

DINAJPUR RAPE

Family wants verdict upheld; child still suffering

OUR CORRESPONDENT, DINAJPUR

Hailing a Dinajpur court for sentencing Saiful Islam to life imprisonment for raping a five-year-old, the victim's family said they were satisfied with the decision but the child is still to heal from the brutal torture she had to endure.

At a press conference in Dinajpur Press Club yesterday, the child's mother said the entire family was satisfied and urged the higher court to uphold the sentence and make a speedy disposal of the case.

The victim and her family were accompanied by several non-government organisation officials, including Shamim Ara Begum, executive director of Pallishree – a local NGO.

The child, who was raped by Saiful at the age of five on October 18, 2016, could not yet start going to school as her health has still not improved despite ongoing treatment.

The mother said that Saiful used to be a neighbour. "After abducting our daughter in October 2016, he raped and tortured her."

The child had cuts all over her body, which caused massive bleeding. She had cigarette burns on her as well. Her uterus too is damaged critically, she said.

On October 19, the family found the little girl on a cropland near their home. After they rescued her, her father filed a case with Parbatipur Police Station.

Saiful was arrested on October 22 and has been in prison since then.

The child has so far undergone five major surgeries in a Dhaka hospital and is still in need of more. "She still has no control over her urethra, and that is the biggest barrier on her path to a full recovery and a normal social life," said the victim's grandmother, in tears.

"Children her age are supposed to be active and playing. My granddaughter can't even think of that due to her condition...She is even afraid of people she has known her whole life."

To that, the girl's mother added, "Her home is everything to her now."

A Dinajpur court convicted accused Saiful Islam to life term imprisonment on Monday. The court also fined him Tk 20,000, in default of which he will have to spend five more months in jail.



Kawra trees are dying fast in the reserve forest in Kuakata of Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila due to what forest officials say are the impact of climate change and sand accumulation during high tide. The death of the trees would expose the coastal people to serious damages from natural disasters, including storms and cyclones. The photo was taken on Friday.

PHOTO: STAR

His homecoming speech had governance directives

Says PM on Bangabandhu

UNB, DHAKA

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said Bangladesh will be governed as per the ideological speech of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman that he delivered on his historic Homecoming Day in 1972.

"The father of the nation on his Homecoming Day on January 10, 1972, delivered his policymaking speech and ideological directives for governing the country. We've to go ahead with that ideology; we've to advance the country with that. And the pace of development in Bangladesh must not be stalled, no matter what," she said.

The PM was addressing a discussion, marking the historic Homecoming Day of Bangabandhu. The Awami League organised the programme at its Bangabandhu Avenue central office.

Hasina, also the AL president, presided over the event, joining it from the Gono Bhaban.

She said the AL has been in power, elected by the people, for three consecutive terms. "Had we not been elected by people, then we wouldn't be able to come to power for three consecutive terms and complete 13 years [in power]. This is the reality. This reality has to be accepted."

If the AL remains in power, the wheels of development will be moving, Hasina said, adding that those who had made Bangladesh a place of killers, war criminals and corruption, there will be no place for them in this land. "This [message] has to be clearly conveyed to them."

Recalling the tumultuous days during the rule of Bangabandhu after independence, she said some people had written columns criticising the government of Bangabandhu, or created the volatile situation in the country in the name of a movement or scientific socialism. "What did they actually want to do? That's my question but I didn't get the answer yet."

Coming down heavily on a section of people, the PM said it is the habit of a class of people to criticise all good work of AL.

Regarding the allegation of wasting money in the name of development activities, Hasina said if thousands of crores of taka had been wasted in the name of development, then how had Bangladesh become the role model of development in the world.

Briefly describing various success stories of the country in the last 13 years, she said many developed and rich countries are not providing coronavirus vaccines free of cost.

"We're providing vaccines completely free of cost. So far, 13 crore people have been vaccinated."

She renewed her call to all to take vaccines to remain protected from the deadly virus. "And there's no shortage of vaccines."

AL Publicity and Publication Secretary Abdus Sobhan Golap conducted the discussion.

On January 10, 1972, Bangabandhu returned to independent Bangladesh via London and New Delhi after 290 days of captivity in a Pakistan jail.



Metro to be costlier

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the matter. Asked why specious footpaths were not considered at the design stage, Siddique said: "Metro rail is a new concept in our country. So it is taking us time to understand everything. We are learning from trial and error."

The expansive footpaths are not the only addition to the project design: the metro rail line would be extended from Motijheel to Kamalapur following Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's direction in 2019.

As per the original plan, a walkway was supposed to connect Kamalapur, the country's biggest railway station, to Motijheel, Dhaka's commercial hub.

Now a full-fledged station would be built in Kamalapur for the convenience of users, taking the total number of stops to 17.

About Tk 1,100 crore would be needed for this end, according to Siddique.

The length of the line will now be 21.26 kilometres instead of the original 20.10 km.

The original plan had an option of station plazas in four stops. No allocation was made for the exercise, which would entail land acquisition, too.

DMTCL has now decided to take up on that option, which would fetch revenue, and has sought funds accordingly.

The original cost included land acquisition for transit-oriented development (TOD) hub at Uttara Centre Station. But

it did not assign funds for preparing the layout and registration, which DMTCL is now seeking.

In urban planning, TOD is a type of urban development that maximises the amount of residential, business and leisure space within walking distance of public transport.

In doing so, TOD, which typically includes a central transit stop (such as a train station, or light rail or bus stop), aims to increase public transport ridership by reducing the use of private cars and by promoting sustainable urban growth.

By implementing TOD hubs, rail owners can offset capital costs of construction and secure long-term revenues to offset operating costs once in service.

Besides, the higher exchange rate of the dollar and the rise of value-added tax and customs duty are the other major reasons behind the cost escalation, Siddique said.

The authority also sought to extend the deadline by one and a half years to December 2025. But the partial operation of metro rail from Uttara to Agargaon is still expected to kick off in December.

Project Steering Committee led by Nazrul Islam, secretary of Road Transport and Highway Division, will hold a meeting over the revision proposal today.

Of the revised project cost of Tk 33,472 crore, Tk 19,675.70 crore will come

from project aid and the rest from the government exchequer.

The revised proposal would be forwarded to the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council for final approval.

Approved in December 2012, the project, which is being funded with soft loans from Japan, did not take off until 2016.

At present, the overall progress of the project is 73 percent, while the Uttara-Agargaon section, which is expected to open to the public later this year, is 90 percent complete.

Once completed, the metro rail will be able to carry 60,000 people an hour, bringing down the commute time between Uttara and Motijheel to around 40 minutes from the existing two hours.

Officially known as Mass Rapid Transit Line-6 or MRT Line-6, it is one of the eight fast-track projects of the government. If the revision proposal is approved, all eight projects but the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant would be revised at least once.

Uncertainty over funding, complexity over designs, planning and land acquisition, lack of capability of implementing agencies and the pandemic are blamed for the time and cost overruns.

Time and cost escalation of development projects have become a major concern, with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressing discontent over the issues on several occasions.

The heat is on, as barbs rule campaigns

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leader, said the local administration should remain alert so that the polls atmosphere remains peaceful and voters can exercise their franchise.

Asked about the allegation of harassment of Taimur's campaigners, the immediate past Narayanganj mayor said she was not aware of it. She demanded arrest of those possessing illegal arms to maintain a congenial voting atmosphere in the city.

On Monday, Narayanganj-4 AL lawmaker Shamim Osman extended support to Ivy and his supporters started

campaigning for the mayor hopeful.

Ivy, however, said Shamim cannot join electioneering as it would be a violation of the electoral code of conduct.

She said it did not matter who was supporting whom. "My strength is my party men and also the people of Narayanganj."

TAIMUR'S CAMPAIGN BNP leader Taimur was relieved of two party posts over contesting the election going against the party's decision. Many local BNP leaders have joined his campaign.

His election coordinator Monirul Islam, also the acting convener of

Narayanganj BNP, was arrested by police on Monday.

Taimur alleged that the Election Commission failed to create a level playing field for all candidates and the local administration was also biased towards the ruling party mayoral candidate.

He further complained that police were raiding houses of his supporters and harassing them.

"This harassment and intimidation of the opposition men show why many political parties are boycotting the polls. I hope that the prime minister will pay special attention so that people's hopes and

aspirations is reflected in the polls. Otherwise, her image will be tarnished," Taimur told journalists at a press conference in the city yesterday.

Sounding a note of warning to the local administration, the mayor hopeful said he will stage a sit-in in front of the office of the Narayanganj superintendent of police if the harassment of opposition men goes on.

Ivy, meanwhile, said she does not have any power to influence the local administration to work in her favour.

She also asked why the administration would work for her. "I think this is his

[Taimur's] new election campaign strategy."

Jayedul Alam, superintendent of Narayanganj police, said the overall election atmosphere in the city was very peaceful till now and there would be no chaos centring the polls.

Stating that five people have been arrested so far, the SP said among the seven mayor candidates, only one independent runner is raising allegations which are baseless.

"Police do not work for any specific party. It will do whatever is needed to hold a free and fair election," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Half of Europe

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"approved vaccines do continue to provide good protection against severe disease and death, including for Omicron".

The city of Anyang in Henan province in China on Monday night told its five million residents to not leave their homes or drive cars on the roads, China's official Xinhua news agency said.

Last week, the one million people in Yuzhou – also a city in Henan – were told to stay at home. Xi'an, home to 13 million people, is in its third week of lockdown, reports AFP.

China reported 110 new local virus cases yesterday, a tiny figure compared with the hundreds of thousands emerging daily in global hotspots such as the United States. The United States reported 135 million new coronavirus infections on Monday.