

Bilkis Bano's rapists should be jailed



A CLOSER LOOK

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NINETEEN-year-old Bilkis Bano was five months pregnant with her second child when the 2002 Gujarat Riots broke out, following the Godhra train fire that killed 60 Hindu pilgrims. Along with her extended family, Bano had to flee her home and seek shelter in various places to escape the long arms of bloodthirsty rioters. On the morning of March 3, 2002, as Bano and her family were on their way to a nearby village, they were set upon by a gang of sword-wielding men who brutally killed 14 of her family members, including her three-year-old daughter. Bano, who was visibly pregnant by then, begged for mercy – after all, these were men from her own village, people she had grown up with. But her pleas fell on deaf ears. She was gang-raped, brutally and mercilessly; when she started bleeding profusely and fell unconscious, the criminals left her for dead.

Bano did not give in to her grief. She stood up for justice and rested her faith in the Indian constitution and justice system. When the local Gujarat officials dismissed her complaints, she reached out to the National Human Rights Commission for help, and then moved the Supreme Court of India. Despite the threats and intimidation she faced not to pursue the case, including from policemen and some state officials – which forced her to change home more than a dozen times – she kept fighting for justice.

In December 2003, the Supreme



The release of 11 convicts who gang-raped Bilkis Bano and killed her family members, including her young daughter, during the 2002 Gujarat riots sparked protest in India last week.

FILE PHOTO: AFP

Court ordered a CBI probe. The situation was such that in August 2004, the court ordered for the trial to be held in Maharashtra. In January 2008, a special CBI court found 11 of the accused guilty of rape and murder and sentenced them to lifetime

imprisonment, which was also upheld by the Bombay High Court in May 2017. Later in 2019, the Supreme Court awarded a compensation of five million Indian rupees to Bilkis Bano.

“That is what my struggle was for. For equality for each of us. When we are wronged, we must seek to right it using the power of truth. When our rights as citizens are denied, we turn

pledge to get rid of everything in our behaviour, culture and everyday life that humiliates and demeans women?” from the Red Fort ramparts during his Independence Day speech, Bilkis Bano's rapists walked free from jail under the Gujarat state government's remission policy. They were received with garland and sweets by their relatives and associates. One

their victims.

While remission can be granted to criminals who have served 14 years in jail, along with fulfilling other conditions, according to an amendment made in 2014 to Gujarat's policy on the matter from 1992, criminals convicted of certain crimes, including rape and murder, are not eligible for remission. However, since the verdict was given in 2008, the original policy from 1992 was applicable, and based on that the state government approved the convicts' plea for remission.

It must be noted here that two BJP MLAs and three party members were part of the 10-member board, headed by district magistrate of Panchmahal, Sujal Mayatra.

One of the MLAs on the board, CK Raulji from Godhra, said, “I don't know whether they committed any crime or not. But there has to be an intention of committing crime... They were Brahmins and Brahmins are known to have good sanskaar [manners]. It might have been someone's ill intention to corner and punish them.”

Such a comment from a member of the Indian Legislative Assembly is irresponsible and reckless. Such statements not only show his apathy towards the victims, but also raise questions about his trust in the wisdom and judgement of the Indian judiciary system.

After the criminals were allowed out of the prison, questions have been raised about the legal validity of the decision, based on the legal procedural requirements to make such a decision. For instance, Section 435 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of India makes consultation with the Centre mandatory in such cases. Also, Section 432(2) says that the opinion of the presiding officer of the concerned court should be the guiding factor in the government's decisions on remission. Did the state government

follow these procedures? We do not know. And questions on many other aspects of the remission have been raised by the civil society, legal experts and journalists in India, who are baffled. Since the state government has remained notoriously silent on these, the central government must intervene and immediately clarify the procedure that has been followed in this decision, to ensure transparency.

For India, a nation that is scrambling to contain rape of young girls and women – according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 77 rape cases were recorded daily on average in India in 2020 – the premature release of the 11 convicts has set a very dangerous precedent. This incident will only add to the sense of impunity some Indian men consider themselves entitled to, as a result of which they rape, sexually assault and even kill young girls and women, especially from minority communities.

While the Indian Centre issued guidelines to release prisoners across the country to mark Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, how the remission of convicted murderers and rapists will contribute to the said mahotsav is a question India as a nation should ask itself.

Bilkis Bano was not just fighting herself – she was fighting for justice, for the triumph of the rule of law and constitution over evil; she was fighting for truth. The premature release of her rapists and the murderers of her family might undo all the years of hard work that India as a nation has done to fight for the cause of women, to eliminate violence against them. The central government and the Supreme Court should revisit and reconsider the state government's decision to prematurely release these 11 convicts of rape and murder, as the crimes committed by them fall under the broader issues of national interest, including human rights, women's safety and communal cohesion.

Where do the subsidies in the power sector really go?



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THERE is a lack of clarity and transparency when it comes to how much subsidy is being provided to the power sector, why the government is providing it, and in fact, who they are subsidising.

On the matter of fuel imports, specifically imported oil, the explanation the government has provided about the rise in fuel prices is that it is highly subsidised.

On the other hand, in the Bangladesh Economic Review, which is prepared by the government, it is clearly stated that from 2014-15 to May, 2022, no subsidy was provided. In fact, up until that time, the government made a profit of Tk 48,000 crore.

Now, for the power sector, it is being said that the sector is subsidised and the subsidies are gradually increasing. Therefore, to reduce these subsidies, the price of power must be increased.

Upon examining the information provided by the government and the Power Development Board (PDB), we can see that it's true – subsidies are, indeed, increasing. But why is it increasing? Who is receiving these subsidies? These are important questions.

To answer this, let us look at the 11-year period between 2011-12 and 2021-22. During this time, various private companies that are involved with the power sector were given Tk 90,000 crore. Out of this, nearly Tk 60,000 crore was disbursed among just 12 companies. But they were not given the money to produce electricity; they were given the money to ensure that they did not produce electricity.

What this means is that these companies – that are involved with the power sector – have entered into contracts with the government which stipulate that even if the government does not purchase electricity from them, they will still be paid in the form of “capacity charge”.

When the government entered these contracts, they would have known what our electricity demand was and how much electricity was needed to be purchased from

these companies. Meanwhile, our power generating capacity has increased quite a lot in comparison to demand. Yet, the government has entered several of these contracts which state that these companies would receive money as capacity charge. And this has racked up an expense of Tk 90,000 crore in the last 11 years, and out of that, 12 companies have received Tk 60,000 crore!

Topping this list of companies is Summit Group, who have received almost Tk 12,000 crore. Other than that, there are UK and Malaysia-based groups that have received almost Tk 14,000 crore, United Group has received Tk 7,000 crore, Orion Group has been given Tk 4,000 crore, Hosaf Group and Mohammadi Group have received Tk 2,000-2,500 crore. Tk 5,800 crore has been spent in the last three years on electricity imports from India, and Adani Group will join this list next.



According to information provided by the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources in a recent Parliamentary Standing Committee meeting, in the nine months of the fiscal year 2021-2022, these companies have been given Tk 12,000 crore. This amount was Tk 18,000 crore in the previous year, and just more than Tk 18,000 crore the year before that.

And now, on top of the capacity charge that is being spent despite acquiring no electricity, three LNG-based power plants are being added. These plants are owned by Summit Group, Unit Group, and Reliance Group of India.

So, it turns out that the amount of money that is being paid to Indian groups such as Reliance, Adani, and top Bangladeshi power companies as well as other foreign groups to sit idle is bigger than the loans that Bangladesh is seeking from the World Bank, IMF, and ADB due to its current financial crisis. If efforts were taken to make the local fuel and power sector robust and self-sufficient, even then the amount of money required wouldn't be this large.

The proposal that we had made that included gas exploration and lifting along with the adoption of renewable energy to create an environmentally sound, durable, long term, safe electricity system that would provide power at reduced prices – even that wouldn't have cost this much money.

This is the enormous amount of money that was given to some electricity traders to simply sit idle.

The question, now, is why will the public be held responsible for these thousands of crores of taka that was given to a handful of electricity traders as subsidies?

We didn't get any electricity, but the money, which was given to them, could have been used to restructure the entire fuel and power sector of Bangladesh into a self-sufficient and durable sector.

Now, this burden is being passed onto the people by increasing the price of electricity and by increasing the prices of fuel. The consequence of this is that we are having to pay more not only for electricity and fuel but for everything else too. Our lives are becoming unbearable; a majority of people don't have anywhere to go, and people whose lives were devastated by the Covid-19 pandemic are now having to face this manmade crisis.

The public can't take responsibility for this manner of careless dealmaking. What the public should do is find out who is responsible for these activities, and who might be making these deals in exchange for some commission. This is a form of robbery – robbery of public resources, and the public needs to apprehend those who might be involved in this.

It's unacceptable that every couple of months, the public takes responsibility for these misdeeds and pays more and more money for electricity, for fuel, which makes their lives unbearable.

Transcribed and translated by Azmin Azran

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Local Government Engineering Department
Office of the Executive Engineer
District: Magura
www.lged.gov.bd

শেখ হাসিনার মূলনীতি
গ্রাম শহরের উন্নতি।

Memo No. 46.02.0055.000.07.059.21.1780 Date: 22.08.2022

Invitation for Tender (Works)
Tender Notice No. 06/2022-23

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for Rural Roads & Culvert Maintenance (GOBM) 03 Nos. & Improvement of Ponds, Canals Across the Country Project 01 No. under District: Magura District.

Sl. No.	Tender ID No.	Name of works	Last selling date & time	Closing date & time	Opening date & time	Procurement method
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
01	725778	e-Tender/LGED/Mag/GOBM/22-23/RW-08 Periodic Maintenance of Kullia Bazar-Bariol UP, Nutungram, Gabtala Bazar, Gongarampur Dakhil Madrasha via Chandpur Road from Ch. 00m-6530m under Sadar upazila, Dist: Magura, Road ID: 255573014 (Overlay)	18-09-2022 16:00pm	19-09-2022 12:00pm	19-09-2022 12:00pm	(OTM)
02.	725779	e-Tender/LGED/Mag/GOBM/22-23/RW-09 Periodic Maintenance of Sattrujitpur UP – Amuria Bazar via Baharbag Bazar Road from Ch.00m-4106m and 8945m-9480m under Sadar upazila, Dist: Magura, Road ID: 255573001 (Overlay)	18-09-2022 16:00pm	19-09-2022 12:00pm	19-09-2022 12:00pm	(OTM)
03.	725783	e-Tender/LGED/Mag/GOBM/22-23/RW-13 Widening of Gangarampur Bazar – Pulum Bazar Road from Ch.00m-3830 under Salikha upazila, Dist: Magura, Road ID: 255853013 (Road Widening)	18.09.2022 16:00pm	19.09.2022 12:00pm	19.09.2022 12:00pm	(OTM)
04.	724989	IPCP/MAGU/MOHAM/P/20-21/6.03 1.a Re-Excavation of Kanutia Maddhomic Biddhaloy Pond b. Construction of 01 No. Ghatta 17.30x5.00m for Kanutia Maddhomic Biddhaloy Pond under Mohammadpur Upazila Dist: Magura.	11.09.2022 16:00pm	12.09.2022 12:00pm	12.09.2022 12:00pm	(LTM)

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.
To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online branches of any registered bank branches.
Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

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