

A good Samaritan indeed

Rickshaw-van puller Alamgir leaves profession to guard risky unmanned level crossing

During the daybreak, at least 2,000 EPZ workers, mostly female, from surrounding villages cross the precarious level crossing on light vehicles braving the risk.

EAM ASADUZZAMAN

A poor man has set an example of magnanimity voluntarily guarding an unmanned rail crossing defying the bone-chilling cold and dense fog at the daybreak to caution Uttara EPZ workers about approaching trains, who are in a mad rush to reach factories in time.

Notably, on January 26, a terrific accident took away the lives of four female EPZ workers and critically injured four others as Khulna-bound Rupsha Express crushed a battery-run three-wheeler carrying them on the way to their workplace at the early hours on the unguarded rail crossing at Sonarai Dhonipara village in Nilphamari Sadar upazila.

After the accident, agitated people demanded that a gate be set up and a gateman be appointed but no high officials

of railway either visited the spot or gave any assurance in this regard.

Still at the daybreak, at least two thousand EPZ workers, mostly female, from surrounding villages cross the precarious level crossing on light vehicles braving the risk, locals said.

Alamgir Hossain, 40, a rickshaw-van puller who lives near the rail crossing, got worried and felt the urge to secure the level crossing.

Talking with local elderly people, Alamgir arranged bamboo poles and set them on each side of the rail crossing.

Whenever a train comes he sets the long bamboo pieces crosswise and cautions the pedestrians and vehicles to keep away from the rail tracks.

"I saw the blood-splattered bodies of the accident victims and when I found that the same risk still prevails, I became unsettled,"

said he.

"Every day, I come to the rail crossing at the daybreak and notice the headlight of an approaching train amid dense fog and whenever I see one I shout out to caution drivers and walkers. I have been doing this for all trains," he added.

Alamgir's son Aminur Rahman, 19, an HSC examinee, said "My father has given up pulling his rickshaw-van to guard the rail crossing, yet we respect his noble intention. To maintain the family, I and my younger brother are working at a brick kiln as our institution is closed."

Easy bike driver Shibu Roy said, "We sometimes offer him Tk 10 to Tk 20 but he never accepts."

Sadar upazila Chairman Shahid Mahmud said, "We have requested the railway authority to build a rail gate and appoint a gateman at this risky crossing."



Alamgir Hossain has been voluntarily guarding a risky rail crossing alerting vehicles and pedestrians while a train approaches at Sonarai Dhonipara village in Nilphamari Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

Courage

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the communists for all the casualties and refused to sign. I reproached him for his behaviour. After he refused to sign, I, as the convener of the All-Party University State Language Action Committee, signed the leaflet.

Shortly afterwards, it was announced that a ghaibana janaza would be held at the Medical College Hostel compound at 10:00am the next day. That night, Toaha, Oli Ahad, Emadullah and I discussed the janaza in detail. At some point that night, Oli Ahad went to Maulana Bhasani and requested him to lead the janaza prayers. According to Oli Ahad, Maulana agreed. But he was not seen the next morning. We then learned that he had already left for Narsingdi. Oli Ahad became very angry with him. Later Maulana Bhasani told me that he did not confirm Oli Ahad. He left for Narsingdi because he felt that the people in the village areas needed to be informed about the situation in Dhaka.

In my opinion, the events of February 22 were more significant than the events of February 21. I learnt from my personal experience that students were less courageous than common people. If we had to rely only on the students, then there were doubts as to whether there would be a procession on February 22. The procession happened because of the participation of a large number of general people in the ghaibana janaza. A large number of employees of the secretariat participated in the janaza and the procession. Police opened fire on the demonstrators near the High Court gate. But the procession continued spontaneously. Nobody cared about Section 144.

Abdul Matin was the convener of the All-Party University State Language Action Committee during the language movement.

This is an abridged version of Abdul Matin's interview published in Bhasha Andolon Prasanga: Katipay Dalil (Ed. Badruddin Umar, Bangla Academy, 1995.)

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Sanctions

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yesterday as there were some misleading media reports on his speech delivered at a programme in New York on February 1 regarding the sanctions.

On December 10, 2021, the US imposed sanctions on Rab and seven of its present and former top officials over allegations of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.

Earlier, the United States did not invite Bangladesh to its Summit for Democracy held on December 9-10.

Covid pandemic

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the previous week.

Next in line came France with 289,200 cases, down a fifth, and India where they fell by a third to 204,500.

The number of Covid-linked deaths increased globally for the fourth week in a row to 10,507 per day, a rise of 16 percent.

Even though the highly contagious Omicron variant led to four times more daily infections than previous waves, daily deaths remain far lower than their record high in January 2021 when they skirted 15,000.

The US recorded the most deaths this week with 2,576 per day, ahead of India (1,040) and Brazil (702).

Coastal areas

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by law enforcers, it's just a matter of their willingness to stop the use of single-use plastic in hotels, motels, and restaurants," she told The Daily Star.

The DoE will implement the three-year project in the coastal districts of Bagerhat, Barguna, Bhola, Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Feni, Khulna, Laxmipur, Noakhali, Patuakhali, Pirojpur and Satkhira.

A total of 40 upazilas in the 12 districts and eight selected areas of Chattogram city are within the project area, shows the Action Plan of DoE.

Bangladesh has been seeing a steep rise in plastic usage over the years. As per a World Bank research conducted in 2020, per capita plastic usage in the country was 3kg in 2005. The figure went up to 9kg in 2020.

According to World Bank data released last year, Bangladesh produces 8,21,250 tonnes plastic annually. Of the amount, 2,93,825 tonnes is recycled each year.

Zoo, park

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"Sawan was suffering from old-age complications and died in her cage around 10:00pm. She was buried inside the zoo after an autopsy, which showed she wasn't suffering from any disease."

The average life span of a tiger is around 15-16 years. Sawan died at the age of 18 years and seven months, he added.

Teknaf shook with 'crossfire' horror

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Around 10 pm Shah Alam told her that her husband would be taken to his house at 11 pm. He asked her to be there with money.

She waited all night for his call, which never came. So she went to his house the next morning at 7 am. She asked Shah Alam why he didn't call her. Upon getting no answer she went back home.

Meanwhile, despite Shah Alam's warning, Senowara told Abdul Jabbar, a member of ward number 9. That same afternoon, she went to meet a former MP and told him in detail what has happened. He called SI Moshuir and told him to release her husband. SI Moshuir denied having her husband in the police station. Then the MP called OC Pradeep and he too denied having her husband in their detention.

Some 15-20 days later, a local named Rafiq Ullah was taken away by OC Pradeep and his men and kept in the hajotkhana on the second storey of Teknaf police station. In the detention cell, Rafiq Ullah met Senowara's husband, who gave her phone number and asked him to contact her.

When Rafiq Ullah got out of the station, he called Senowara and asked her to meet him. "Please don't tell anyone you met me," Rafiq told Senowara when they met.

She, however, told the MP what happened. The MP asked her to go back to the police station. She did

and demanded to see her husband.

But when they threatened her with arrest, she left the police station. She then sent a document to the superintendent narrating what happened.

Some three or four months later, OC Pradeep, Sagor Deb, Rubel Shwama, Moshuir and 2-3 cops went to her home after the evening prayers and told her that she must pay Tk 10 lakh if she wants her husband back alive.

She told them: "My house is broken. I have no rice to cook, and my children are hungry. How will I give Tk 10 lakh?"

The verdict stated that she fell to Pradeep's feet, but the cop told her that she must manage Tk 5 lakh at least. Otherwise, she would not get her husband back alive.

To gather the Tk 5 lakh, Senowara took a Tk 1.5 lakh loan from a non-governmental organisation, sold off her husband's CNG for Tk 2.5 lakh and mortgaged her home for Tk 1 lakh. It took 15 days to gather the money.

Pradeep and his team then called in at her home and picked up the amount.

The next day, Senowara called Pradeep but he did not answer. She went to the police station and begged for her husband. "Pradeep did not respond -- he simply laughed."

On July 7, 2020, local journalists called her and told her that her husband's dead body was in the morgue. OC Pradeep had

given him "crossfire".

The verdict stated that Senowara believes that her husband was tortured to death and then passed off as a "crossfire" death. He was declared to be the second-in-command of a robber named Hakim.

A local member and businessman named Ham Jalal told the court how he was extorted by the cops, and how his young brother was killed in a crossfire.

On January 23, 2019, six cops from Teknaf police visited the house and a sub-inspector named Sanjit told him to open the door or be shot. Four cops entered and two stood outside.

They told him that a listed drug trader had named him as a criminal. SI Sagor told him that he needed to pay Tk 20 lakh or be arrested.

When Ham Jalal said he did not have so much money, SI Sanjit called Pradeep to inform him, and the cop was instructed to detain Jalal.

Jalal was taken to the second storey of the police station where there are four rooms. In one of the rooms, detainees who would be sent off to "crossfire" are kept.

SI Sagar then turned to him and said: "You have earned a lot of money by becoming a member. Give Tk 15 lakh and we will tell sir to let you go. Otherwise, you will be dead on Marine Drive tonight."

Jalal agreed to give the money and asked the cop to contact the upazila rental car association's

general secretary Rafiq. He was then thrown into a cell.

Then 15-20 minutes before dawn, constable Rubel brought a mobile phone and asked him to talk.

Rafiq was on the other end and he questioned how he would gather so much money. He asked Rafiq to sell his Noah microbus for Tk 12 lakh, take Tk 1.5 lakh from his savings and borrow the rest.

The next day his father went to meet OC Pradeep but was told that his son was not at the police station, the verdict said. The father went to meet Pradeep again two days later and was told to pay Tk 7 lakh in exchange for his son.

His father bargained and offered Tk 6 lakh. That night, at 1:30 am, constables Sagar and Rubel took him to Marine Drive and asked him to recite the kalima.

"You will shoot me. I want to talk to OC sir one last time," Jalal told them.

He was allowed to speak with the OC.

"I have four sons and one daughter. If you kill me, their future is doomed. I owe people around Tk 1 crore," Jalal told the OC and begged for two days. At that moment, the OC got a call.

The next day, he was charged with possessing 3,000 pieces of yaba. His father came to the police station, cried and said: "You took Tk 6.4 lakh from me to release my son." Jalal was in jail for three months.

Earlier on December 13, 2018, his younger brother Yusuf Jalal was detained by the police, the witness testified. He said that a Teknaf municipality driver came to their house and conveyed that Pradeep said that Yusuf can be released for Tk 1 crore.

They could not manage Tk 1 crore, and later that night, around 1 am, Yusuf was killed in a crossfire at Moulyipara neighbourhood. Nurjahan, a resident of a house nearby, witnessed the incident and fainted, Jalal said.

The court also took testimony from Daily Cox's Bazar Editor and Publisher Faridul Mostafa Khan, who was tortured by Pradeep for his journalism.

Khan had published news about Pradeep killing people in the name of crossfire, which angered the cop.

When the cops tried to detain Faridul, he escaped to Dhaka. He even wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, home minister and inspector general of police seeking help. The letters were submitted to the court.

Faridul had also filed a writ petition with the High Court seeking safety for himself and his family.

On September 21, 2019, Faridul was picked up from his home in Dhaka's Mirpur neighbourhood and brought to Teknaf police station.

He testified that the criminals stripped and videoed him. They rubbed chilli powder on his eyes and beat him up with

hockey sticks. He told the court that OC Pradeep had urinated on his face.

Later that day he was taken to Marine Drive and was threatened with crossfire, but they changed their mind and prosecuted him for drug possession instead.

"Sinha would not have been killed if Farid's journalism had been paid heed, and Pradeep transferred out of Cox's Bazar," the court said.

Another victim Baby Begum testified. In 2019, fifteen days after Eid-ul-Fitr, OC Pradeep and 14 others raided their house for yaba.

Upon not finding yaba, they beat up her husband Ziaur Rahman, her 15-year-old daughter Nazneen Akhter and looted the house. She told the court that a constable took naga chilli peppers from the kitchen and rubbed them on her daughter's face.

Then the husband and the daughter were taken to the police station, she said. An informer visited their family and told Baby to pay Tk 5 lakh for the daughter and Tk 40 lakh for the husband.

When Baby said that she did not have that much money, they prosecuted Naznin with 2,000 pieces of yaba and OC Pradeep himself called Baby and threatened to kill Ziaur in a crossfire. Ziaur had been in illegal detention for 18 days.

During his detention, he was taken as an eye-witness to three crossfires and threatened with the same

fate if his wife did not pay up.

Baby managed Tk 15 lakh and handed it over to Pradeep via informers.

She was on her way to Cox's Bazar to see her daughter when she was picked up by cops claiming to belong to the Detective Branch and later slapped with three cases.

Baby also said that when she met her daughter at court, Naznin told her she was sexually abused by the cops.

PRADEEP DEFLECTING BLAME

The verdict observed that in a last-ditch attempt to save himself, Pradeep tried to make others scapegoats.

When the prosecution finished their arguments, and the judge called the defence, Pradeep, who was standing on the docket, yelled and said he wants to say something.

"Liaquat killed Major Sinha. I did not command him to kill Sinha," he said.

When the court asked him to explain why sub-inspector Nandadulal Rakshit had said otherwise in his statement, Pradeep said: "I did all this upon the directives of SP Masud."

Contacted, Superintendent of Police ABM Masud Hossain said he had heard that Pradeep had tried to deflect blame but did not want to comment further.

The court observed that "even in this eleventh hour, Pradeep's declaration is conspiratory, deceptive and a final try to make Liaquat a scapegoat."