

PAHELA BAISHAKH
SEXUAL ASSAULT
Trial in limbo
Only 3 out of 34 witnesses
gave depositions in 5yrs

EMRUL HASAN BAPPI and CHAITANYA CHANDRA HALDER

Trial of the case filed over the Pahela Baishakh sexual assault incident at Dhaka University (DU) did not make any headway even after five years, due to the prosecution's failure to produce witnesses before court for their statements.

During Pahela Baishakh celebrations on DU campus on April 14, 2015, a group of young miscreants went berserk at TSC area for about an hour, sexually assaulting at least 20 women.

Till March 6 this year, only three out of 34 prosecution witnesses gave their depositions, after charge framing, according to the prosecution.

Among the remaining 31 witnesses, 11 did not show up in court to give testimonies for unknown reasons despite being summoned, throwing the trial into uncertainty, the state lawyers said.

The trial is now pending at the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-8 of Dhaka.

The court has issued several summonses with non-bailable arrest warrants against the 11 absentee witnesses, as they did not comply with multiple court orders in the past, said Monira Begum Moni, a state lawyer.

The 11 witnesses are police inspector Zahid Anowar, assistant sub-inspector Monirul Islam, constable SM Rezaul Haque, Bangladesh Chhatra Union DU unit's former president Liton Nandi, DU marketing department's former student Ishat Kashfia Ila, Suman

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Due to ongoing classes, Esha Chakma couldn't visit her home in Rangamati to join her family in Biju celebrations. Despite that, her festive spirit couldn't be halted as she prayed for the well-being of all beings by releasing flowers in the fountain at Charukola with her friend. However, she believes that if the government had provisions for a holiday on Biju, she wouldn't have to miss out on their annual celebrations. This photo was taken at Dhaka University yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Take steps
against illegal
lenders: HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday ordered for setting up complaint boxes at all districts and upazilas to receive information and allegations from people about the functions of unauthorised financial and microcredit institutions and individual money lenders.

Bangladesh Bank (BB) has been directed to issue notice to deputy commissioners and superintendents of police to take necessary steps.

During hearing a writ petition, the HC bench of Justice Abu Taher Md Saifur Rahman and Justice AKM Zahirul Huq ordered the central bank to submit a complete report after complying with yesterday's and previous directives on this issue in 60 days, Supreme Court Spokesman Md Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star.

SC lawyer Syed Sayedul Haque Suman on September 7 last year submitted the petition as a public interest litigation.

He said BB yesterday submitted a compliance report before the HC bench, saying that it has formed 19 teams to monitor the activities of unauthorised financial institutions and money lending.

For the same petition, the HC on September 27 last year had directed the government to

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An effort to ensure
efficiency

BRTC to bring more vehicles under location tracking

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) is bringing more of its vehicles under vehicle tracking system (VTS) to ensure transparency and efficiency in fleet management.

VTS is a software system used to monitor location of vehicles. It uses global positioning system (GPS) for tracking, giving authorities real-time information.

Driven by benefits the state-run transport agency is getting after introducing the system for 500 buses, it will now add 700 more buses and trucks under VTS, officials said.

BRTC has already floated a tender for procuring VTS equipment for 500 trucks and 200 buses, and software services for 1,200 buses and trucks, including for buses in which VTS devices are already installed.

"It would bring transparency and accountability of BRTC services. It would decrease wastage of assets and increase passenger services," BRTC Chairperson Tazul Islam told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the agency will gradually bring all its vehicles under VTS.

BRTC owns 1,650 buses, of which 1,256 are in service. Of those that are out of service, 178 have to be written off, and 204 need major repairs, according to its 2020-2021 annual report.

The agency provided services to 4.31 crore passengers in the last fiscal year.

It also owns 590 trucks, of which 498 are in operation, reads the report. These trucks carried 6.55 lakh tonnes of goods during the same period.

BRTC often draws criticism for the early demise of its vehicles, due to lack of skilled mechanics and spare parts, inadequate maintenance, and authorities' poor decisions, said experts and users.

Besides, corruption by a section of

➤ BRTC will bring 700 more buses, trucks under VTS

➤ It will gradually bring all vehicles under system

PERKS OF VTS

It can track real-time location, distance travelled, number of trips

Using these info, fuel use, operation time of vehicles can be checked

Swift action can be ensured against violations



BRTC officials is to blame for poor services, which ultimately had turned it into a losing concern, they said.

However, Tazul Islam said the situation has changed a lot, as the agency is now making profit. Implementation of different initiatives, including introduction of VTS and fleet management automation system, have helped change the scenario.

VEHICLE TRACKING SYSTEM

A BRTC official said VTS was already built in 500 buses procured from India in 2019, and later, they installed necessary software to make the system operational in early 2020.

Using the system, authorities can know real-time location of vehicles, the distance they travel and the number of trips among other information, he said.

"As we can know the distance travelled, we can determine the amount of fuel

vehicles require. So, no one will be able to use or pretend to use more fuel than what is needed. So, the system is saving fuel costs," he told this correspondent, wishing anonymity.

Tazul Islam said they regularly check how many vehicles are in operation and can immediately know whether they are late to start operation. Before, it would take over a month to get this information, after every depot would place its monthly report.

Besides, BRTC is implementing a fleet management automation system at three of its 22 depots, which will allow authorities to get other types of information, including income and expenditure.

The system is also being implemented in five other depots on pilot basis, a BRTC official said.



National Eidgah
to see main Eid
jamaat after 2yrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main jamaat of this Eid-ul Fitr will be held at the National Eidgah on the High Court premises in Dhaka at 8:30am.

If the congregation cannot be held due to inclement weather or any other unavoidable reason, the main jamaat will be held at 9:00am at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque.

The decision was taken at an inter-ministerial meeting held at the Ministry of Religious Affairs yesterday to decide the official programme to celebrate the upcoming Eid.

Minister of State for Religious Affairs Faridul Haque Khan presided over the meeting, the meeting sources said.

PAHELA BAISHAKH
Celebrations to
end by 2:00pm



STAR REPORT

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Shafiqul Islam yesterday said all public events celebrating the Pahela Baishakh must end by 2:00pm on April 14. No food shops will be opened as the celebration will be held during the month of Ramadan, he said while assessing security arrangement for the Bangla New Year celebration at Ramna Batamul, reports UNB.

The celebration points, including Ramna Batamul and Dhaka University campus, are set to be under CCTV camera surveillance, he said.

Ishraque
gets bail

UNB, Dhaka

BNP leader Ishraque Hossain secured bail yesterday, six days after he was arrested and jailed in an arson attack case.

Police said the case was filed for torching a car near the Bangladesh Bank in 2020.

Dhaka Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Tofazzal Hossain passed the order on a bond of Tk 5,000.

Ishraque's lawyer Taherul Islam Tawhid said his client was out of the country on the day of torching a vehicle for which he was arrested.

He said the BNP leader was granted bail as he submitted the proof before



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Tale as old as time
Halkhata slowly turning into a lost tradition

DIPAN NANDY

Halkhata is a tradition that is almost synonymous with Pahela Baishakh celebrations. It refers to the practice of opening new ledger books for account-keeping on the first day of the Bangla New Year.

However, time has worn out the culture, which is why it's not seen as much as before.

In the past, traders in the rural areas used to open shops on the first hour of Pahela Baishakh, clean and decorate it with paper flowers. Customers were greeted with traditional snacks like jilapi or muri.

The thousand-year-old tradition is on the verge of getting lost with time. Traders of Old Dhaka will organise the Halkhata festival on Friday, on a more limited scale this year.

Traders said in the past, it was an occasion of unparalleled joy. But nowadays almost everyone does the book-keeping based on the Gregorian calendar.

Biswajit Ghosh, a gold trader from old Dhaka's Kotwali, said, "In the past, we used to organise Halkhata on a much larger scale. But considering the state of business for the last two years due to the pandemic, there is no point in organising such an extravagant event."

"We used to send invitations to our customers.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

It was all very festive. This year, we have made arrangements on a smaller scale for Ramadan too," said Pandab Ghosh, proprietor of SR Jewellers.

The absence of the Halkhata festival has also affected seasonal Halkhata traders.

Noor Alam Mollah, a seasonal trader at the weavers' market, said his business is not satisfactory this year. Abdul Hamid, another seasonal trader, echoed him. "The business isn't what it used to be. But we are still surviving somehow," he said.

This tradition is on the verge of getting lost with time. Traders of Old Dhaka will organise the festival on Friday, on a limited scale.



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