

## Sundarganj OC closed after talks on bribes leak

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

Md Touhiduzzaman, the officer-in-charge of the Gaibandha's Sundarganj Police Station, was closed and attached to the Gaibandha police lines after several audio clips surfaced of his allegedly taking bribe to release two key accused of a high-profile case.

On April 10 last year, police recovered the dead body of a local shoe trader Hasan Ali from the residence of Masud Rana, Awami League's Gaibandha district's deputy office secretary.

Later, Ali filed a murder case against three involved with the incident: Masud Rana, Md. Rumen Haque and Md. Khalilur Rahman Babu.

Several audio clips surfaced in which Touhiduzzaman can be heard talking to relatives of Rumen and Babu.

Touhiduzzaman has taken about Tk 8 lakh promising to release them from the charge sheet of the murder case.

The clips are fabricated and tempered, he told The Daily Star.

"We are running an investigation on this," Md. Touhidul Islam, superintendent of police in Gaibandha, told The Daily Star.

## ATTACK ON BROTHERS

### Former mayor, brother jailed

#### 2 others also behind bars

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A former Sujanagar municipality mayor and a top Jubo League leader were sent to jail yesterday on charges of attacking two brothers, and killing one of them.

Al Amin, 27, a municipality employee, his brother Rajab Ali, 37, were attacked on their way back after appearing in court as witnesses in a case. When they were in Pabna Sadar upazila's Sadullapur area, the criminals hacked them indiscriminately with sharp weapons in broad daylight.

While Rajab was sent to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital with critical injuries, where he is still undergoing treatment, Al Amin was pronounced dead on the way to hospital.

Their brother Md Laltu filed a case accusing 33 people, including former mayor Tofazzal Hossain Tofa and his brother Jewel Rana, president of Sujanagar Jubo League, said Jalal Uddin, officer-in-charge of Ataikula Police Station.

Police then arrested Tofa, Jewel and their accomplices Liton and Gour, with two firearms in their possession. They were later sent to jail through a court.

Another case was filed against them with Sujanagar Police Station for possessing firearms. They were shown arrested in this case as well, said OC Abdul Hannan.

A drive to arrest the other accused was underway.



The photo, taken from the capital's College Gate area yesterday, could be a poster for how not to be safe as a pedestrian. A man steps over the divider while talking on his phone, his back turned towards oncoming traffic. Behind him, a woman, two young children, and a man are also risking their lives by walking into traffic to get to the other side. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

# Mitali Express may begin journey this month

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Mitali Express, the third passenger train to be operated between Dhaka and West Bengal's New Jalpaiguri (NJP) in India, is likely to start running within this month to boost connectivity between the two neighbours.

The new train will begin its journey as the two countries agreed to resume the operations of the two existing passenger trains after the suspension of services amid the Covid-19 outbreak.

Following Bangladesh Railway's proposal, Indian Railway has suggested the resumption of operations from March 26. The railways ministry has called for an inter-ministerial meeting on Sunday to confirm the date.

Before the pandemic-induced suspension from March 15, 2020, the Maitree Express was operating on the Dhaka-Kolkata route while Bandhan Express on the Khulna-Kolkata route.

The 456-seater Mitali Express,

which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi on March 26 last year, would use Chilahati-Haldibari rail link.

Rail communication between the countries via Chilahati-Haldibari route resumed in December 2020, after a 55-year hiatus.

New Jalpaiguri has the biggest railway station in the northern part of West Bengal and is just six kms away from Siliguri. It is a key junction between mainland India and north-eastern India.

#### THE NEW TRAIN

The 10-coach all-AC train will operate twice from Dhaka and twice from NJG every week, Shahidul Islam, divisional railway manager of BR Paksey Division, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He led an eight-member delegation in India last year to discuss different aspects of the new train.

It will leave Dhaka at 9:50pm on Mondays and Thursdays and will reach NJP at 7:15am on Tuesdays and Fridays.

It will then leave NJP at 11:45am on Sundays and Wednesdays and reach Dhaka at 10:30 on the same days, he said.

BR will sell tickets in three categories and each ticket of berth would be \$44.

Fifteen percent VAT and Tk 500 travel tax would be added to the ticket price, meaning the one-way travel on berth will cost Tk 4,902.

Each cabin seat would be \$33, meaning total cost of a ticket would be Tk 3,801.65, while a chair seat would be \$22, meaning the ticket would be Tk 2,701.

Tickets for children aged below five would be 50 percent of the regular cost.

BR sources said operations of the new train may be delayed by a day or two as the BR will be suspending online ticketing services for five days from March 21 in order to handover the ticketing job to a new vendor.

Besides, the railways minister Nurul Islam Sujan, who is expected to be present during the launching of Mitali Express, may remain busy on March 26 – Bangladesh's Independence Day.

The date of launch will be confirmed after the Sunday meeting, a BR official said.



## Bowing before bureaucrats

FROM PAGE 1

For the cases, the anti-graft watchdog appointed a new investigation officer who recommended submitting a final report – instead of a charge sheet – before the court.

On September 10, 2020, the ACC wrote to the Cabinet Division that the court had accepted the final report and ordered taking necessary measures. By that time, both the cases were shut.

This is the tip of the iceberg as there are several instances where the commission did not take up cases against government officials.

According to ACC insiders, the top tiers of the autonomous body always sympathise with officials of a particular cadre – administration – and sweep corruption allegations involving them under the carpet.

"The commission has turned into an organisation of giving clean chit to admin officials," said another officer, preferring not to be named.

In many cases, he said, the investigation officers give in to pressure and submit reports against petty officials. The "soft stance" of ACC towards the admin cadre has long been a major cause of grievances among its officials.

A glaring example is the sacking of deputy assistant director Sharif Uddin, which triggered huge outrage among his colleagues. They say he was "punished" for unearthing graft against some top bureaucrats.

The top tier of the watchdog comprises eight director generals, one secretary, two commissioners

and a chairman – 10 of the positions filled by former and current bureaucrats.

A former district and sessions judge holds the post of the commissioner (investigation) while the director general (legal) is an incumbent district and sessions judge.

The ACC commissioner, who ordered the investigation into the alleged corruption of Lohagara UNO, was also from the judiciary.

#### WE'RE ASKED TO GO AFTER PETTY EMPLOYEES

In 2019, a newspaper reported that the then land secretary used official cars for family affairs. Besides, he drew a car maintenance allowance violating rules.

A day after the publication of the news, the allegation reached the ACC. Instead of initiating an enquiry, the then ACC chairman Iqbal Mahmood referred it to the Cabinet Division.

Around 14 months later, the Cabinet Division sent a reply to the ACC along with an explanation of the land secretary.

Terming the news report fabricated and intentional to tarnish the government's image, the land secretary wrote, "During a field trip to check on officials and attend public hearings, it was not possible to pay full attention to family matters. I used that official car for a special necessity of the family temporarily since my personal car bought at interest-free loan was out of order."

There was an allegation that apart from using an SUV allotted for official purposes, he and his family members used two more government cars.

"There was ample evidence of misusing power and public money by the land secretary. But the commission did not show interest in probing those allegations," said an ACC investigator.

Another ACC investigator said, "Had the ACC taken some action against corrupt bureaucrats, it would have created instances ... government officials would not dare commit corruption."

"Instead," he added, "we're asked to run after petty employees like security guards and peons."

In December 2019, 45 officials of different ministries and organisations made a trip to Seattle to take delivery of a Boeing aircraft. Some media ran reports on this as the expenses for the trip were paid from the public exchequer.

The ACC too received a complaint over this. The complainant said he works in an airline that receives 40-50 new airplanes each year, and only the engineers and a set of pilots go to receive the delivery.

Once again, the ACC bosses directed officials to forward it to the authorities concerned.

"Send it to the secretary, civil aviation ... for looking into this," reads a note signed by Iqbal Mahmood on the top of the file.

Three months later, the civil aviation and tourism ministry wrote back to the ACC chairman pointing out its logic behind the trip of such a large group.

An ACC official who was involved in the correspondence said the allegation was brought 10 days prior to the delivery.

"Had the commission taken a prompt action, such a huge misuse of public money could have been stopped ... The commission waited for reports that came almost three months after the event," he said.

Contacted, Moidul Islam, former director general of the ACC, said an investigation officer has to face job uncertainty for his failure to appease top officials in the commission. On the other hand, he has to face music in the courtroom to let corrupt government officials go scot-free.

"They face this double whammy."

Moidul, who served in the commission for about nine years, opined that the ACC was formed to function as an independent organisation. "But it has gradually been gripped by the bureaucrats and is losing its independent character."

There are many ACC officials who are senior to and more efficient than the bureaucrats sent to the commission on deputation. The deputed officials who have little knowledge about ACC's investigation method, dominate the investigators.

Iqbal Mahmood, immediate past ACC chairman, could not be reached for comment despite several attempts.

Current ACC Chairman Mohammad Moinuddin Abdullah said it was not true that the commission was biased towards bureaucrats.

"If anything related to administrative matters come up, we forward it to the department concerned. But if we get enough information about corruption, we go for investigation," he said.

## The man who mapped out

FROM PAGE 1

The last instance brought Sheikh Mujib close to the then Commerce and Labour Minister of Bengal, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, who asked him to start a student unit of the Muslim League. Their relationship deepened when Mujib was sent to Islamia College in Kolkata after his matriculation. His leadership acumen got him elected as the general secretary of the college students' union. He remained a Muslim League activist who played a significant role in diffusing communal tension during the riots or distributing food among the victims. When his party broke away from the conservative and elitist faction of the Muslim League and rebranded itself as the Awami Muslim League, Mujib was elected as its Joint Secretary. The imminent departure of the British made the party focus on securing a homeland for the Muslim majority.

After the Partition, Mujib came to the University of Dhaka to study Law. The euphoria of having a hard-earned Pakistan with two wings was short-lived as the central government started disregarding the regional needs and culture. The declaration of having Urdu as the state language irked the people of East Pakistan further as they realised the colonial intention of the central leaders. The resentment resulted in activism. Mujib along with many of his peers was sent to jail. The Language Movement catapulted Mujib to the political centre

stage from the campus protest he was leading to redress the wrongs against fourth-class employees. He was given a ticket by the electoral alliance of 'Haq-Bhashani-Suhrawardy' to contest the Gopalganj constituency in 1954. His overwhelming win against a formidable opponent earned him a ministerial position in the cabinet of the United Front in 1956.

Once Maulana Bhashani left the Awami Muslim League, his party adopted a secular stance by removing Muslim from its name. Mujib became the party's general secretary in 1955. The abrogation of the constitution by the military junta forced Mujib to launch his campaign for democracy. With his fiery speeches and charismatic presence, he galvanised support for the historic six-point demand seeking regional autonomy. The leaders of West Pakistan saw it as a secessionist scheme and brought charges of conspiracy against him in 1968. He was released from what is now known as the Agartala Conspiracy Case following a mass uprising in 1969. Soon after, he was bestowed with the honorific title Bangabandhu – the friend of Bengal.

When the military junta announced the date for a national election in 1970, they did not expect Awami League to get the majority of the seats. The landslide victory made Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the prime-minister-elect of Pakistan. However, notwithstanding the people's verdict, the

military rulers took him into custody and unleashed a genocide on March 25, 1971. The moment of truth that Mujib outlined in his famous speech on March 7, 1971, arrived. People braced for the ultimate sacrifice. Resistance was mobilised; freeing Mujib and freeing the country became synonymous.

With Mujib as its president, a provisional government was formed at a border-town renamed as Mujibnagar. The guerrilla war lasted for nine months before the victory was earned on December 16, 1971, at a cost of 3 million lives. Mujib was returned to his people on January 10, 1972. He took the responsibility of a war-ravaged country that had to negotiate with the nuances of the Cold War, the growing influences of the Islamic countries, and the expectations of the big neighbour who supported us during the war.

For someone, who spent a quarter of his life in jail and the rest in promoting a just cause for a nation for his people to dream, it was time to become a statesman to bring recognition for a new country. He had just over three years to do so before assassins tried to silence him and all that he stood for.

On March 17, we look back at the man who became the architect of a nation-state. He mapped out our destiny when the maps of the region were being re-drawn. It is up to us to adorn the map and the man behind it with love and pride.

## Man arrested over rape, murder of 12-yr-old

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chattogram

Rab yesterday arrested a 49-year-old man in Manikganj in a case filed over the rape and murder of a 12-year-old girl.

The arrestee is Md Alamgir Mia.

Rab 7 in a press release said a team arrested him from Manikganj, where he fled after committing the crime in Chattogram on March 13. The victim's family members filed a case with Halishahar Police Station the same day.

Alamgir forcibly took the victim, who was his neighbour, to his house and raped her Rab said. When she said she would tell her family, Alamgir strangled her to death and hid the body under the bed.

## Lawyer jailed in DSA case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

A Bagerhat court yesterday sent a lawyer to jail in a case filed under the Digital Security Act.

Police arrested Golam Kibria Tariq on Tuesday night after Nitish Kumar Biswas, principal of Govt SM College, filed the case with Morrelganj Police Station. Biswas accused Tariq of repeatedly posting ugly and defamatory statuses on Facebook about the principal, his family and the teachers and other staffers of the college.

## Man arrested for raping stepdaughter

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A man was sent to jail by a Kishoreganj court yesterday for raping his stepdaughter in Bhairab upazila.

The 35-year-old arrestee is from Jamalpur village in Bhairab, police said.

The 17-year-old girl lodged a case with Bhairab Police Station on Tuesday, accusing her stepfather of raping her, and the police arrested him the same day, said Golam Mostafa, officer-in-charge of the station.

Quoting the case statement, the OC said on March 10, when the mother was not home, the arrestee raped the girl.

## Why no rules on care for kids born of rape?

### HC asks govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday issued a rule asking the government to explain in four weeks why its inaction to formulate rules under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000 to provide maintenance for children born of rape should not be declared illegal.

In the rule, the court also asked it to show cause why a direction should not be given to ensure maintenance of a child born of rape in Kurigram.

The HC bench of Justice Farah Mahbub and Justice SM Maniruzzaman issued the rule following a writ petition moved by lawyers Azizur Rahman Dulu and Ishrat Hasan.

Ishrat Hasan said a Khoir Ali from Kurigram raped the victim in 2010 and a female child was born. In 2021, a court sentenced him to life imprisonment and ordered the government to provide maintenance to the child, but the government did not do so as no rules were formulated under the law.

## Sign

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global financial markets. Shares in Germany – Russia's biggest energy market – were up 3.4 percent.

In a speech to the US Congress that drew a long standing ovation, an unshaven Zelenskii in an army green T-shirt appealed for tougher sanctions on Russia and more weapons to help his country fight "for the values of Europe and the world".

Three weeks into the invasion, Russian troops have been halted at the gates of Kyiv, having taken heavy losses and failed to seize any of Ukraine's biggest cities in a war Western officials say Moscow expected to win within days.

Talks were due to resume later yesterday by a video link for a third straight day, the first time they have lasted more than a single day.

"The meetings continue, and, I am informed, the positions during the negotiations already sound more realistic," Zelenskii said in a video address overnight.

In what was seen as a major shift, Zelenskii had said on Tuesday Ukraine could accept international security guarantees that stopped short of its longstanding aim to join Nato.

Keeping Ukraine out of the Western military alliance was one of Russia's main demands in the months before it launched what it calls a "special operation" to disarm and "denazify" its neighbour.

Europe's biggest invasion since World War Two has destroyed some Ukrainian cities and sent more than 3 million refugees fleeing abroad.