

Woman set on fire by husband, his mother dies

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

A 22-year-old woman died last night four days after her husband and mother-in-law set her on fire in Kabilera Para area of Gaibandha.

Sharmin Akter, 22, died at Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery around 10:00pm, said Mahfuzur Rahman, officer-in-charge of the Gaibandha Sadar Police Station.

He added that Sharmin's husband Korban Ali, 25, and his mother Kulsum Begum, 45, had a fight over trifles on Tuesday afternoon, and around 1:00pm Korban and Kulsum poured an inflammable substance on Sharmin's body and set her alight.

Police arrested the suspects and a court sent them to jail the next day, the OC said.

After the incident, Sharmin's family members rescued her and took her to Gaibandha General Hospital around 9:00pm.

A medical officer said she suffered 70 per cent burns.

She was taken to the national institute on Wednesday.

Man held

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Baishtila area. Her father lives elsewhere."

"On Friday night, her aunt went out for shopping and the girl was alone in her home. The suspect allegedly raped her entering the house," he said.

Later the child was rescued by locals and admitted to the One-stop Crisis Centre of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

A local union parishad member filed a case later that night and police arrested Islam Uddin around 10:00am, the OC said.

Punish those

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The eminent personalities strongly condemned those incidents and demanded trial of those, including policemen, officials and other persons, responsible for the incidents.

"We think citizens' fundamental rights have been violated and the celebrations marking 50 years of independence have been denigrated through carrying out these attacks.

"We all have to keep in mind that people have constitutional rights and freedom to stage protests in a disciplined manner," the statement said.

The 20 citizens said they thought that the ill-attempt to restrict the rights by opening fire and carrying out torture during the celebrations of 50 years of independence is a farce at the aim of the country's independence and spirit of Liberation War.

The signatories to the statement are: M Hafiz Uddin Khan, Ali Imam Majumder, Prof Anu Muhammad, Badiul Alam Majumdar, Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Sara Hossain, CR Abrar, Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury, Asif Nazrul, Shahidul Alam, Hasnat Quaiyum, Nur Khan Liton, Shireen Huq, Jakir Hossain, Perween Hasan, Lubna Mariam, Sharmeen Murshid, Firdous Azim, Naila Zaman Khan and Rahnuma Ahmed.

In a separate statement, Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) yesterday expressed concern and condemned Friday's incidents in Chattogram and Brahmanbaria.

It also demanded fair probes into those incidents and legal actions against those responsible for the violence.

On Friday, four people were killed in Chattogram and one was killed in Brahmanbaria in clashes between supporters of Hefajat-e-Islam and policemen after Juma prayers.

European

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Only shops selling food, and book and music stores are open and classrooms in high schools are only running at half the capacity.

Daily cases in France have nearly doubled since the start of the month and there have been more than 200,000 new cases every week.

Belgium meanwhile closed all businesses involving non-medical physical contact such as hairdressers for four weeks from yesterday. Shops offering "non-essential" services can only receive clients with appointments.

Poland closed creches, playgrounds, furniture and DIY stores, as well as beauty salons and barber shops.

Social distancing in churches in the predominantly Catholic nation has also been tightened with one person allowed in every 20 square metres (200 square feet) instead of 15 square metres earlier.

The Philippines yesterday announced that more than 24 million people in and around Manila will go into lockdown next week.

From Monday, people will have to work from home unless they are considered essential workers, and public transport will be halted. All mass gatherings will be banned, night-time curfews from 6:00 pm to 5:00 am will be enforced and non-essential businesses will be shut.



Activists of Hefajat-e-Islam build lines of defence on a road near the main gate of Hathazari Madrasa in Chattogram yesterday while policemen stand guard in front of them. Vehicles of Border Guard Bangladesh and police take position, bottom right, to tackle any untoward incident there. The activists also brought out a procession in the port city's Jamiatul Falah mosque area, top right.



PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

Hefajat mayhem on

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according to Abdullah Al Mamun, doctor at the emergency unit of Brahmanbaria General Hospital. He said three were brought dead to the hospital.

Locals who witnessed the clash said they saw a rally of Hefajat heading out of Budhol union area and reaching Nandanpur beside the highway around 5:30pm. The protesters were intercepted by members of the police and the BGB, who had been stationed there.

Witnesses told our correspondent that the madrasa students outnumbered the members of the two forces, encircled them and started hurling brick chunks at them.

In response, the BGB opened fire with live ammunition, witnesses told our correspondent.

Asked about the three people killed in Brahmanbaria, BGB spokesperson Lt Col Faizur Rahman, however, said, "We heard that there was a clash but it was not with us, it was with the police."

Abdur Rahim, officer-in-charge of Brahmanbaria Sadar Police Station, said he was unaware of anyone being killed.

The dead included Zohor Alam, 4, a resident of Haria village of Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila and a workshop assistant, Sujon Miah, 20, of Moindo village of the district's Majlishpur union, and Badal Miah, 28, a migrant worker of Sunamganj's Dirai upazila.

Meanwhile, the Islamist group is enforcing a countrywide hartal today.

In Faridpur, 250-300 people attacked Bhangra Police Station around 2:15pm yesterday, injuring six police personnel, including two sub-inspectors and an assistant sub-inspector.

Locals told our correspondent

that many gathered at the Eidgah ground near the police station after Zuhr prayers. They later joined a rally of madrasa students coming from Bhangra Bishwa Road area and the two groups carried out the attack around 2:15pm.

The groups vandalised the main gate of the police station and damaged two motorbikes belonging to the police, said Md Alimujjaman, superintendent of police in Faridpur.

Police fired at least 45 rubber bullets to disperse the attackers and bring the situation under control, he said.

"We had been in touch with different madrasas, and they had given us words that they would not do anything like this, but they attacked the police station all of a sudden.

"We came to know that the attackers are the activists of Hefajat-e-Islam and supporters of Pir Char Manai. All the injured police personnel were admitted to Bhangra Upazila Health Complex. Police will file a case soon," added the SP.

At Chattogram's Hathazari, the bastion of Hefajat, members of the outfit ran amok. They also built a solid brick wall that blocked the Chattogram-Khagrachhari highway.

All traffic movement on the road had remained halted since the night before.

Police held discussions with Hefajat men at Hathazari Police Station throughout the day yesterday. The two groups sat six times before a truce was reached.

They talked about what to do with the bodies of the four killed in Hathazari on Friday.

Local MP Anisul Islam Mahmud and Chattogram Range DIG Anwar Hossain and District Superintendent of Police SM Rashidul Haque negotiated with Hefajat men.

"The [madrasa] students are furious and they want to take the bodies of the dead students back to the madrasa and hold a janaza there, but the administration had initially refused to allow us to do that. The administration wants the janaza to be held far away from the madrasa, at Jamatul Falah field in the city," Hefajat Joint Secretary General Nasiruddin Munir told The Daily Star.

Following the discussions, Hefajat accepted the terms of the police and allowed the final rites of the dead to be held away from the group's stronghold.

Among the dead on Friday was one bystander Waidul Islam Rumon. His elder brother Towhidul Islam Sumon said Rumon used to study at class-X at Razoan High School.

About two weeks back, he came to Hathazari and took a job at a tailoring shop as the school remained closed.

"On Friday evening, he was supposed to come home [Razoan]. After offering Jumma prayers, he took lunch. When he was coming to his shop for work, he was killed on the way," Sumon told The Daily Star last evening adding that he was still waiting for his brother's body at Chattogram Medical College Hospital.

While the events unfolded, police had taken up position in front of Hathazari Madrasa, along with Rab members and four platoons of BGB, led by three magistrates, reported our Chattogram correspondent.

A witness who had seen how the Hefajat protesters were killed on Friday, narrated how the incident.

"Around 2:30pm, I saw a clash in the street, so I went to my rooftop. I saw the madrasa students attacking the police station. They kept throwing bricks at the police station for around five minutes. At first, the police retaliated with rubber bullets. But

then around 2:38pm, the police docked their rifles through holes in the boundary wall of the police station and opened fire," said the witness, wishing not to be named.

At the capital, Islamist protesters brought out two processions yesterday. Around noon, Hefajat supporters demonstrated within the premises of Baitul Mukarram mosque, while supporters of Islami Andolon brought out a separate rally that started from the North gate of the mosque, and proceeded for half a kilometer before being suspended in front of Dainik Bangla More.

The demands being placed by Hefajat include, the withdrawal of the officer-in-charge of Hathazari police station, a promise that no cases will be lodged against the students, and assurance that the police who fired at the Hefajat supporters will be brought to justice.

In addition, at Malibagh yesterday, a bus was set on fire, and a car and CNG-run auto-rickshaws were vandalised.

In Sylhet, police detained 14 Islami Chhatra Shibir men during a rally protesting the deaths of those who were protesting Modi's Bangladesh visit.

The activists of Shibir, a pro-student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, gathered and started a rally at Sylhet city's Nayasarak area yesterday afternoon.

While policemen reached the spot, the activists started throwing stones at the law enforcers, who charged batons to disperse the attackers, said Ajbahar Ali Sheikh, deputy commissioner (north) of Sylhet Metropolitan Police (SMP).

Police also seized 15 motorcycles from the spot along with some other materials meant for vandalism, he said adding that legal steps against was being taken in this regard.

Mexican child, 9, dies trying to enter US: border patrol

AFP, Washington

A nine-year-old Mexican child died while trying to cross the Rio Grande into the United States, the Border Patrol said Friday amid a surge in migrants seeking to enter the country.

The child was found together with a Guatemalan woman and her three-year-old, all unconscious and stranded on an island in the middle of the river which demarcates the US-Mexico border in Texas on March 20.

"Agents found the individuals and immediately began administering first aid while transporting the migrants to shore," the Border Patrol said in a statement that did not state the deceased child's gender.

The woman and the three-year-old regained consciousness but the nine-year-old could not be revived.

The three, who were not identified,

were some of the 500 migrants rescued from dangerous situations in the past five months as thousands attempt to cross the border every day.

A senior Border Patrol official said Friday that the numbers continue to increase: some 6,000 undocumented migrants were caught on Thursday trying to enter the country.

Unlike in the past, when most of those caught crossing the southern border illegally were single adults, most recently about half have been either in family units or as unaccompanied children.

Most are being sent back into Mexico but all of the unaccompanied children and a number of the families are being allowed to stay in the United States.

Holding and processing facilities for the children at both the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) are packed far beyond capacity.

Bus driver held for reckless driving

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In the case statement, the plaintiff mentioned speeding and reckless driving of the Dhaka-bound bus from Rajshahi as reasons behind the accident.

SM Manjur Rahman, Rajshahi branch manager of Hanif Enterprise, opposed the police version and said their driver had lengthy experience of driving heavy vehicles.

"We have talked with our coach driver. We visited the spot and talked to locals. We came to know that the allegations against our coach driver were not true," he said.

"Dhaka coaches have to have certain speed on the highways. But we learnt that the microbus was speeding and it was coming on the wrong lane of the highway.

"In order to avoid a head-on collision, our driver swerved to the right of the highway, but the microbus moved and collided with our coach," Rahman said.

"We learned that the microbus was overburdened," he added.

Talking to The Daily Star, RMP Commissioner Md Abu Kalam Siddique said the highway's speed limit was 40 kilometres per hour, but from the CCTV footage they saw of the Dhaka-bound bus, it seemed like it was travelling at around 60kmph.

"The coach hit the microbus so hard that it was thrown 20 metres, a fire broke out in the vehicle and quickly spread from its gas cylinder," the RMP boss said.

The driver of the microbus and all its passengers, but one, were killed in the accident.

The lone surviving passenger of the microbus is Pavel, 18, who has been undergoing treatment at the ICU of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

Quoting doctors, police officials said his condition was critical.

Both of Pavel's parents -- Mokhlesur Rahman, 40, and Parveen Begum, 36 -- died in the accident, the police

official said.

The police handed over all 17 bodies to their family members yesterday evening after the autopsy of the bodies was done and DNA samples collected at the RMCH morgue.

Receiving the bodies, the family members broke down in tears.

Sohel went to the morgue to receive the body of his brother Abu Hanif, 25, of Pirganj in Rangpur district. Hanif was driving the black Toyota HiAce microbus.

"It was my brother's first trip with the microbus. It has turned into his last trip," Sohail said.

He said Hanif was hired as a driver after the vehicle's owner Rafiqul Islam, a motorcycle mechanic in Pirganj, bought it only five days back.

Hanif, who had been driving for the last seven years, was the lone bread earner for his family of a wife and four young sons, Sohail said.

Md Abdul Karim Sarker was receiving five bodies -- his daughters

Shamsunnahar and Kamrunnahar, Shamsunnahar's husband Salahuddin, their son Sajid, 7, and daughter Safa, 2.

"I bade them farewell, I didn't know they were leaving forever," he said, adding that his daughters and their families were going to Rajshahi on for sightseeing and to visit a friend's house.

Ful Mia, 40, his wife Nazma Begum, 37, their son Faisal, two daughters -- Sadia, 7, and Sumaiya, 4 -- were members of another family who lost their lives in the accident, according to police.

Vuttu Mia, 45, his wife Mukta Begum, 40, and their son Yamin, 14, are also among the dead.

Other than the driver Hanif, there was Shahidul Islam, 46, who also perished in the accident.

The bus's helper and supervisor received minor injuries and were given first aid from RMCH. None of the bus passengers were hurt.

Namita Ghosh

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Yesterday, the PM expressed deep shock at the death of Namita. She prayed for the salvation of the departed soul and expressed sympathy to the bereaved family.

Namita last appeared at a programme on Bangladesh Television on March 12 marking the Independence Day.

She was first admitted to Asgar Ali Hospital. As her condition deteriorated, she was moved to Mugda General Hospital before being taken to Popular Hospital, where she breathed her last.

Noted singer Fakir Alamgir said, "Namita was the first voice artiste of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. Sadly, she was not evaluated properly though her contributions to the country were immense."

Namita, a valiant freedom fighter, joined Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra at the age of 14 in 1971.

On March 27, 1971, she crossed the Buriganga river at night to reach Keraniganj. From there, she went to Cumilla before travelling to Agartala. She became acquainted with valiant freedom fighters there, and took part in the making of a documentary.

Namita then travelled to Kolkata where she joined Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. She was an artiste of Bangabandhu Shilpi Goshti. She along with her team travelled to several refugee camps to inspire valiant freedom fighters.

The singer completed matriculation from Banglabazar Girls High School and later went to Jagannath College. Her mother Joshoda Ghosh, a radio artiste herself, inspired her to pursue a career in music.

She received lessons under the tutelage of Pandit Barin Mazumder, Ustaad Munshi Roisuddin and Ustaad P C Gomes. She also received lessons on Nazrul and Rabindra Sangeet from several other teachers.

Namita started her singing career at Dhaka Betar in 1969. She was a student at "Sangeet Shiksha Ashor" of Dhaka Betar in 1964. She started singing on television in 1969.

"She was a devoted artist who loved her work," said Rafiqul Alam, a Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra artiste.

"At Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, she was always ready to take up any work that Samar Das would assign to her. Even after the country's independence, she was always there whenever we needed her," Rafiqul added.

Singer Shaheen Samad said, "Namita was the youngest artiste at Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. She was among the first ones to join."

"We all adored Namita and she always respected us. We two were great friends. She used to stand beside me at every programme. She left us all, but our love for her will remain intact."

Namita was a regular artiste on radio and television and she was mainly a chorus artiste at Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, said Monowar Hossain Khan, general secretary of Swadhin Bangla Betar Employees Council.

"She was an excellent human being. Her death is a great loss for all of us."

Bulbul Mohalanobish, another artiste at Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, said she knew Namita since her childhood. "She struggled a lot in her life. It is a very sudden death for all of us."

A Guard of Honour was accorded to the artiste in Old Dhaka yesterday. Her last rites took place at Dhaka's Postagola.

Voting starts

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million would be a major achievement for Modi's BJP as it looks to expand further its power base beyond its Hindi-speaking northern heartlands.

In a state where thousands have died since the 1960s, fresh incidents of violence were reported yesterday with police saying a mob threw bombs at one polling station, seriously injuring an officer.

The president of the BJP in the state, Dilip Ghosh, said one of their supporters was killed by members of the region's ruling Trinamool Congress party in the early hours.

Assailants also attacked the vehicles of at least two election candidates, police said.

In this phase, in West Bengal, more than 73 lakh voters will decide the fate of 191 candidates across 30 assembly segments -- nine in Purulia, four in Bankura, four in Jhargram, six in Paschim Medinipur, and seven in Purba Medinipur, reported our New Delhi Correspondent.

Voting in West Bengal takes place in eight phases, ending on April 29, and the votes will be counted on May 2.

The first phase of the election in West Bengal has registered a voter turnout of nearly 80 per cent, Reuters reported citing election officials.

Politicians on the campaign trail often showed scant regard for social distancing, but as voters queued patiently at polling centres, security personnel and election workers handed out masks, hand sanitisers and gloves.

Modi was re-elected for a second five-year term in 2019, and his BJP is pushing to extend its influence beyond the 12 out of 28 states where it rules alone, and several others where it is part of a ruling alliance - not least because this would help it to control the upper house of the federal parliament.