

# 12-year-old boy accused in trafficking case

HC grants him bail; case statement says he is 22

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday granted anticipatory bail for eight weeks to a boy aged about 12 in a human trafficking case filed in Cox's Bazar.

However, the case statement written last year mentions that the boy is 22.

The court asked him to surrender before the trial court at the end of his bail.

The HC bench of Justice Obaidul Hassan and Justice AKM Zahirul Huq gave the order following a petition filed by the boy for anticipatory bail.

During hearing of the bail petition, the court observed that although the petitioner was yet to become a "man", he had been accused in a human trafficking case.

Deputy Attorney General Md Sarwar Hossain Bappi told The Daily Star that the boy might be 12 or 13 years old. But in the case, the plaintiff said he was 22.

The boy's lawyer Zaman Akhter Bulbul told reporters that the alleged incident of human trafficking took

place in 2014 and the case was filed in 2018.

Nurul Islam, 42, a resident of Hajipara area of Ramu upazila, filed the case under the anti-human trafficking law with a Chattogram court on September 27, 2018 accusing six people including the child.

The trial court is currently recording witness statements, the boy's lawyer added.

According to the case statement, Nurul was sent to Malaysia by a small boat on June 21, 2014 with the assurance of a well-paid job.

After some days, Nurul Islam was dropped at a jungle in Thailand. But then traffickers tortured him and demanded ransom from him.

After talking to him over phone, the boy and another accused took Tk 3 lakh in ransom from Nurul's relatives. After a few days, Nurul Islam reached Malaysia where he was detained in 2017, according to the case statement.

After being in jail for a year in Malaysia, Nurul came back to the country and filed the case.

# BRTA out of its depth

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Between August and September, about 89,000 vehicles had their fitness certificate renewed.

On October 23, the court directed the authorities concerned to take necessary steps so that vehicles without valid fitness documents do not get fuel from any filling station. The authorities are yet to receive the certified copy of the court order.

Once the directive is implemented, many vehicle owners would rush to the BRTA offices to get their fitness documents updated, as they had done when law enforcers intensified drives after the student agitation for road safety last year, a BRTA official said.

## QUALITY COMPROMISES

Established in 1987, the BRTA deals with vehicle registrations, issuing and renewing of driving licences, fitness of vehicles, and route permit for commercial vehicles through its 57 district and five metro offices.

In recent years, the number of vehicles, mainly motorcycle and cars, saw a huge rise. But the BRTA's manpower has stayed almost the same.

The BRTA Mirpur office has 18 vehicle inspectors but only six of them regularly work for checking fitness of vehicles at the office. The rest are usually engaged with mobile courts and other work, including issuance of driving licences.

An inspector, with the help of aides, is supposed to check 59 elements of every vehicle. The inspector has to do this in about three minutes on a slow day.

The inspection of a vehicle is supposed to take half an hour, transport expert Prof Moazzem Hossain said.

An inspector seeking anonymity said, "We [six inspectors] check fitness of 800 to 900 vehicles daily in normal time while 1,300 to 1,400 in rush time. In rush time, three inspectors [who work with mobile courts] join us."

Asked how just six inspectors check 800 to 900 vehicles a day, a BRTA director said, "Our inspector can't check all elements. They check major elements involving safety issues."

BRTA has only one Vehicle Inspection Centre (VIC) at the Mirpur office to check some elements digitally and some 100 commercial vehicles (bus and trucks) are tested there every day.

Other vehicles have to be checked manually, which experts said could compromise safety as it leaves room for manipulation and irregularities. An automated system can get exact performance data of a vehicle's key safety features like headlights, brakes, and speed capabilities, which is almost impossible to do manually, they said.

Prof Moazzem, also a former director of Accident Research Institute at Buet, said the authority is taking money from vehicle owners but does not check vehicles properly.

"This is cheating," he said.

Due to the lack of manpower, people are suffering and improper inspection fails to identify safety issues, he said.

"For these reasons, people often feel discouraged to have their vehicles' tested and this is a reason behind the

huge number of vehicles without fitness documents," he said.

Sources said some unscrupulous people at the BRTA, taking advantage of the situation, are giving owners fitness certificates without having the vehicles checked for money.

## POSSIBLE WAY OUTS

Last year, the BRTA sent a proposal of 3,820-man organogram with additional 133 posts for inspectors and 220 posts for assistant inspectors.

The ministry reduced the number to 2,315 with 133 and 111 posts for inspectors and assistant inspectors, a BRTA official said.

"We have sent the fresh proposal to the ministry on Thursday," he said. The proposal would go to the public administration ministry and then finance ministry as per procedure.

Meanwhile, Road Transport and Highway Division in August formed a committee to work how fitness tests could be outsourced to private companies.

"The decision to outsource the work was taken due to the huge scarcity of fitness testing facilities," Sitangshu Shekhar Biswas, member secretary of the committee, told The Daily Star.

The committee has already set some criteria for private companies and submitted their report to the ministry, Sitangshu, also the director (operations) of the BRTA, said.

## MINISTRY'S SAY

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said manpower of the BRTA was better than before.

"However, manpower is not enough considering the increasing volume of work [of the BRTA]," Quader said replying to a question at a press conference at his secretariat office yesterday.

"Our ministry has given reminder to the public administration ministry to increase manpower. We are hopeful of getting additional manpower soon," he said.

Asked about implementation of the HC directives, he said Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources would implement the HC order and he was not aware of how much work that ministry has done so far.

"If the people comply with the court order, they will benefit," said the minister, adding that "no helmet, no fuel" initiative taken by Dhaka Metropolitan Police delivered positive results.

Asked whether implementation of such order would increase public suffering given that many public transports do not have the necessary fitness clearance, Quader said, "We will decide based on reality."

He said they were working to increase the number of public transport vehicles as "we will find very few public vehicles with proper fitness once we go for action against unfit vehicles".

Between independence and September this year, 41.76 lakh vehicles, including 27.54 lakh motorcycles, got registered with the BRTA.

The BRTA does not have any data as to how many of these vehicles are actually on the road.

Motorcycles are exempted from the fitness checks.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina holds a copy of the minutes from the 1972 cabinet meetings handed over to her as a souvenir during yesterday's cabinet meeting.

PHOTO: PID

# Malpractices hurting overseas job sector

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"Age limit for the women going abroad for domestic work is 25 to 38 years. But there were cases 18-year old girl's age has been shown 25 years. Also, 55-year old women's age in the passport was shown 36," he said.

While more than 10 lakh Bangladeshis secured jobs overseas in 2017, that came down to 7.34 lakh last year. In the first eight months this year, 4.17 lakh Bangladeshis migrated overseas for jobs, and the projected figure by the yearend is 6.26 lakh.

The issues of undocumented Bangladeshis came up prominently as thousands of migrants are being deported by Saudi Arabia. This has also been a major issue in Malaysia where authorities have been conducting raids against irregular migrants, including those from Bangladesh.

On various occasions over the last one year, Bangladesh requested Malaysia to regularise the undocumented Bangladeshis (around 50,000 who were registered there under the Rehiring Programme during 2016 and 2018), but Malaysia said that they could not do so.

When the UAE restricted recruitment from Bangladesh in 2012, it did not cite any reason, but insiders said recruitment of surplus labour between 2007 and 2012 had caused many workers to become irregular, which was considered a major problem by the UAE.

According to the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), more than two lakh Bangladeshis migrated to the UAE each year between 2007 and 2012. The figure was much higher, more than 4.19 lakh, in 2008.

The case was similar in Malaysia, which had suspended recruitment

COUNTRY	RECRUITMENT	LABOUR MARKET SITUATION
Saudi Arabia (2017-Sept 2019)	10.77 lakh	High number of deportation of migrants since 2017
Malaysia (2007-08)	4.05 lakh	Frozen in early 2009
Malaysia (2017-18)	2.76 lakh	Suspended in 2018
UAE (2007-2012)	16.06 lakh	Restricted since 2012

from Bangladesh in early 2009 after recruiting high numbers of workers in the previous two years.

The Southeast Asian country, which had been recruiting from Bangladesh since 1990, never hired more than 68,000 Bangladeshis a year until 2006. The numbers went up strikingly to 273,201 in 2007 and 131,762 in 2008, according to the BMET data.

Malaysian NGO, Tenaganita, in its researches from 2007 had found that many of the Malaysian companies recruited excessive number of workers. For example, a company that required 50 workers would hire 100.

Tenaganita said the motive of the agents and illegal brokers was to make profit out of more recruitments, but that led to joblessness and exploitation, prompting Malaysia to freeze recruitment in 2009.

Even in 2018, Malaysia had hired 1.76 lakh Bangladeshis and about a lakh the previous year. While suspending, Malaysia had said a syndicate of ten recruiting agents was charging workers up to Tk 4 lakh (20,000 Malaysian Ringgit).

Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme, said there is a clear link between sending excessive number of workers overseas and

labour exploitation, deportation and even closure of labour markets. That is evident in the cases of Malaysia, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

"Agents and brokers focus on the number of workers, not on their wellbeing. This is simply because they want money. Sending more workers means more money for them," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Hasan said this trend is causing serious economic and social problems in society, because many of the migrants face situations akin to human trafficking and return home physically and mentally harmed, and in debt.

"Interestingly, neither the recruiting agents nor illegal manpower brokers involved in such processes are held accountable," he said.

Minister Imran Ahmad said his ministry is now maintaining 'zero tolerance policy' against those involved in recruitment irregularities. Bangladesh embassies and ministry officials are working together to this end, he added.

Asked how he is going to take action against the syndicates of manpower brokers and agents, he said, "We don't have all the information. If you have any list of errant agents or brokers, please provide us with it. It will help."

# Menon sorry for 'confusion' over his remarks

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national polls, he said.

If any of his party members had attended the meeting, they could have cleared the "misunderstandings", Menon said.

On October 19, Menon at a programme in Barishal city alleged that people could not cast their votes in the December 30 parliamentary polls.

"Although I was elected in the election, I am testifying that people couldn't cast their votes in that election. They couldn't vote in the union parishad and upazila parishad polls," he said.

Menon, who was a minister in the last cabinet of Sheikh Hasina, said his statement was partially published, causing the meaning to change.

After the statement, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, also AL general secretary, asked whether Menon would have said this if he were a minister.

In response to Menon's explanation, Nasim said the 14-paty alliance was pleased with his explanation.

"We got an explanation from Menon today ... I want to say that the controversy over his remarks came to an

end through his explanation," Nasim told journalists after an alliance meeting at his home in the capital's Dhanmondi yesterday.

"We believe that the way the 14-party alliance leaders, including Rashed Khan Menon, worked in the past, we will work the same way in future."

Nasim said Menon agreed with the stance of 14-party alliance over the election and his statement was published partially, which created confusion.

Menon said he was working under the alliance leadership, he added.

# Shakib's place in India tour uncertain

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was supposed to name an altered squad last night. However, Shakib's continued absence forced the board to defer naming the squad to today. Similar uncertainty surrounds the Test squad, which is yet to be announced.

Shakib's absence has not been his only disciplinary breach over the past week. In the middle of the three-day players' strike, Shakib had signed a sponsorship deal with telecom company Grameenphone on Tuesday, which was in direct breach of the terms of his contract. After the strike was resolved on Wednesday with the BCB agreeing to nine of the players' 11-point demand, the board issued a letter to Shakib asking him to explain his deal with the telecom giants.

"When it comes to sponsorship deals the telecom companies pay the most.

We had a three-year sponsorship deal with Robi for Tk 90 crore. One of the terms of the deal was that the players could not sign with any competing brands. They wanted four or five players for a total of 45 minutes a year [to shoot commercials]," BCB President Hassan told The Daily Star during an interview at his residence yesterday.

"What Grameen did was they signed one player, and none of the others wanted to fulfil the commitment to Robi. So they [Robi] complained a few times and eventually withdrew from the deal.

"Then it was decided that the players could not sign with any telecom company, and they would have to take the board's permission even before signing deals with brands of other sectors. This is written in their contracts and they have signed it," Hassan said while explaining how Shakib had

breached the terms of his contract. "I want him to give his side of the story, which is why I issued the letter."

As for the uncertainty surrounding Shakib's availability for the tour of India, Hassan seemed to have as little knowledge on the subject as those outside Bangladesh cricket's corridors of power.

"To tell you the truth, I am confused. Nothing is clear at the moment. If Shakib does not go, it changes the whole team combination. He told me yesterday [Sunday] at my office that he was going to Mirpur to play [the practice match], but I went there and I saw he was not there.

"There is something more here. This is suspicious. All I can say is that it is not what you are thinking," said Hassan, perhaps alluding to any fallout from the players' strike.

# JU crisis deepens

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residence and chanted slogans demanding her resignation.

A spokesperson of the platform, Prof Sayeed Ferdous of anthropology, said the protest would continue until Prof Farzana's removal.

Meanwhile, the VC-backed teachers' organisation "Jahangirnagar for development and against injustice" urged to the protesters to solve the crisis through discussion.

Students started protests on August 23 demanding a judicial inquiry into the reported involvement of the vice-chancellor and her family in corruption and mismanagement of Tk 1,445 crore development projects on the campus. Many teachers joined them later.

# HC fixes Nov 3 for verdict on banking sector commission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court has fixed November 3 to deliver its verdict on the rule issued over the formation of a commission to look into the irregularities and corruption took place in the banking sector in the last two decades.

The HC bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Md Khairul Alam yesterday fixed the date after concluding a hearing on the rule.

Following a writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh, another HC bench on February 13 this year issued a rule asking the authorities concerned to show causes why they should not be directed to form a commission to investigate the irregularities and corruption in giving out loans and waiving interest in the last two decades.

In the rule, the court asked the respondents to explain why their failure or inaction to stop various irregularities, illegalities and corruption during this period should not be declared illegal.

The rule also asked them to show causes why their failure to recover the loans from the defaulters in the mentioned period should not be declared unlawful.

The respondents are secretaries to the cabinet division and the prime minister's secretariat, ministries of finance, the financial institutions division, governor of Bangladesh Bank (BB) and the chairmen of the National Board of Revenue and the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

The court ordered the respondents to explain why they should not be directed to stop the irregularities and corruption in sanctioning loans, waiving interests and recovering the loan amount from the defaulters.

During hearing on the rule on June 24, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam submitted a report prepared by Bangladesh Bank to the HC, saying that the amount of the country's total defaulted loans in the last 20 years is Tk 2.2 lakh crore.

Of the total loans, Tk 1.1 lakh crore is realisable, Tk 80,000 crore requires court orders to be realised as a large number of cases are involved with the amount, and Tk 30,000 crore cannot be realised, the attorney general told the court citing the central bank's report.

The money was taken by loan defaulters from different banks in the last 20 years using 10,476 different accounts.

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# DU 'ILLEGAL ENROLMENT' Heated arguments in academic council meet over BCL men

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University teachers yesterday evening had heated arguments at the academic council meeting held over the "illegal enrolment" of 35 Chhatra League leaders.

The 35 students, including Golam Rabbani, former general secretary of Bangladesh Chhatra League, reportedly get enrolled to the university by violating admission rules ahead of the Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducusu) polls.

Nine of them got elected to different posts in the Ducusu and hall union polls.

The argument broke out when Prof ABM Obaidul Islam, chairman of the physics department, also convener of the BNP-backed White panel of DU teachers, took the floor and read out a written statement.

The academic council meeting, held at Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate building around 3:00pm, was chaired by DU Vice-Chancellor Prof Akhtaruzzaman.

Talking to the reporters Prof ABM Obaidul said, "We asked the council, which is the highest academic decision-making body, to launch proper investigation into the incident and to bring the perpetrators to book. The illegal enrolment of 35 Chhatra League men tarnished the image and dignity of the university."

Thirty-four of the Chhatra League leaders reportedly got admitted to an evening course titled "Master of Tax Management" under the banking and insurance department of the Business Studies faculty, according to media reports.

Golam Rabbani was allegedly enrolled under MPhil course of Criminology department, the reports said.

Speaking about the incident last night, Prof ABM Obaidul said, "Prof Abul Mansur Ahmed of mass communication and journalism department first protested my speech terming it politicised."

He said later the Blue Panel teachers, including the Ruqayyah Hall provost, also Sociology Professor Zeenat Huda, and former Education and Research Institute Professor M Wahiduzzaman exchanged words with him.

Prof M Wahiduzzaman, also the former VC of Noakhali Science and Technology University (NSTU), urged

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Long queues of motorcycles near the Mirpur BRTA office for fitness certificates.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON