are likely to get 1.5 - 2 times higher salary compared to a gazetted officer almost in every scale. Even multi-national companies fall behind in some cases. No newspaper can pay the increased salary and allowances.

The 9th Wage Board, besides increasing pay, has also raised various fringe benefits. General transport allowance has been raised by 100 percent, professional conveyance for journalists and business professionals have been raised by 71 percent and 100 percent respectively. Besides, some of the sundry allowances that Noab had requested to be expunged have

not only been retained, but increased in some cases. However, we must mention the Cabinet Committee’s good gesture in bringing symmetry between the Bangladesh Labour Law of 2006, Income Tax Ordinance of 1984 and other industries in matters of income tax and gratuity. The legal weakness that was there has been amended.

Besides, the following suggestions from Noab have not been taken into consideration, such as:

- There are only six grades under Newspaper Wage Board compared to 20 for government services. In banks and insurance companies, there are 18 to 22 grades. In line with these, Noab had proposed 18 grades for the journalists.
- A recreation leave of 30 days in every three years has been provided with a net pay of one-month gross salary which is unknown anywhere in the government or semi-government sphere.
- Under the 9th Wage Board, house rent has been fixed at 65 percent of basic pay. According to article 33(A) of the Income Tax Ordinance, house rent up to 50 percent is tax exempted. The remaining 15 percent is taxable. The Noab had therefore proposed the house rent to be fixed at 50 percent of the basic pay.

In general, most of the proposals tabled by Noab to Ministry of Information, Wage Board and Cabinet Committee have not been considered. Taking into consideration of all these facts, no newspapers shall be able to implement the 9th Wage Board. The Noab feels that to keep the newspaper industry alive, the government must reconsider the 9th Wage Board Royedad and seriously consider the recommendations of Noab.

Tigers

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The Tigers suffered a 25-run defeat to Afghanistan in their second match on Sunday after a hard-fought three-wicket victory against Zimbabwe in the tournament opener on Friday.

When the two sides met in the tournament opener in Mirpur on Friday, it was Zimbabwe who dominated the game until Afif Hossain’s 32-ball 57 finally saved the day after the top-order failed horrendously. Even promoting Mushfiquur Rahim to the opening slot in their next game against Afghanistan did not make any difference as the top order failed to fire yet again.

Bangladesh made quite a few changes to their squad for the Chattogram leg -- Soumya Sarkar’s exclusion and pacer Rubel Hossain and Shafiqul Islam’s inclusion being the mentionable ones. And although a win today would be enough to see the team through to the final, scheduled to be played at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on September 24, Shakib Al Hasan’s shaky side will be looking to operate with a steady and proper plan, something they have failed to do so far.

Another case

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constitution in an attempt to “provoke anarchy” in the hills.

After recording the case, the court fixed October 2 for hearing, said Debasish Devnath, bench assistant of the court.

On August 27, Ibrahim filed another case under the Digital Security Act with the court of Senior Judicial Magistrate Mohammad Hasan accusing the correspondent of the same.

But the judge dismissed the case saying there was no legal barrier in using the term “indigenous”.

“The government of Bangladesh discourages using the term ‘Adivasi’, but it does not discourage using ‘indigenous,’ the judge said while passing the order, adding that the two words do not mean the same thing.

“Therefore, it is not evident that the accused had committed an offence by using the word ‘indigenous’ in his report,” the judge said.

In the latest case statement, Ibrahim also alleged that Senior Judicial Magistrate Hasan had “arbitrarily” dismissed the case.

When asked if anyone had influenced him in filing the cases, Ibrahim said, “Some Bangalee leaders of CHT and I had a meeting on August 20 and decided to file the cases against the reporter as he has long been working for the rights of the hilly people.”

On August 19, Masum Rana, president of another forum of Bangalee settlers named Parbatya Adhikar Forum, filed another case against Sanjoy for the same.

Contacted, Sanjeeb Drong, general secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, said, “We strongly protest filing of multiple cases against a journalist who works for the rights of indigenous people,” adding that filing of such cases is a threat to the press freedom in the country.

Britain’s top

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character and Britain as it prepares to leave the EU.

It is not known when Britain’s highest court will reach a decision.

Johnson told BBC television beforehand that he would “wait and see what the judges say”.

Johnson chaired a cabinet meeting yesterday, the day after holding his first face-to-face talks with European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker and EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier.

Following the meeting in Luxembourg he insisted there remained a “good chance” of striking a new divorce deal -- if there was “movement” from the bloc.

But Juncker’s office appeared more pessimistic, saying Britain must “come forward with legally operational solutions” to the existing withdrawal agreement struck by his predecessor Theresa May.

“Such proposals have not yet been made,” it said.

‘ENTIRELY PROPER’

The Supreme Court’s entry into the three-and-a-half year saga stems from Johnson’s “do or die” promise to deliver Brexit on October 31.

He suspended parliament for five weeks in what his critics say was a blatant bid to keep his pro-European opponents from trying to get it further postponed.

The government counters that parliament is usually dissolved yearly and that Johnson was simply clearing the way for a new agenda following May’s resignation in July.

The Supreme Court has called in the maximum 11 of its 12 judges to hear the case, so that there cannot be a tie.

They must rule on whether they even have the right to adjudicate on the politically contentious issue, before considering Johnson’s motivations for the move.

The High Court in England said it was not a matter for the courts to decide upon, while Scotland’s highest civil court called the suspension “unlawful”.

Bangladesh to hold meet with China, Myanmar

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in Rakhine since August 25, 2017. China is said to have brokered a bilateral deal between Bangladesh and Myanmar on the repatriation of Rohingyas.

China earlier said it wants a bilateral solution to the Rohingya crisis and see the start of the repatriation soon. Some officials of the Chinse embassy in Dhaka were also present at the Rohingya camps in Cox’s Bazar during the repatriation attempt on August 22.

Talking to The Daily Star, Col (ret’d) Faruk Khan, MP, chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee

on Foreign Affairs, said the committee discussed the progress of the diplomatic efforts by the foreign ministry.

“The ministry told us that Bangladesh will hold a trilateral meeting with China and Myanmar.”

During the UN General Assembly, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will also hold meetings with the heads of different countries, he said.

The ministry also said it was working on how the Rohingya issue could be taken to the International Court of Justice.

“We have recommended that the government should mount diplomatic

pressure on Myanmar so that it takes back Rohingyas soon,” Faruk Khan said.

He said members of the parliamentary standing committee would visit ASEAN countries next month to convince their lawmakers to play a strong role in speedy repatriation of Rohingyas.

The parliamentary standing committee also recommended that the home ministry identify human traffickers and take stern legal actions against them to protect Bangladeshi migrants abroad.

“Human traffickers are operating at home and abroad. They need to

be brought to book,” the committee chief said.

The meeting also recommended that the foreign ministry play its due role to ensure repatriation of undocumented Bangladeshis from various countries, Faruk Khan said.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, standing committee members Abdul Mazid Khan, Habibe Millat, Nahim Razzaque, Kazi Nabil Ahmed, Nizam Uddin Jalil, Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque, and Maritime Affairs Unit Secretary Khorshed Alam were present at the meeting.

26 killed in blast at president’s rally

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An AFP image from the scene near Ghani’s rally, roughly an hour’s drive north of Kabul, showed the remains of a burnt motorcycle, with a body on top, covered by a blanket and next to a badly damaged police car.

Women and children were among the casualties, Parwan hospital director Abdul Qasim Sangin told AFP.

The president, who was speaking to his supporters at the time of the blast, was unhurt but later condemned the attack, saying the incident proved the Taliban had no real interest in reconciliation.

“As the Taliban continue their crimes, they once again prove that they are not interested in peace and stability in Afghanistan,” said Ghani in a statement.

TALKS ‘DEAD’

Sixty kilometres away in Kabul, a

shopkeeper, Rahimullah, said he had been sitting inside his shop when the second blast came.

“The wave broke all the windows,” he told AFP.

“I rushed outside and saw several bodies just across the street. This is the second time in less than a month that a blast has broken our windows. I just fixed them a week ago.”

The UN’s mission in Afghanistan also slammed the Taliban, accusing them of showing “despicable disregard for civilian life & fundamental human right to participate in democratic process”.

The elections will see Ghani face off against his own Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah, and more than a dozen other candidates, including former warlords, ex-spies, and onetime members of the country’s

former communist regime.

For weeks, the election had been sidelined by the US-Taliban talks, with many Afghans and observers expecting the vote to be cancelled if a deal was agreed. Even candidates did little in the way of campaigning.

But with the deal off, Ghani and his rivals have begun the race.

Ghani is seeking a clear mandate they can use to negotiate with the insurgents on a lasting peace in Afghanistan.

Trump’s declaration that the US-Taliban talks were “dead” spurred the insurgents to declare last week that the only other option was more fighting.

“We had two ways to end occupation in Afghanistan, one was jihad and fighting, the other was talks and negotiations,” Mujahid told AFP last week.

Mawa-Bhanga route to open in June 2021

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authorities could not utilise the allocation mainly because of problems in the rail project’s design, said sources.

Replying to a query at the briefing, Project Director Golam Fakhruddin Ahmed Chowdhury said there were some problems in the design of piles of viaducts on both sides of the Padma.

“We have been able to solve those problems... Work is now going on in full swing,” he added.

LOCOMOTIVES FROM INDIA

Sujan said India would provide Bangladesh with 20 locomotives free of charge, and an announcement in this regard is expected to come during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s India visit in the first week of next month.

With most of the BR locomotives already running beyond their economic life, the government initially considered hiring locomotives from India for the first time to help the railway overcome the crisis.

India decided to give Bangladesh 20 locomotives -- 10 broad gauge and 10 meter gauge -- free of charge as a gesture of friendship, Sujan said.

He mentioned that they have already taken up projects to purchase locomotives, but those will start arriving late next year.

BR Director General Md Shamsuzzaman said the railway has 263 locomotives, of which 68 percent are running beyond their economic life.

The 20 locomotives to be brought from India would help ease the ongoing crisis, he said, adding that those would be used for two to three years.

2ND BANGABANDHU BRIDGE

Sujan hoped the physical work of the second Bangabandhu Bridge over the Jamuna river would start in January next year.

The government plans to build the 4.8-km bridge at a cost of Tk 9,734 crore by 2023.

Suspended univ journo now ‘getting death threats’

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media and in person,” she said.

On September 10, the university authorities suspended her for her posts on social media which the authorities claimed has tarnished the university’s image.

Zinia said she did not post anything derogatory and faced suspension for her reports on irregularities and corruption in the university.

The suspension has sparked criticism on the social media. Many demanded unconditional withdrawal of her suspension and a proper

investigation into the corruption allegations.

PROTEST AT KHULNA UNIVERSITY

Around 100 teachers and student of department of Mass Communication and Journalism (MCJ) at Khulna University (KU) formed a human chain in front of Hadi Chattar on the campus premises, demanding immediate withdrawal of Zinia’s suspension order.

Condemning the suspension order, KU MCJ’s Assistant Prof Shariful Islam said universities are democratic places where people are allowed to express their freedom of speech.

“But the vice-chancellor of BSMRSTU wants to keep the students silent by taking disciplinary actions and creating a culture of fear,” he said.

Speakers at the human-chain also threatened to undertake tougher actions if their demands were not met.

PRESS CONFERENCE OVER ZINIA

Prof Khondoker Nasiruddin, vice-chancellor of BSMRSTU, held a press conference at his office and claimed Zinia was suspended for specific reasons.

He claimed that Zinia tried to destabilise the university and foil the admission test by hacking the

university’s website.

Zinia also tried to hack some teachers’ Facebook profiles, along with the VC’s one, he added.

Zinia made derogatory remarks on Facebook about teachers and the university which he claimed tarnished the image of the university.

“Suspension order of Zinia will be withdrawn if Zinia sought an apology”, he said.

But Zinia said she would not seek apology as she did nothing wrong.

VC Nasir said allegations brought against him were false and fabricated.