

Stay alert to avert

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Gafargaon-Toak district highway, reports BSS.

Hasina urged all, including the drivers and pedestrians, to be responsible in using roads to avoid accidents.

She said it would not be wise to hold only the drivers responsible for road accidents. Everyone, including the drivers and road users, should have awareness of driving vehicles and crossing streets, the PM added.

Referring to the law regarding road safety, she said everyone should follow the traffic rules and regulations.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader also addressed the programme, moderated by PM's Principal Secretary Md Nojibur Rahman.

Hasina exchanged views with local lawmakers, administrative officers and distinguished personalities of Munshiganj, Narayanganj, Satkhira, Chattogram and Mymensingh through videoconferencing.

"Railway to be made profitable sector"

Meanwhile, speaking at another programme at the Gono Bhaban, Hasina yesterday vowed to make the railway a profitable sector, reports UNB.

"We want to show those who once wanted to shut down non-profitable rail routes that these can be made profitable and modernised," she said.

The premier made the pledge while flagging off the intercity train "Kurigram Express" on the Kurigram-

Dhaka-Kurigram route and launching the newly-imported coaches of Rangpur Express and Lalmoni Express through videoconferencing.

She said the government was working to bring the whole country under railway network.

Hasina said the railway is most popular among the common and middle-class people, but the former BNP government had planned to shut down rail routes following suggestions of international organisations saying that those were not profitable.

"I think it was a suicidal decision for our country because the common people choose rail for their communication. It's essential for a country to have rail, water, air and road transport system."

The PM said her government has been implementing a massive programme to spread railway connectivity to every division, including Barishal.

The government would extend the railway network to Barishal, Mongla in Bagerhat, and Payra Port in Patuakhali, Hasina said.

Later, she exchanged views with locals from Kurigram, Rangpur and Lalmonirhat through videoconferencing.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi and Social Welfare Minister Nuruzzaman Ahmed were present.

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujon also spoke at the programme from Kurigram through videoconferencing.

Administrators

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appointing the administrators to run the businesses.

However, the 2G and 3G services will continue.

Meanwhile, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal last month stepped in as mediator and announced that he would start a negotiation with the carriers and the regulator to settle the issue amicably. A proposal to form two neutral committees to revise the audit findings was placed in a meeting on October 3.

After that meeting, the carriers received a separate proposal through emails to pay immediately their principal dues (excluding the fines for delaying the payment) which were undisputed. But in response, the operators said the principal amount was not undisputed. They said they had not received any reply after that.

The telecom regulator has run a long auditing process and in 2016, it claimed that Grameenphone owed it Tk 12,579.95 crore and Robi Tk 867.23 crore for dodging revenue share, taxes and late fees accumulated until December 2014.

Of the total, the principal amount for Grameenphone is Tk 2,299.71 crore and Robi's Tk 319 crore, according to the BTRC.

The telecom minister yesterday hinted that the BTRC would appoint the administrators by this month. The officials would remain at Grameenphone and Robi until the dues were realised.

Of the four administrators in each of the companies, one would act as chief executive officer. The three others would be legal, engineering, and finance and marketing experts, BTRC Chairman Haque told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Our main target is to realise public money. To get that money, the team [of administrators] will be the real authorities of the companies," he said.

Spokespersons of both the companies said the government would face "serious consequences" if the decision was implemented.

Since Grameenphone and Robi's parent companies Telenor and Axiata have large government investment in Norway and Malaysia, it will become a government-to-government issue as soon as the appointments take place, said a top executive of a carrier, requesting not to be named.

"Our group has already instructed us to observe the government move.

we'll react soon and the consequence will be very tough," the official said.

Grameenphone and Robi in late August filed cases challenging the audit claims.

Barrister Tanjib-ul Alam, an expert in company laws, who is representing Robi in the case, said the government could appoint an administrator only when a company winds up.

"Appointing receivers [administrators] at Grameenphone and Robi will be unlawful as they have filed court cases on the issue," said Tanjib.

Both carriers, however, said they were yet to receive any notification from the BTRC.

"We have not yet received any formal notification regarding the appointment ... However, we would like to reiterate that a case is pending before a competent court of law," said Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory officer at Robi.

He said the appointment of administrators would go down as the darkest chapter in the history of telecom industry.

"Needless to say, it will irreparably damage the country's image as a safe haven for foreign investment," Shahed said in an email.

Hossain Sadat, acting head of communications at Grameenphone, said,

"We will not engage in any speculation as we have not received any such information from the BTRC."

"Our priority remains in finding a transparent, amicable, and timely solution. However, we have recently received a new set of directives from the government that may prolong the dispute. Regrettably, the unfounded restrictions and the show-cause notice by BTRC on Grameenphone are still in place, preventing us from normalising our business operations and are affecting our customer experience."

In July, the BTRC slashed Grameenphone's bandwidth by 30 percent and Robi's by 15 percent for failing to pay the dues.

But the block on bandwidth was lifted after two weeks, considering the inconvenience it was causing the subscribers.

On July 22, the government also decided not to allow the companies to roll out new packages or services, or import network equipment. The restrictions will be withdrawn after the administrators take office, Jabbar said.

Former PNG PM temporarily avoids arrest

AFP, Port Moresby

Papua New Guinea's ex-prime minister Peter O'Neill won a temporary reprieve in a corruption case yesterday when a court agreed to a brief suspension of his arrest warrant.

Acting police commissioner David Manning announced Tuesday that a warrant for O'Neill relating to graft allegations had been issued by a district court, but he refused to give details due to the "sensitivity" of the investigation.

O'Neill has denied the charges, calling them politically motivated, and refused to cooperate with police -- claiming a lack of legal process, including not being officially presented with the warrant.

"If this were a serious matter, not a political power play, a formal process would be in place that would have seen legal representation made to my office," the former leader said in a statement on Tuesday.

Papua New Guinea's national court yesterday granted O'Neill a short suspension of the arrest warrant until Monday, when the court will hear further arguments.

O'Neill's long tenure was marked by a string of corruption allegations, including the purchase of 40 Maseratis for an Asia-Pacific leaders' summit he hosted -- in a country where few homes have reliable electricity.

He was forced to step down in May after allies balked at his decision to sign a multibillion-dollar liquefied natural gas deal with France's Total and US firm ExxonMobil.

Local communities had complained bitterly about not benefiting from similar deals in the past.

After promising to resign and then trying to cling to power via the courts, he was ultimately replaced by his former finance minister James Marape, who vowed to clean up the government.



Decorated brand-new carriages have been hooked up to the Lalmoni Express. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the carriages and a new train service called Kurigram Express yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

No to terrorism, communalism

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They, however, said although their protest ended, they would monitor the progress of the implementation of their 10-point demand.

The demands include death sentences for the killers, identification and expulsion of the killers from the university, quick disposal of the case under a speedy tribunal, publication of a copy of the charge sheet of the case, ban on organisation-based politics in the university, explanation for the VC's absence for 30 hours after the incident, disclosure of previous incidents of violence and establishment of a common platform to regularly review and act on complaints from students.

After the oath-taking programme, the Buet VC said the accused would be expelled after getting the report of the investigation committee.

"All the accused would be expelled. Nothing will happen on the basis of individual decisions. We will need the probe report and take a unanimous decision. There has been a lot of progress [in these regards]," the VC told reporters.

Abrar, a second-year student of Buet's electrical and electronic engineering department, was beaten to death by a group of Chattrra League men at the university's Sher-e-Bangla Hall between the night of October 6 and early hours of October 7.

The Buet students had been

demonstrating since the day.

The protesters relaxed their agitation on October 13 and 14 after the Buet authorities issued separate notices regarding their demands, and taking the university's admission tests into consideration.

On Tuesday, the students held a meeting with acting DSW Prof Mohammed Abdul Basith at 3:00pm at the university central cafeteria.

Later in the evening, they called off their protest, but said they would not resume academic activities until the authorities expelled the accused on the basis of the charge sheet submitted by the law enforcers.

Academic and administrative activities of Buet were supposed to resume at the end of Puja vacation on October 12, but the students are yet to start attending classes and examinations.

In the face of protests, the Buet authorities suspended 19 students whose name were mentioned in the case complaint, evicted illegal occupants from the halls, sealed off rooms of political leaders and office of the student body, and installed more CCTV cameras inside all the dormitories.

'OFFENCES IN THE NAME OF RAGGING TO BE TRIED'

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday assured of trying offences committed in the name of ragging at educational institutions.

"Any kind of torture, including slapping in the name of ragging, is an offence under the penal code of the country. If anybody lodges complaints of being tortured in the name of ragging, the offence will be tried under the existing laws," he said.

The law minister's remarks, which comes against the backdrop of the death of Buet student Abrar Fahad, was made after a meeting with a delegation of the European Union led by its Ambassador to Bangladesh Rensje Teerink at his secretariat office yesterday afternoon.

Minister Anisul said holding trial of the offences of ragging through the court was the only way to stop the practice.

He said the government would take necessary steps to hold the trial of the Abrar murder case and ensure swift justice.

"The prosecution concerned has already been asked to take preparations for moving the Abrar Fahad murder case before the court quickly as per directives from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The trial proceedings of the case will begin as soon as the police submit the charge sheet of the case to the trial court," he said. The law minister informed reporters that a discussion on human and labour rights took place with the EU delegation and they were ready to provide assistance to Bangladesh to this end.

4 land in jail, 2 in correction home for rape

STAR REPORT

A Dhaka court yesterday sent two juveniles to a correction home for allegedly raping a teenage girl in the district's Kamrangirchar area on Friday.

Police arrested the accused on Tuesday night after the victim's sister filed a case accusing four with Kamrangirchar Police Station, said Mostafa Anwar, inspector (investigation) of the police station.

According to the case statement, one of the victim's female friends took her to a house on Friday. Three boys were waiting in the house and raped the girl.

The female friend was arrested for her alleged involvement in the rape. Another alleged rapist was on the run, the police official added.

The victim was sent to one-stop crisis centre at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday for forensic test.

Meanwhile, a Gazipur court yesterday sent a man to jail for allegedly raping his four-year-old niece on Tuesday.

Police arrested the accused -- Azizul Haque, 19, inhabitant of the district's Sreepur upazila -- after the victim's father filed a case with Sreepur Police Station on Tuesday night.

According to the case statement, Azizul took the victim to a bush near Dhaka-Mymensingh highway luring her with chocolates. Later, he raped the girl and left her there.

The victim's parents, both garment workers, were in their workplace when the incident happened.

Returning home, they, along with locals, searched for the girl and found her bloodied body in the bush, said Manjurul Islam, sub-inspector of the police station.

The victim then narrated the incident to her family, he added.

Police sent the girl to Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College for forensic tests.

A Sylhet court yesterday sent two men to jail for their alleged involvement in raping a grade-nine student in the district's Zakiganj upazila on Monday.

The victim's family filed a case with Zakiganj Police Station accusing Kawsar Ahmed, 20, and Najim Ahmed, 21.

According to the case statement, battery-run auto-rickshaw driver Kawsar and his cohort Najim Ahmed, 21, picked up the girl on their auto-rickshaw along with some of her friends.

At one point the girl was alone inside the auto-rickshaw as rest of her friends got off the vehicle. The criminals then took the girl to an isolated area and raped her.

Hearing the girl scream, locals rushed to the spot and rescued her but the criminals managed to flee, the case statement added.

The girl was sent to one-stop crisis centre of MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Meer Mohammad Abdun Naser, officer-in-charge of Zakiganj Police Station, said they arrested Kawsar and another Jewel Miah. Jewel Miah helped Kawsar to hide his auto-rickshaw in which the crime was committed.

Najim Ahmed was on the run, he added.

Meanwhile, another Sylhet court sent a man to jail in connection with the rape of a teenage girl in the district's Osmaninagar upazila on October 8.

The accused Ejaul Islam was arrested and placed before the court after the victim's uncle filed a case with Osmaninagar Police Station on Tuesday night, said Main Uddin, officer-in-charge of the police station.

According to the case statement, Ejaul abducted the girl on October 8, forcibly took her to his home and raped her.

Abrar begged for water, not a drop given

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Technology, was beaten with cricket stumps and skipping ropes for hours by Buet unit BCL leaders and activists at the university's Sher-e-Bangla Hall between October 6 night and the early hours of October 7, leading to his death.

Abrar was struck over 100 times on his knees, legs, soles of the feet, and arms with cricket stumps.

The gruesome murder triggered a firestorm of protests on university campuses across the country.

Sadat, also a batch-17 student of Buet, said that upon instructions from another accused Moniruzzaman Monir, he and some other students of his batch brought Abrar to room 2011 of the hall on October 6.

Seniors from batches 15 and 16 of Buet, including Mehedi Hasan Robein, Anik Sarkar, Ifi Mosharrar Shakal,

Muzahidur Rahman Muzahid and Moniruzzaman then started beating Abrar indiscriminately.

Sadat also said that around 12:30am on October 7 he left for his room in the hall.

As no lawyer stood for Sadat, Metropolitan Magistrate Morshed Al Mamun Bhuiyan asked the accused why they committed the offence. He replied that he did it because he was "instructed by his seniors".

Md Wahiduzzaman, inspector of the Detective Branch (DB) of police and also the investigator officer of the case, produced Sadat before the court with a 10-day remand prayer, but the court granted a five-day remand.

Abrar's father filed a murder case against 19 students of the university, mostly Buet BCL leaders, and several other unnamed accused with Chavkbazar police station on October 7.

Detectives have already arrested 20 people, including 16 FIR-named accused, in connection with the murder.

Six of the accused have already made confessional statements in which they narrated the horrific descriptions of torturing Abrar to death.

According to the statements, Abrar was taken to the room after the accused suspected him to be an Islami Chhatra Shibir activist and was so severely beaten that he vomited thrice and lost consciousness.

Even when he fell unconscious, the accused said he was feigning and could be beaten for another two hours.

Meanwhile, detectives yesterday sent two mobile phones and a laptop of the victim, mobile phones of the accused and a CCTV footage to Criminal Investigation Department for forensic tests.

Not many urban poor getting help

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said in the report ahead of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty being observed today.

The theme of the Day this year is "acting together to empower children, their families and communities to end poverty".

The report said, "Given the country's rapid urbanisation there are now more people living in extreme poverty in urban Bangladesh than in 2010."

According to the WB, 35.01 percent of Bangladesh's population lives in urban areas.

Even though 8 out of 10 poor live in rural areas, at current trends of urbanisation and poverty reduction, more than half of Bangladesh's poor households will live in urban areas by 2030, it said.

The report said Bangladesh

recorded 3 percent increase in its urban population share between 2010 and 2016, and the urban population grew at an average 3.9 percent a year since 2000.

"Rapid urbanisation in Bangladesh plays a modest role in poverty reduction," it said, adding that safety nets could contribute more to poverty reduction in the country.

The report mentioned that a third of the poor households have access to social protection programmes, compared to 18 percent of non-poor households.

"This suggests there is room to increase coverage and improve the quality of targeting. Coverage in urban areas is particularly low and safety nets for families with young children and elderly members could have a strong impact on reducing urban poverty.

"There is a natural life cycle to poverty, and well-designed safety nets can target support to households when they need it most: when children are young and when elderly household members must be cared for."

Talking about the issue, economist Zahid Hussain said the coverage of safety net schemes should be expanded in urban slums.

He said quality education, adequate healthcare and sanitation should be extended in the slums.

"A child born in a slum is not responsible for the poverty of the family. It is the responsibility of the state to provide proper education and nutrition to children so that they can break out of the vicious circle of poverty," he said.

He added steps were necessary to protect slum dwellers from various types of exploitation.

25 injured as villagers clash with police

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charged baton and fired 30 rounds of rubber bullets and tear gas.

The situation was brought under control with police reinforcement, but tension was still prevailing.

Meanwhile, five policemen of the Bhendabari Police Investigation Centre were closed to Rangpur Police Lines for their "negligence in duty". They are Sub-Inspector (SI) Aminul Islam, the centre in-charge, and assistant sub-inspectors Shah Alam, Hari Kanta Barman, and Tamiz Uddin, and constable Ariful Islam.

According to locals, a police team from the centre picked up

Md Shamsul Islam, 59, a resident of Shantipur village of Mithapukur upazila, on Tuesday night. He was found dead inside the lockup of the centre yesterday morning.

Santana Begum, daughter of the deceased, alleged that the centre in-charge, SI Aminul Islam, and police informer Md Zia beat her father to death because he refused to be extorted for Tk 1 lakh.

She said her father was a cattle trader, but police labelled him a drug peddler. SI Aminul denied the allegations.

Gopalpur Union Parishad

Chairman Aminul Islam said, "To my knowledge, Shamsul was a cattle trader, not a drug peddler."

Meanwhile, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Pirganj police station Soroj Kumar claimed Shamsul was arrested in neighbouring Borodarga village with 15 litres of local liquor.

The detainee committed suicide by hanging himself in the lockup, he claimed.

Shamsul's daughter Santana, however, told The Daily Star that villagers found the body on the floor of the lockup and not hanging from anything. She alleged that police

were giving misleading information to save those responsible.

Shamsul's wife Momena Begum said her husband was innocent and demanded a fair investigation into the incident.

Meanwhile, a three-member probe body was formed with Rangpur Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Abu Maruf Hossain as head and was asked to submit the report within three days, said Rangpur SP Biplob Kumar Sarkar.

The body was sent to Rangpur Medical College Hospital for autopsy.