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## Bike accident turned into extortion case

Case statement 'drafted by Rab' implicates 8 Mirpur students; victim, witnesses term the case 'false'

MUNTAKIM SAAD and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

A simple motorbike accident by a teenage boy in the capital's Mirpur has been turned into an extortion case against eight school and college students for reasons the victim, his family and witnesses cannot explain.

In the evening of March 7, Abdul Barek was hit and injured by a teenage biker in front of Baitur Rahman Jame Mosjid in Mirpur 12.

The 60-year-old was first rushed to a nearby hospital and then to the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation by locals, and he returned home the same night with his fractured left arm in a cast.

A case drafted by Rab-4 three days later tells a very different story, however.

The case makes no mention of the accident or the biker. Instead, it accuses five college students and three more teenagers, including two school-goers from the neighbourhood, of "beating, injuring and extorting Tk 40,500" from Barek, a tea vendor.

The accused include a 15-year-old son of Mohon Mia, who is allegedly a victim of enforced disappearance. Mohan Mia went missing in 2018 after a dispute over a piece of land in Mirpur 2 with a local man.

Mohon Mia's father Jamsher Ali and locals suspect some Rab members sided with that man, and turned against Jamsher's family and some locals.

Locals and the victims' families also suspect Rab was influenced by an informant who wanted to "teach these boys a lesson" for the bike accident.

Barek's son Nazmul Hossain Bappi, the plaintiff of the case, said he wanted to file a case over the accident, seeking compensation, and that he only signed the statement drawn up by Rab.

He also alleged that Rab kept him and five of the accused in the Rab-4 headquarters in Paikpara for about 24 hours, before they were all taken to Pallabi Police Station for Bappi to lodge the already drafted case and for the five students to be handover to the police.

Parvez Islam, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station, declined to comment citing ongoing investigation.

Rab-4 Company Commander refuted all the allegations and said they acted properly.

### WHAT HAPPENED?

Talking to The Daily Star recently, Barek said he was returning home after buying some goods for his shop when the accident happened.

He said the biker, who was alone, could be aged around 15, and that he passed out after being hit.

"I later came to know that my son filed a case. I thought it was over the accident and that we would get some compensation... But later, the whole story changed," he said.

According to the case statement, the accused came in front of Barek's tea stall in Mirpur 12 on three motorbikes and demanded Tk 20,000. Refused, they beat him up with iron pipes, leaving him with a fractured arm and injuries to his head and other parts of the body.

A spot visit by The Daily Star found the accident spot is about a kilometre from the tea stall.

Barek said nothing in the case statement is true.

The case, filed on March 10, also states that the accused were members of "Sumon-Habib" gang involved in extortion and mugging in the area.

Locals said there was indeed one such gang, but the accused and their families denied they were involved with the group.

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Traders sorting out a pile of Hilsa at a market on Port Road in Barishal city. Boatloads of fish have begun to arrive at markets after a 65-day ban on fishing came to an end on Saturday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

## 'Economic crisis' NOT ENDING SOON

Say economists, urge govt to take more measures to tackle challenges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is now facing an "economic crisis" that will not be over soon as the global economy is also going through turmoil, economists said yesterday.

They urged the government to take more measures as the current ones taken to address the situation are inadequate.

The crisis might ease once but at a slower pace, they said at a discussion on the recent economic challenges of Bangladesh, organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue at its office in the capital.

The economists think the country should explore more gas to reduce over-reliance on imports to meet its energy demand and avoid quick rental power plants in order to tackle further troubles in the foreseeable future.

They suggested the government enhance the monitoring on imports to protect the forex reserves, and said tackling money laundering should be given emphasis.

Ensuring good governance in banks, withdrawing the lending interest rate cap of 9 percent and managing foreign loans from different sources to keep the reserves afloat were also among their recommendations.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increasing interest rate on loans to contain inflation
- Mobilising foreign loans to keep forex reserves afloat
- Enhancing monitoring on import payments
- Corporate governance in banks
- Reducing dependency on rental power plants
- Exploring more gas

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the CPD, presented the key-note paper at the event, saying the price of almost every food item was increasing at a higher rate compared to the inflation rate unveiled by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in June this year.

Inflation in Bangladesh reached 7.56 percent in June, which is the highest in nine years.

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## 'Democracy will die if people do not vote'

CEC says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal yesterday said people have become apathetic towards voting.

"If democracy and its spirit are to be kept alive, voters will have to come to the polling stations," he said during talks with the Islamic Front Bangladesh yesterday afternoon at the Election Commission office.

"If they [voters] refuse to come to the polling station and vote, it will be understood that the country's democracy is sick and will have an unnatural death."

The EC has been holding a series of talks with political parties and a cross section of people, seeking their recommendations on

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### ENERGY CRISIS

## Govt strategy to blame, not war

Energy expert Badrul Imam tells *Star*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The current energy crisis in the country has more to do with the government's reluctance to explore natural gas than the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, observes prominent energy expert Prof Badrul Imam.

"Over the last 20 years, Bangladesh drilled 26 exploratory wells, making it one of the least explored countries with high hydrocarbon potential," he said at an inhouse discussion at The Daily Star Centre in the capital on Saturday.

Badrul, former chairman of Dhaka University's geology department, noted that the Russia-Ukraine war just exposed Bangladesh's vulnerability in energy security, thanks to the country's growing reliance on costly LNG import instead of emphasis on gas exploration.

"Today's crisis has not hit us suddenly. It has been coming slowly but surely. We predicted that there would be a point in time when the crisis would arise," said the noted geologist.

He further said it's not possible for Bangladesh to attain energy security with this low rate of exploration.

"It's the result of the government's wrong planning and

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Mountaineer Wasfia Nazreen holding the Bangladesh flag of 1971 at the summit of K2, one of the most difficult to reach peaks in the world. She uploaded this photo on her Facebook page yesterday, giving credit to Mingma Sherpa for taking the picture. She reached the peak Friday morning.

PHOTO: COURTESY

### COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

## Impunity, inaction lead to recurrences

Say eminent citizens

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government's lack of efforts and failure to set examples by punishing perpetrators of communal violence are to blame for the incidents recurring, eminent citizens said.

At a discussion held yesterday, they said such acts were rooted in unhealthy communal sentiments that have grown in the absence of democratic values, progressive education and varied cultural practices.

Condemning recent attacks, including the ones on establishments of the Hindu community in Narail, they called for reforms to the country's educational and legal systems, and resurrecting the practice of good norms and values.

Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, with support from Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), organised the event on "Recent Communal Violence: Citizen's Protest" at the capital's Brac Centre Inn.

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, eminent academic, said a core dream behind Bangladesh's liberation struggle in 1971 was to achieve a "democratic country".

"The foremost condition to have such a nation is that each and every citizen

will have equal rights and opportunities. However, this has not been established in our country," he added.

He acknowledged that the country has seen significant economic progress, but said inequality has widened along with development.

The development included "the tears of the people", he said.

A mere handful of people accumulating a majority of the wealth, violence against minorities, women and children are all signs of an undemocratic and discriminatory state, he said.

The administration is not proactive despite recurrence of communal violence while law enforcement agencies also do not mobilise swiftly enough – even when they reach the scene of the crime in time, they do cannot perform their duties as needed.

Saying violence against minorities are not stray incidents but connected to political realities, he stressed the need for social reforms.

Former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumder said the violence will not stop if the perpetrators think they will be shielded by a culture of impunity.

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