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# Languishing in legal web for 24 years

Man has no strength left to fight court battle as trial drags on

WASIM BIN HABIB and EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

As his name was called out, Ahad Ali stepped inside the courtroom and stood in the dock with both hands pressed together in a gesture of mercy, staring at the judge with pleading eyes.

He stayed in the same position for the next 10 minutes while the court held the hearing of a drug case filed 24 years ago in which he is the lone accused.

The judge of Special Judge's Court 2 of Dhaka left the courtroom, passing an order for a fresh date of the next hearing -- an inevitability Ahad has learned to live with.

He got down from the dock, walked out of the courtroom, enquiring about the next date with his lawyer. About two hours later, he left for his Rajshahi home with the thought of coming back on May 11 for the next hearing.

For more than two decades, Ahad

has been shuttling back and forth between Rajshahi and Dhaka to appear before the court for a crime that he claims he did not commit.

The long trial process is taking a heavy toll on him, costing him money, time and energy, and leaving him in constant worry.

He was in his mid-20s when he was arrested in 1998 from Dhaka's Gabtoli Bus Terminal on the allegation of possessing heroin. The man -- a father of two -- is in his early 50s now, but the case drags on. Until February this year, no witness came to testify.

"Only Allah knows when it will come to an end, when I will be free from this cursed life," Ahad told The Daily Star on the court premises after the hearing, held on February 8.

This is a glaring example of what happens when someone gets caught in a complex and lengthy judicial process and how a case can linger for so many years.

This newspaper has been following the case for the last six months, trying to track down the witnesses and the plaintiff, and going through the case documents.

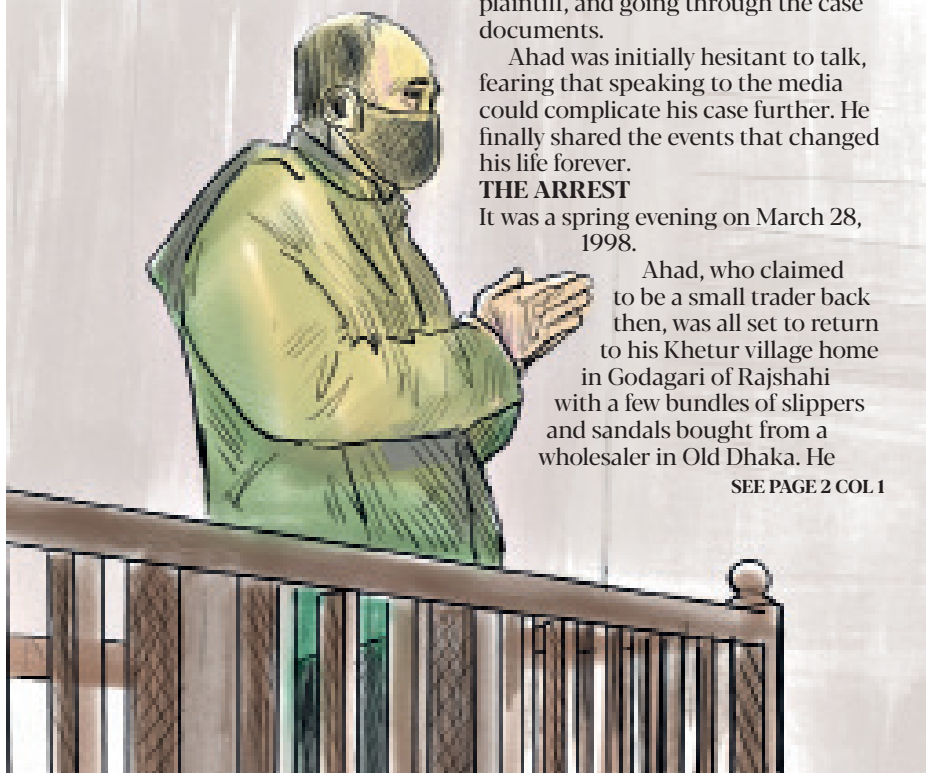
Ahad was initially hesitant to talk, fearing that speaking to the media could complicate his case further. He finally shared the events that changed his life forever.

## THE ARREST

It was a spring evening on March 28, 1998.

Ahad, who claimed to be a small trader back then, was all set to return to his Khetur village home in Godagari of Rajshahi with a few bundles of slippers and sandals bought from a wholesaler in Old Dhaka. He

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Supporters of Sri Lanka's ruling party hold down and beat up an anti-government demonstrator during a clash between the two groups, amid the country's economic crisis, in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## SRI LANKA ECONOMIC CRISIS

# PM quits after violent clashes

MP kills protester, 'then self'; 3 others also die in violence; nationwide curfew imposed

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa quit yesterday, as an outbreak of political violence killed five people including an MP and wounded almost 200.

Lawmaker Amarakeerthi Athukorala from the ruling party shot two people -- killing a 27-year-old man -- and then took his own life after being surrounded by a mob of anti-government protesters outside Colombo, police said.

And another ruling party politician who was not named opened fire on anti-government protesters in the southern town of Weeraketiya, killing two and wounding five, according to police.

Sri Lanka has suffered months of blackouts and dire shortages



of food, fuel and medicines in its worst economic crisis since independence.

This sparked weeks of overwhelmingly peaceful demonstrations against President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, as well as his brother the prime minister.

Scores of Rajapaksa loyalists yesterday attacked unarmed protesters camping outside the president's office on a seafont

promenade in downtown Colombo.

"We were hit, the media were hit, women and children were hit," one witness said, asking not to be named.

Police fired tear gas and water cannon and declared an immediate curfew in Colombo, which was later widened to include the entire South Asian island nation of 22 million people.

A total of 181 people were hospitalised, a Colombo National Hospital spokesman said. Eight were injured elsewhere.

Shots were fired from inside the prime minister's official residence later yesterday, as thousands of protesters breached the main gate and torched a parked truck, an AFP reporter said.

Police also fired tear gas to

push back protesters.

Police sources confirmed that shots were fired in the air to prevent the crowd breaching the inner security ring of the residence where Rajapaksa was holed up.

"Strongly condemn the violent acts taking place by those inciting & participating, irrespective of political allegiances," President Rajapaksa tweeted. "Violence won't solve the current problems."

Mahinda Rajapaksa tendered his resignation as prime minister, saying it was to pave the way for a unity government -- but it was unclear if the opposition would cooperate.

The US ambassador Julie Chung tweeted that Washington condemned "the violence against peaceful protesters today, and

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# Debt servicing may become tricky in three years

Says economist Debapriya Bhattacharya

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The debt situation may become tricky from 2024-25 if the government does not ramp up its revenue base now as the repayment schedule for many of the costly loans taken recently would begin then, eminent economist Debapriya Bhattacharya yesterday.

At the end of the last fiscal year, the total outstanding debt stood at \$131.14 billion, increasing by \$16.45 billion on average in the past three years.

"Our revenue is already low, and the comfort we had from our foreign currency reserves is fading too -- we have to look at the situation holistically," he said in a dialogue styled 'Conversations on Public Debt in Bangladesh.'

At the end of fiscal 2020-21, Bangladesh's revenue-GDP ratio stood at 9.4 percent, which is the lowest among South Asian nations.

In a country of about 16.4 crore people, only 74 lakh have the taxpayer identification number and of them, 23 lakh pay tax.

"Is it possible to implement such mega projects with the tax collected from just 23 lakh?"

On the external front, things are looking even more wobbly.

The balance of payment was \$3.1 billion in the

deficit at the end of March, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank. A year earlier, it was \$6.9 billion in the surplus.

As of May 5, Bangladesh's foreign currency reserves are less than \$42 billion, which is an 18-month low.

"Bangladesh's external debt situation is now in

**"Bangladesh's external debt situation is now in the green zone but it may slip to the yellow zone from 2024-25."**

Debapriya Bhattacharya  
CPD Distinguished Fellow



the green zone but it may slip to the yellow zone from 2024-25," said Bhattacharya, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

At the end of fiscal 2020-21, Bangladesh's external debt stood at \$60.15 billion. It picked up much between fiscal 2018-19 and 2020-21, increasing by \$9.02 billion in the last fiscal year alone.

"The recent pickup of external debt growth demands close scrutiny of the portfolio."

Bangladesh's foreign debt composition has progressively changed: concessional loans from

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# Trusting the businesspeople was a mistake

Commerce minister says about edible oil crisis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With the government still struggling to bring stability to the volatile edible oil market, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi yesterday said it was a mistake on his part to trust the businesspeople as they hoarded edible oil and hiked prices abnormally after the Eid-ul-Fitr.

"My mistake is that I trusted them. I requested them not to increase the prices... It's my failure," the minister said in reply to queries from journalists at a press conference at his Secretariat office.

Right before the Ramadan, he had asked the businesspeople not to increase edible oil prices and to maintain an uninterrupted supply of the item in the markets during the holy month. He had also said the prices would be hiked after the Eid in accordance with the prices in the international market.

About syndicates in edible oil trade, the minister claimed there were no syndicates at the refiners and millers level.

However, the dealers and retailers took advantage of the situation and hoarded the item to make hefty profits, Munshi said.

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গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

পরিচালকের কার্যালয়

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**বিজ্ঞপ্তি**

**সম্পূর্ণ শ্রবণ প্রতিবন্ধীদের কক্সিয়ার ইমপ্লান্ট ডিভাইস প্রাপ্তি আবেদন**

মাননীয় প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনার নির্দেশে ন্যাশনাল ইনস্টিটিউট অব ইএনটি-তে গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকারের সমাজকল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়ের অর্থায়নে এবং স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার কল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়ের সার্বিক সহযোগিতায় শ্রবণ প্রতিবন্ধীদের কল্যাণে 'কক্সিয়ার ইমপ্লান্ট কার্যক্রম' চালু করা হয়েছে। এই কর্মসূচির মাধ্যমে শ্রবণ প্রতিবন্ধীদেরকে সার্জারীর মাধ্যমে সরকারি অর্থে কক্সিয়ার ইমপ্লান্ট ডিভাইস (যন্ত্র) প্রদান করা হবে। সমাজকল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়ের অনুমোদিত কক্সিয়ার ইমপ্লান্ট বরাদ্দ নীতিমালা অনুযায়ী নির্বাচিত প্রার্থীদেরকে ডিভাইসটি বিনামূল্যে/আংশিক মূল্যে প্রদান করা হবে।

কক্সিয়ার ইমপ্লান্ট ডিভাইসটি বরাদ্দ পাওয়া ও সার্জারীর মাধ্যমে কানে স্থাপনের জন্য আগ্রহী শ্রবণ প্রতিবন্ধী শিশু রোগীর অভিভাবকগণের পক্ষ থেকে আবেদন আহবান করা যাচ্ছে। উল্লেখ্য ০৫ বৎসরের নীচের শিশুদের অগ্রাধিকার দেয়া হবে। আবেদনপত্র ও বিস্তারিত তথ্যের জন্য যোগাযোগ করুন- সকাল ৯.০০ ঘটিকা হতে দুপুর ১.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত (বৃহস্পতি দিন ব্যতীত), রুম নং ৭০৯ (৭ম তলা), কক্সিয়ার ইমপ্লান্ট বিভাগ, ন্যাশনাল ইনস্টিটিউট অব ইএনটি, তেজগাঁও, ঢাকা। আবেদনপত্র সংগ্রহ ও জমা দেওয়ার শেষ তারিখ-৩১ মে ২০২২ইং পর্যন্ত।

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অধ্যাপক ডাঃ মোঃ আবু হানিফ

পরিচালক কাম অধ্যাপক

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