

4 held for abduction, gang rape of schoolgirl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A team of Rab-8 has arrested four men for their alleged involvement in the abduction and rape of a schoolgirl in Gopalganj's Kotalipara upazila.

The accused are Gopal Barai, 30, Barun Bala, 23, Atal Barai, 22, and Plavan Barai, 25, of the same upazila.

Mohammad Sadequul Islam, company commander of Rab-8, said the arrestees picked up the victim at knife-point when she was going to her uncle's house.

Taking her to an abandoned house, they first took compromising videos. The criminals kept her confined and gang-raped her multiple times. They even forced her to do drugs.

After three days of confinement, the schoolgirl managed to break a window and escape. Knowing everything, her father filed a case with Kotalipara Police Station on Wednesday.

Rab headquarters' intelligence branch and Rab-8 conducted a joint raid to arrest the accused. They were arrested from Dhaka, Gopalganj and Madaripur on Saturday.

The arrestees admitted their involvement in the crime during primary interrogation, said Rab.

Jillur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Kotalipara Police Station, said the victim was sent for medical tests.

North Korea slams 'feeble' Biden

AFP, Seoul

North Korea has described Joe Biden as an "old man in his senility", in a characteristically colourful personal attack on the US president after he accused the Russian leader of war crimes in Ukraine.



Pak parliament

FROM PAGE 1
The front runner to become Pakistan's next prime minister, Shehbaz Sharif, said Khan's departure was a chance for a new beginning. "A new dawn has started ... This alliance will rebuild Pakistan," Sharif, 70, told parliament yesterday.

"I don't want to go back to bitterness of the past. We want to forget them and move forward. We will not take revenge or do injustice; we will not send people to jail for no reason, law and justice will take its course," the 70-year-old former chief minister of Punjab province said.

His first tasks will be to repair relations with the powerful military as well as

key ally the United States, and tend to a stuttering economy.

The military viewed Khan and his conservative agenda favourably when he won election in 2018, but that supportwanedafterafalling-out over the appointment of the influential military intelligence chief and economic troubles that led to the largest interest rate rise in decades this week.

Khan had antagonised the United States throughout his tenure, welcoming the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan last year and more recently accusing the United States of being behind the attempt to oust him. Washington dismissed the accusation.

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Shahinoor said the people of IMO rescued her son after a few days and also arranged a phone call between her and Yakub.

"When I heard my son's voice on the other end, I could not hold my tears. My son was also crying."

But she could not meet Yakub because he was in Tripoli at the time.

"With the help of IMO, my son and I could return home."

On reaching Bangladesh, both of them stayed at Ashkona Hajj Camp until March 21 before they were allowed to go home for a long-cherished happy reunion.

Yakub said he went to Libya on a tourist visa in May 2019 to become a migrant worker. He started working at an oil company in Benghazi for a monthly salary of around Bangladeshi Tk 35,000.

Looking for a better life, Yakub decided to go to Italy illegally at the beginning of last year on the advice of a man named Jahangir. He paid Tk 4 lakh to a broker named Rafiq to go to Italy.

But he was caught by the Libyan Coast Guard and landed in jail along with 300 others, he said.

"Around six months later, I tried to go to Italy again. This time, the human traffickers got hold of us," he said.

"They took our mobile phones, our money, our clothes and everything. We were kept in a small room that resembled a grave for 7 days. There was no light or air. Meals were given 2-3 days a week. They beat us up once a day. They used to beat us with whatever they could find."

The victims were kept in a slaughterhouse where some of the hostages died of starvation, he added.

Shahinoor said, "I wasn't able to go to school while my father was in jail. Some students addressed me as the son of

any financial resilience, are not covered by the government's safety net programmes.

"The Open Market Sales programmes will not be of much help to these people. The government needs to prepare a proper database and provide them with financial support," he said.

Dr Nazneen Ahmed, an analyst at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), said, "The government may help the private sector expand and create more jobs for the middle class. It can also provide small loans to families in crisis through Mobile Financial Services like Rocket and bKash."

Hossain Zillur put emphasis on preparing credible lists of the needy families in a transparent way before launching a safety net programme.

"Last year, the government announced it would give Tk 2,500 each to five million people. Eventually, it could cover

only 3.4 million people -- that too amid allegations of corruption in preparing the list of beneficiaries."

He said it's not an impossible task to find out those who need the support most.

"But the government has been very reluctant to involve social and non-governmental actors in the process... The issue is national, and the government needs to use all capacities available within the country."

Asked what measures the government can take to support middle-income families in this situation, he said the government can expand programmes like Open Market Sales to the district and upazila level.

Stressing the need for reducing non-food expenditure burden, he said middle-income and lower middle-income families have to bear the burden of high utility bills along with quite high taxes.

"They can avoid buying

fish, meat or expensive food items but they cannot avoid paying electricity or gas bills and transport fares that are on the rise."

He pointed out that many of these services such as electricity, water and gas can be provided at an affordable price if the government can ensure good governance and transparency in these sectors.

"Why is the electricity cost so high? The government is paying billions of taka to power plant owners in the name of capacity charge without using the plants."

"Bangladesh is probably the only country where transport costs rose during the pandemic and the government couldn't intervene... If the government ensures good governance in these sectors, middle-income families will be able to save a significant amount of money from their essential non-food expenditure."

Babita's elder brother Badal Hawlader said, "None of Hriday's colleagues has come to the court or the jail gate today [yesterday]. Some of his colleagues did not come out of fear, while others did not want his release."

Hriday's son Sreshtho Mandal said, "I wasn't able to go to school while my father was in jail. Some students addressed me as the son of

to IOM for rescuing my son. We also need government support to get back the money that we have paid."

According to the Consular and Welfare Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 902 irregular citizens of Bangladesh have been repatriated from Libya from last September to March this year.

According to IOM sources, 23,601 people from different countries have gone missing in the Mediterranean since 2014.



Sohel Taj, former state minister for home affairs and son of Bangladesh's first prime minister Tajuddin Ahmad, at a demonstration yesterday on Manik Miah Avenue with demands that include declaration of April 10 as the 'Republic Day'.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION BILL

Sparks hope, yet loads need to be changed

Say experts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent citizens yesterday said the long-anticipated anti-discrimination bill sparks hope, but it should undergo significant changes before it's passed.

Law Minister Anisul Huq placed the "Anti-Discrimination Bill 2022" in parliament on Tuesday. The bill aims to ensure dignity and equal rights to the citizens.

The bill was later sent to the parliamentary committee on law ministry for scrutiny. The committee was asked to submit its report before the House in 30 days.

Although the proposed law recognises different forms of discrimination that people face in their daily lives, it largely ignores the remedial aspects, the eminent citizens told a media briefing organised by Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, at the capital's Brac Centre Inn.

They said the draft law does not have a provision for punishment against discrimination, and stressed the need for proper functioning of the monitoring

committee mentioned in the draft law.

Debapriya Bhattacharya, convener of the platform and eminent economist, said the platform has long been demanding the law.

Almost all the targets of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially

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goals 10 and 16, are centred on ending discrimination, he added.

"Many would say law takes its own course ... but law takes its own course only if there is visible political will, a skilled administration and judicial system, and proactive monitoring by the citizen," he added.

Eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik said as there is a "political vacuum" in the country, police and bureaucracy have become more powerful and its reflection could be seen in different laws.

"Now, laws are being formulated to increase the power of bureaucracy," he said.

A national committee comprising 29 members will be formed under the law. However, in addition to a minister, 15 of those members will be either secretaries or joint secretaries whereas only three to four members will be from the civil society, he said.

Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said it is difficult to be hopeful about the law's proper implementation.

Misuse of power is largely responsible for creating discrimination in society, he said, adding that the institutional capacity to prevent such misuse of power is largely absent.

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Actor Sohel murder accused denied bail in narcotics case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday denied bail to Ashish Rai Choudhury, an accused in the actor Sohel Chowdhury murder case, in a narcotics case.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Shanta Akhter passed the order after Ashish's lawyer submitted a bail petition.

Rab on April 5 arrested Ashish from his Gulshan residence, from where they also seized 17 bottles of foreign liquor.

Later, a case was filed against him with Gulshan Police Station under the Narcotics Control Act and he was sent to jail by a Dhaka court on April 7.

In December 1998, Sohel Chowdhury was shot dead inside Trumps Club in the capital's Banani.

Ashish is yet to be shown arrested in the murder case.

Indian national shot dead at Lalmonirhat border

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Border Guard Bangladesh yesterday recovered the body of an Indian national from Durgapur Kuthibari border in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila.

The body of Sirajul Haque, 30, an Indian national, was recovered from the Bangladesh side near sub-pillar 12 of the main pillar 924 of the border in the morning, Haris Mia, Durgapur BOP camp commander of Lalmonirhat 15 BGB Battalion, told The Daily Star.

He said members of Padma Camp of Cooch Behar 75 Border Security Force (BSF) Battalion opened fire on the border at dawn, injuring Sirajul, who died inside Bangladesh.

"We have informed BSF about this through a flag meeting at noon. The BSF told us they will take the body later to find out whether the deceased was an Indian national," he said.

Aditmari Police Station Officer-in-charge Moktarul Islam said the body was sent to Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Police looking for man who raped 27-yr-old

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police were trying to arrest the lone accused in a case filed over the rape of a homemaker in Jamalpur's Islampur upazila.

The accused is Kamal Hossain, 35, of Darjipara village in Islampur.

The 27-year-old woman lodged a case with Islampur Police Station on Saturday.

Quoting the case statement, Mahmudul Hasan, sub-inspector of the station, said Kamal entered the woman's house on Wednesday night and raped her, brandishing a knife and threatening to kill her only child. The accused also threatened the woman with dire consequences if she told anyone about the incident.

Middle class in a tight spot

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figure suggests."

This is clearly hurting the poor and even segments of the middle class because incomes have not increased in keeping with such price hikes, he noted.

"The government doesn't appear interested in seeing this as a national issue, but sees it through a bureaucratic and ruling party lens. They are reluctant to engage social actors in meaningful ways, particularly in the challenging task of listing the people who really need support."

To prevent the situation from worsening further, experts urged the government to include the middle class in social safety net programmes, and prepare credible lists of the people in need.

According to Prof Bazlul Haque Khondker, teacher of economics at Dhaka University, around 70 percent of the population, who don't have

Mother flies to Benghazi, brings back son

FROM PAGE 1
for airfare and other expenses. I boarded a Biman plane on January 8. This was my first trip outside Bangladesh. I was alone. I met a few people who were also travelling to Libya. I stayed in Dubai for a day. From Dubai I went to Egypt where we had a 24-hour transit. Finally, I reached my husband's home in Benghazi.

"After reaching Benghazi, I started contacting people who could speak in Bangla. I told them about my missing

son. Seeing me cry, some of them contacted the International Organization for Migration which helped me rescue my son."

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But he was caught by the Libyan Coast Guard and landed in jail along with 300 others, he said.

"Around six months later, I tried to go to Italy again. This time, the human traffickers got hold of us," he said.

"They took our mobile

phones, our money, our clothes and everything. We were kept in a small room that resembled a grave for 7 days. There was no light or air. Meals were given 2-3 days a week. They beat us up once a day. They used to beat us with whatever they could find."

The victims were kept in a slaughterhouse where some of the hostages died of starvation, he added.

Shahinoor said, "I will not let my son go anywhere again. I'm forever grateful

to IOM for rescuing my son. We also need government support to get back the money that we have paid."

According to the Consular and Welfare Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 902 irregular citizens of Bangladesh have been repatriated from Libya from last September to March this year.

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Hriday Mondal

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authorities kept me in jail was probably to ensure my security."

Hriday's wife Babita Hawlader said her husband has become ill as he could not take his medicine in jail "That is why Hriday will taken to a relatives' homes in Dhaka and he will be there for the next few days for treatment."

On his way to the capital with his family, Hriday was given security by Munshiganj police until the last point under their jurisdiction before entering Dhaka. However, his home in Munshiganj and where he is staying in Dhaka have no police protection at the moment.

Babita once again alleged that her husband was a victim of a conspiracy.

"We demand that the authorities concerned take necessary measures so that my husband can rejoin his work and take classes without any disturbance. We seek the government's cooperation so he can go out of home and move freely without fear."

Replying to another query, she said, "We will decide whether we will file a case under the ICT act or a defamation case against the conspirators."

Babita's elder brother Badal Hawlader said, "None of Hriday's colleagues has come to the court or the jail gate today [yesterday]. Some of his colleagues did not come out of fear, while others did not want his release."

Hriday's son Sreshtho Mandal said, "I wasn't able to go to school while my father was in jail. Some students addressed me as the son of

a criminal. People verbally abused me whenever I went out of home. Now that my father is out of jail, I will go back to school with him. I request the government to ensure his security."

Around 12:00pm yesterday, the Munshiganj District and Sessions Judge Motaharat Akter Bhuiyan granted bail to Hriday on a Tk 5,000 bond.

On March 20, Hriday was having a conversation with some of his students about the difference between science and religion.

Later in the afternoon, a group of students filed a written complaint with the head teacher, alleging that Hriday made "derogatory comments on Islam".

On March 22, some students staged a demonstration, after which police detained Hriday. That night, the school's office assistant, Md Asad Miah, filed a case against Hriday for "demeaning religion".

His bail petition was denied twice on March 23 and 28.

The incident sparked huge outrage at both home and abroad. Different organisations issued statements and held rallies in the capital demanding his release.

Corrigendum

Due to an inadvertent error, the report titled "Costly cart before horse" on the front page yesterday mentioned that the name of Biman managing director is Mokammel Hossain. The MD and CEO of Biman MD is, in fact, Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal. We apologise for the mistake.