

MITU MURDER CASE Ex-SP Babul shown arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTG

Former superintendent of police Babul Akter was shown arrested yesterday in the case filed by him over the murder of his wife Mahmuda Khanam Mitu in Chattogram five and a half years ago.

The court of Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Abdul Halim in Chattogram ordered to show Babul arrested in the case following an application by PBI Inspector Abu Jafar Md Omar Faruk, also the investigation officer of the case.

On June 5, 2016, Mitu was stabbed and shot dead while she was taking her son to his school bus stop in the port city's GEC intersection area. Babul filed the case with Panchlaish Police Station the following day against three unidentified men.

Mitu's father Mosharraf Hossain lodged another case against Babul with the same police station in May last year. In the case document, Mosharraf alleged that Babul killed Mitu over his extramarital affairs with a woman.

Babul was then interrogated at the PBI office and taken into their custody. A court later sent him to jail after he was produced before it.

Both the cases are being investigated by the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI).

On May 16 last year, the PBI submitted the final report in the case filed by Babul, calling him the "mastermind" behind the murder. Later, Babul was shown arrested in the case by Mosharraf.

On November 3, a court rejected the PBI's final report asking for further investigation into the case lodged by Babul.



Farmers loading paddy straws onto nosimon vehicles in Khulna's Daulatpur Dewana Morolpara yesterday. They sale every 1,000 bundles of the straw, mainly used as cattle feed, for around Tk 3,500 at local markets. Farm owners buy them for Tk 4,500.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

DEATH IN POLICE CUSTODY

Sisters perform last rites of parents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Himanshu Roy, a tea stall owner who died in police custody in Lalmonirhat, and his wife were cremated in the same funeral pyre on Saturday night.

In a twist of fate, their two daughters became orphans in less than 24 hours.

Himanshu died while being questioned in a room of Hatibandha Police Station on Friday over the alleged suicide of his wife, Sabitri Rani. Earlier in the day, the law enforcers recovered Sabitri's body in Purba Kadma Maldahpara village of Hatibandha upazila.

Himanshu's death raised questions as the room where he was interrogated had no working CCTV camera. His family members alleged he was tortured to death while police claimed he hung himself by the window grilles with an internet cable.

District police later formed a three-member committee to investigate the incident.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday,

Additional Superintendent of Police (A-circle) in Lalmonirhat Marufa Jamal, who is the head of the committee, said departmental action would be taken on the basis of the investigation report.

"We don't have the courage to stand up against the police, but we want a proper investigation. We need justice."

The autopsy on Himanshu's body was carried out at Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital while that on Sabitri's at Rangpur Medical College Hospital. Doctors said the cause of the deaths would be revealed in the autopsy reports.

After the autopsies, the bodies were taken to the crematorium in their village Purba Kadma Maldahpara.

The couple's 14-year-old daughter Priyanka Roy conducted the last rites while her 10-year-old sister Priyoshi

stood next to her.

Several policemen from Hatibandha Police Station were also present.

Priyanka, a ninth grader, told The Daily Star that her father was absolutely fine when police took him to the station on Friday morning, but he returned dead.

She said her father was killed. Himanshu's brother Sudhir Chandra Roy said the same.

"We don't have the courage to stand up against the police, but we want a proper investigation. We need justice," he added.

Local union council member Bijoy Chandra Roy said, "Police told us Himanshu died by suicide. How can anyone get a chance to commit suicide while in police custody? What is the point of police custody then?"

In a statement, rights body Ain o Salish Kendra, said, "There is a law to prevent custodial deaths, and the constitution too has a clause that protects citizens from torture, but these allegations [of custodial deaths] are never investigated."

Don't be afraid, get vaccinated

Hasina urges all

UNB, DHAKA

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged all to get vaccines without unnecessary fear to fight off the coronavirus and its new variants.

"I request all, please get vaccinated... do not fear. This vaccine will at least save your lives. Maybe you will suffer for a few days [if infected by the virus], but your life will be saved. That's why my request to all is that please don't fear and take jabs," Hasina said.

She made the call while addressing a programme marking the laying of the foundation stone of 460-bed integrated cancer, kidney and heart units at medical colleges in eight divisional cities of the country.

Held at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium, the prime minister joined the programme virtually from the Gono Bhaban.

"No one will be left unvaccinated."

Hasina said many are unwilling to take vaccines fearing the pain caused by the injection needle in addition to various negative propaganda against vaccination.

"Our target is to put 80 percent of the total population, except minors, under the vaccination coverage to save them from the coronavirus and the new variant Omicron."

As the new variant is also infecting children, the government has started vaccinating the 12-above children, she said, adding, "Whenever WHO will announce the age of children for taking jabs, we'll start vaccinating them as per its guideline. By the time we've given more than 13 crore doses, including double doses. We've started giving booster doses as well as I want the people of the country to remain safe.

"Please use masks and avoid mass gatherings."

KSJL wants law on EC formation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the dialogue with President Abdul Hamid at the Bangabhaban yesterday, Krishak Samik Janata League opposed search committee for the formation of the next Election Commission.

It proposed that the president takes measures so that a law is enacted in line with the constitution for the EC formation.

The current EC expires its tenure next month. KSJL said in case the law cannot be formulated due to time constraints, Hamid should form the EC including people who he thinks are patriots and acceptable to all.

Led by KSJL President Kader Siddique, a nine-member delegation from the party also submitted to the president a six-point proposal, including on formation of an election-time government comprising leaders of different registered political parties.

The president yesterday invited the ruling Awami League to the dialogue on January 17, the last day of the talks.

Bangladesh Muslim League yesterday boycotted the dialogue, terming it meaningless.

With BMI, seven political parties have so far boycotted the talks.

Not alarming

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reports The New York Times.

But in Bangladesh, the rate of vaccination is modest: as of January 6, 39 percent of the targeted population and 31 percent of the total population have received both doses of the Covid-19 vaccine, according to the DGHS.

At the same time, the administration of booster dose, which is said to provide bigger and broader protection against the Omicron variant, has not taken off on a massive scale.

In short, all the components indicate a storm is brewing.

Until now, the rate of hospital admissions from illnesses caused by the coronavirus has been slower than six months ago, when the Delta variant was wreaking havoc, said Forhad Uddin Chowdhury Maruf, a medicine and infectious disease specialist at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

During July last year, the overall bed occupancy rate skidded to about 90 percent – leaving hospitals stretched precariously thin.

"If the transmission of Omicron happens massively, the number of patients will definitely increase," he added.

But the number of critical patients will be less than it was seen during the second wave of Covid-19 caused by the Delta variant, according to Mushtuq Hussain, consultant of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research.

"Any massive transmission will cause a rush of patients to the hospitals again. We have seen pressure on hospitals in countries where

Omicron has spread fast and extensively – a similar situation may arise here."

To avoid such a scenario and stricter measures like lockdowns, he stressed firm enforcement of health and safety compliances.

"The most urgent step right now is to stop the mass gatherings. The community events should also be limited. Otherwise, there will be no alternative to imposing lockdown, even though the Omicron seems milder than the Delta," he added.

To avoid a repeat of the dire scenario seen during the previous wave of infections, the government has ramped up its vaccination efforts in recent days.

"Transmission has been on the rise – we want to ensure vaccines for more people," Health Minister Zahid Maleque told journalists yesterday after attending the foundation stone unveiling ceremony of Cancer Treatment Centres at eight divisional government medical college hospitals.

There is no shortage of vaccines, but people seem to have lost interest in taking the vaccine, he said.

"That's why we are running awareness campaigns."

The government has gone to community clinics for administering vaccines, while the number of wards offering the vaccine at the union level would be increased from three to nine.

While the vaccine does not prevent the spread of Covid-19, it certainly reduces the chances of death, Maleque said, while urging everyone to wear masks and follow the health rules to prevent another wave of coronavirus cases.

Judiciary not trained enough

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Taslima Yasmin, associate professor of law department at Dhaka University, said the women and children repression prevention tribunals were introduced to give protection to the victims of sexual offences, but they are still being treated the way they were treated by courts before the inception of these tribunals, with the same gender biases and patriarchal mindset.

"We have separate laws and tribunals for women, but we couldn't touch upon that barrier – whether those dispensing justice are gender-sensitive or not, and whether we could have sensitised them towards the plight of the victims," she said.

"Rather, we are in a way nurturing the same overwhelming mindset continued from the British period that the victims of sexual offences are lying – we will receive them with utmost suspicion – and their duty will be breaking that suspicion beyond any reasonable doubt, which ultimately becomes difficult for them to prove," she added.

Taslima conducted a study on the effectiveness of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act-2010 in 2020 and found a dismal picture of training implemented by the Judicial Administration Training Institute (JATI) of Bangladesh.

The study said the judges' training includes a module on the DVPP Act under its four-month foundation training, which consists of only a couple of hour's sessions taken by

an external organisation invited by JATI, and is highly inadequate to build a proper understanding on the detail and peculiar provisions of the law.

"Such project-based training cannot create awareness or sensitisation. Instead, there must be a regular, and institutionalised approach," opined Taslima.

According to JATI, currently it has a wide range of training modules for different judges, but it does not provide any training exclusively on gender issues and sensitivity.

Md Golam Kibria, director (training) of JATI, said when senior judges conduct the training, gender issues come up invariably.

"But this remains only one component of the curricula and usually covered in a day workshop," he told The Daily Star.

Besides, for the judges of women and children repression prevention tribunals, it has a week-long refresher course after their joining, conducted by Supreme Court judges, external members, forensic experts and others, the director said.

"But we have some limitations – we only have one institute for 1,800 judges, and we form a batch with only 45 judges. It happens that a judge doesn't get any training for two to three years," added Kibria, also a senior district and sessions judge.

Speaking to this newspaper on condition of anonymity, some judges said JATI's training is inadequate and irregular,

and they require more attention, because what they studied in universities are completely different from the real-life experiences.

A senior judge who conducts training at JATI said it also happens that some judges are called for a fundamental training two years after holding courts without any experience.

Another senior judge of a women and children repression prevention tribunal said the observation that judge Qumrunnaher gave is not surprising because there are many who often make contradictory remarks.

Advocate Salma Ali, president of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association, said it is the duty of the government to arrange regular training for judges and lawyers, and make them aware of some specific issues – how to deal with the victims, keep their protections in mind, and share positive landmark judgments with them to avoid unnecessary biases in sexual offence cases.

Fire ravages

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Incidents of fire have become a common phenomenon in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar. In March last year, 10,000 homes were razed to the ground in a huge fire in four camps in Balukhali of Ukhiya.

Officials concerned have often attributed the origin of fires to gas cylinders, but insiders in Rohingya camps have claimed that the fires are acts of arson.

The liberator's epic return

FROM PAGE 1
had been put in solitary confinement in Pakistan since the Liberation War began on March 26.

After dilly-dallying by Pakistani rulers over his release, Bangabandhu finally appeared at London's Heathrow airport on the morning of January 8, 1972.

As he walked out into the airport, a tearful on-duty police official said, "Sir, we had been praying for you" – a testimony to how the world had been supporting Bangabandhu and Bangladesh in the fight for liberation.

Mujib returned to his beloved country on January 10, after his "Sonar Bangla" was finally liberated.

BHUTTO MEETS MUJIB
On December 26, Bangabandhu was brought to a police academy in Shihala, not far from Pakistan's Rawalpindi.

When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the then president of Pakistan, visited him, Bangabandhu asked him if he was also detained.

Bhutto said he came as the president of Pakistan, to which Mujib laughingly asked, "How did you become the president after I secured twice as many seats as you in the National Assembly?"

He also said he had no desire to become Pakistan's president. "I long to go to Bangladesh as soon as possible".

Bhutto said he would make the necessary arrangements but needed a few days. Bangabandhu was then finally able to fly away on January 8.

STOP AT LONDON

After arriving in London, Bangabandhu called for other states to recognise Bangladesh as an independent country.

British Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath welcomed Sheikh Mujib in the evening and said that, in principle, they had decided to recognise an independent Bangladesh.

Heath also arranged his own plane for Bangabandhu to fly to Delhi.

THE DIPLOMACY
On board, Sheikh Mujib did not sit idle.

He took Indian diplomat Sashanka S Banerjee, who was accompanying him, into confidence and asked him to convey a message to Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi regarding the early withdrawal of Indian troops from Bangladesh.

The Indian PM had earlier announced that the troops would leave by June 30, 1972.

The British PM, during his talks with Mujib in London, expressed his wish to see the Indian troops pull out by March 31, three months before Gandhi's scheduled deadline, as this would then pave the way for Britain to extend diplomatic recognition.

Mujib wanted Sashanka to personally pass on this request to Gandhi as soon as they arrived in Delhi.

Indira Gandhi gracefully complied and announced withdrawal at the end of Mujib's Delhi visit.

Bangabandhu delivered a short speech to an enormous crowd in Delhi, where he expressed sorrow for not being able to stop by at Kolkata and promised to

visit it soon.

'AMAR SONAR BANGLA'
During his flight to Delhi, Bangabandhu sang Rabindranath's "Amar Sonar Bangla" with the joy of victory, of liberation, evident in his voice.

He discussed with Sashanka whether this song could perhaps be adopted as his new born nation's anthem.

THE LEADER'S RETURN
The Father of the Nation arrived in Dhaka at 1:40pm to a rapturous welcome from his people on January 10.

In the company of Bangladesh government leaders, his truck ride to the Race Course Maidan was almost three-hour long.

Once there, he could not hold his tears while paying tribute to the millions who sacrificed their lives for freedom.

The people of Bangladesh felt the real impact of victory upon Bangabandhu's homecoming.

The country today celebrates the 50th anniversary of its leader's return.

Bangabandhu took his oath as the country's prime minister on January 12, 1972, and immediately started working to rebuild his war-ravaged country into a prosperous, democratic nation with secular freedom.

[The story is based on Sashanka S Banerjee's, book titled "A Long Journey Together - India, Pakistan and Bangladesh" and Dr Kamal Hossain's book titled "Bangladesh: Quest for Freedom and Justice".]