Five accused of raping girl in Rangamati

Court takes case after police refuse

A CORRESPONDENT, *Rangamati*

A case was filed on Tuesday with a Rangamati court against five people on charges of raping a college student and videotaping the incident.

The victim, of the remote Farua village of Belaichhari upazila, filed the complaint with the court after Belaichhari Police Station refused to accept her case, she alleged.

Judge AM Ismail Hossain of the court took the case into cognisance and ordered the officer in charge of Belaichhari police to register it and begin investigation.

According to the case statement, the student was going to her friend's house on the occasion of the Bizu festival on April 13, when the five accused -- Tanchangya alias Agent, Ranjan Das, Sumanta Chakma, Snehashish Barua and Sujan Das -- obstructed her and raped her under a bridge in Farua union.

They videotaped the incident and threatened to spread it online if she filed a complaint.

The victim further said in the statement that she went to the police station on June 28, five days after Sumanta, Snehashish and Sujan threatened to rape her again. However, the OC of the station turned down the case.

After days of threats and intimidation, the girl finally appealed to the district legal aid office on Tuesday, which advised and helped her to file the case with the court.

Asked about his refusal to file the case, Mohammad Alamgir, OC of Belaichhari Police Station, said, "I needed to verify the authenticity of the case since the local headman of the village had come to file the case, and that too more than two months after the incident."

He, however, claimed he was the one who told the victim's family to go to the court.

"Why would I turn them down?" he asked.

Salima Wahida, lawyer for the complainant, said, "The accused were putting pressure on her from all fronts to ensure she did not file the case and they also threatened to rape her again ... We will try to bring her justice as soon as possible."

Political activists chasing their opponents during a clash between BNP supporters and Awami League men at a market in Cumilla's Nangalkot upazila yesterday. BNP claimed 15 of its men were injured in the violence.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

UN mission heads to Ukraine nuclear plant

Kyiv accuses Russia of shelling town by the plant; Gazprom halts pipeline gas flow in new jitters for Europe

AGENCIES

UN nuclear inspectors set off for Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant yesterday after weeks of shelling nearby sparked fears of a Fukushima-style radiation disaster, with tensions rising between Kyiv and Moscow over the visit.

A Reuters reporter following the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) team in a convoy from the capital Kyiv said the inspectors arrived in the nearby city of Zaporizhzhia, where they were likely to spend the night before visiting the plant, which is on territory controlled by Russia, today.

Russian-installed officials in the area suggested the visit might last only one day, while IAEA and Ukrainian officials suggested it would last longer.

"The mission will take a few days. If we are able to establish a permanent presence, or a continued presence, then it's going to be prolonged. But this first segment is going to take a few days," Director General Grossi told reporters at a hotel in Zaporizhzhia.

"We have a very important task there to perform - to assess the real situation there, to help stabilise the situation as much as we can," he said, adding the IAEA team had guarantees from both Russia and Ukraine enabling it to enter the war zone.

Russia captured the plant, Europe's largest, in early March as part of what Moscow calls its "special military operation", something Kyiv and the West have described as an unprovoked invasion designed to grab land and erase Ukrainian identity.

Kyiv says Russia has been using the plant as a shield to strike towns and cities, knowing it will be hard for Ukraine to return fire. It has also accused Russian forces of shelling the plant.

"The situation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant and in Enerhodar and surrounding areas remains extremely dangerous," Ukrainian President Zelensky said late on Tuesday. "The risk of a radiation disaster due to Russian actions does not decrease for an hour."

The Russian defence ministry has said that radiation levels at the plant are normal.

Ukraine yesterday accused Russian forces of firing on a town by the nuclear plant. "The Russian army is shelling Energodar," said Evhen Yevtushenko, head of Nikopol district military administration, which is located on the northern bank of the Dnipro River opposite Energodar town where the nuclear plant is located.

"These provocations are dangerous."

Meanwhile, Russian energy giant suspended gas deliveries to Germany on a major pipeline yesterday, the latest in a series of supply halts that have fuelled an energy crisis in Europe, reports AFP.

Gazprom said supplies via Nord Stream 1 were "completely stopped" for "preventative work" at a compressor unit, shortly after European gas network operator ENTSOG announced that deliveries had ceased.

Zelensky in his late night address said Ukrainian forces were attacking Russian positions in Ukraine along the entire frontline. He said Ukrainian forces were also on the offensive in the east.

"Active military engagement is now happening along the whole front line: in the south, in the Kharkiv region, in Donbas," Zelensky added.

Probe enforced disappearances

HRW urges Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh authorities should heed to international calls for transparent, independent investigations into enforced disappearances, Human Rights Watch said in a statement.

"The evidence of Bangladesh authorities' involvement in countless enforced disappearances is overwhelming," said Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at HRW.

The Bangladesh government should stop feigning ignorance and work with the UN to provide urgent answers and effective accountability, she added.

The statement, issued marking the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances on August 30, mentioned that UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet during her three-day visit to Bangladesh called for the establishment of a "specialised mechanism that works closely with victims and families to investigate allegations of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings".

The UN Department of Peace Operations should heed Bachelet's warning that as the biggest contributor of uniformed personnel to UN peacekeeping missions, Bangladesh should ensure it has a robust system in place for the careful human rights screening of security personnel, said the HRW.

Khaleda back home from hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia returned home from Evercare Hospital yesterday evening after staying there for three days for some medical tests.

"Madam [Khaleda Zia] was discharged from the hospital at 5:30pm. She reached home around 7:00pm," AZM Zahid Hossain, personal physician of the BNP chief, said.

The medical board treating Khaleda decided on sending her back home after reviewing the medical reports, he added.

On Sunday night, the 77-year-old former prime minister was admitted to the hospital.

Khaleda has been suffering from various ailments, including liver cirrhosis.

Police Headquarters gets new add'l IG

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has appointed Md Kamrul Ahsan as additional inspector general (admin) of the Police Headquarters and SM Ruhul Amin as chief of the Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU).

The Public Security Division of the home ministry yesterday issued a notification in this regard.

Kamrul, who was serving as the ATU chief, will replace Md Moinur Rahman Chowdhury who will retire tomorrow, said sources at the PHQ.

Meanwhile, Jamil Ahmed, deputy inspector general of police at the Criminal Investigation Department, was transferred to the PHQ, the notification added.

Subsidised rice

FROM PAGE 1

"There will be two separate queues for TCB cardholders and general customers ... The TCB cardholders will get priority," he said, adding that each cardholder will be allowed to buy 5 kg rice at a time for Tk 30 a kg.

A cardholder will be able to buy up to a maximum of 10 kg rice a month, he mentioned.

A total of 3.15 lakh tonnes of rice will be sold at 2,363 OMS centres in three months. However, there will be no sales at weekends.

Asked whether poor people without TCB cards will be deprived of the benefit, Shakhawat said anyone can buy rice from OMS centres by showing National Identity (NID) card.

Contacted, TCB Chairman Brig Gen Ariful Hassan said there are more than one crore TCB cardholders in the country.

"They will be able to buy rice at the subsidised price of Tk 30 per kg from the OMS centres. Apart from this, sale of oil, sugar, onion and lentil by the TCB will continue simultaneously," he said.

Under the FFP, each of the 50 lakh special cardholders will be able to buy 30 kg rice for Tk 15 a kg per month from 10,110 dealers across the country.

The food ministry will provide 4.50 lakh tonnes of rice for the FPP for three months.

Iraq political gridlock persists after bloody unrest

AFP, BAGHDAD

A months-long political crisis in Iraq showed little sign of abating yesterday despite a fresh push for negotiations after nearly 24 hours of deadly violence between rival Shia factions ended.

The highly-secured Green Zone in Baghdad returned to normality after 30 people were killed and 570 wounded in the clashes pitting supporters of powerful Shia cleric Moqtada Sadr against factions linked to Iran.

Bribery eats up Tk 10,830 crore

FROM PAGE 1

spread in sectors that are supposed to control it and ensure enforcement of law, he said.

According to the report, 74.4 percent homes seeking services from law enforcement agencies endured corruption last year compared to 72.5 percent in the 2017 report.

At least 70.5 percent households dealt with graft in getting passport-related services. It was 67.3 percent in 2017.

In the case of BRTA-related services, last year's number was 68.3 percent and 2017's percentage was 65.4 percent.

The report said the average monthly income of each household surveyed was Tk 25,187 and the average expenditure was Tk 22,055.

At least 55.4 percent homes faced difficulty in getting services due to negligence of duty. This is worse as the percentage in 2017 was 39.9 percent.

The report said 40.1 percent homes had to pay bribes or make irregular transactions of money. This is an improvement as the report of 2017 put the number at 49.8 percent.

Iftekharuzzaman said the decline in homes enduring bribery could be considered an "achievement" but such achievement has been overshadowed by the rise in overall corruption. The misuse of power continued in various other forms, he said.

More than 72 percent of the respondents said they had to bribe or else they would not get the services, Iftekharuzzaman said.

Digitalisation of some services in a few sectors could be a reason for the decline in bribery, he said, adding that it was a highly effective method of reducing corruption.

It is possible to control corruption effectively by ensuring digitalisation of services along with ensuring accountability and punishment of the culprits, he said.

He said the government's top level had committed to "zero tolerance" for corruption but corruption was rampant among public servants responsible for making the government pledge a reality.

The government and the Anti-Corruption Commission have mechanism to prevent corruption but there is a lack in effective enforcement, he said.

"It is usual that any sort of crime will turn institutional and spread its wings in the absence of trial and punishment. This has been happening here," he added.

Iftekharuzzaman said about 19 percent of the respondents filed complaints with the authorities concerned and of them only 0.2 percent lodged complaints with the ACC. The ACC should find out why so many people are not interested in seeking their support, he added.

Contacted, Jahangir Alam, additional secretary (police and NTMC wing) of the home ministry's Public Security Division, yesterday said they would be able to make comments on the report after going through it.

"... I will check tomorrow [today], discuss it with the secretary, and then would be able to give an opinion," he told this paper.

"Bangladesh is a democratic country. There is freedom of expression and anybody can say anything," he added.

67 hurt as AL, police clash with BNP

FROM PAGE 1

A group of the BNP activists were going to the upazila headquarters from Inderhat area to join the party's programme by a trawler.

"When the trawler entered a canal crossing the Sandha river, the BCL men attacked the BNP men, leaving at least 25 leaders and activists injured. Many jumped into the canal from the trawler to save lives," said Alamgir Hossain, convener of the district unit BNP.

Some BNP leaders alleged that Swarupkathi municipality unit BCL President Mithun Acharjay Anuj led the attack. Mithun, however, denied the allegations.

Nesarabad Police Station's OC Abir Mohammad Hossain said he did not hear about any clash.

In Cumilla, at least 15 BNP men were injured after a clash with police and the AL men in Nangolkot upazila.

The BNP men said they brought out a rally at Nangolkot Bazar yesterday morning but were attacked as they reached the Bazar intersection.

"Police first intercepted us. As we tried to march forward, the law enforcers became furious and started charging batons," said Nazir Ahmed Bhuiyan, president of Nangolkot upazila unit BNP.

"Later, the AL men joined police and attacked us, leaving at least 15 of our men injured," he added.

Contacted, the upazila unit Jubo League President and Nangolkot Municipal Mayor Abdul Malek said the BNP men carried out the attack without any provocation.

Abdur Rahim, additional superintendent of Cumilla police, said police fired tear shells to disperse the BNP and the AL men who got involved in a clash.

Nangolkot Police Station's Inspector (Investigation) Kanon Chowdhury said four policemen, including the police station's OC, were injured in the clash.

Meanwhile, some 15 students of AR Government High School in Nangolkot became sick due to the tear shells. The students were taken to the upazila health complex.

In Savar, police arrested 10 BNP activists for blocking roads and attacking police in Chhayabeethi area yesterday.

[Our Mymensingh, Pirojpur, Cumilla and Savar correspondents contributed to this report]

BNP back to streets

FROM PAGE 1

are paying a high cost due to the blanket corruption of the ruling party. So, there is no alternative to [waging] movement," Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, the party's standing committee member, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He also said with people having taken to the streets, the ongoing movement will gradually transform into an anti-government one, and the government must step down from office to pave the way for a free and fair election under a non-partisan interim government.

Sources inside the party said its high command has already instructed grassroots leaders to stay on the streets even after the rise of attacks and arrests, and that action would be taken against any committee that failed to carry out its duties.

"A letter in this regard was sent to district and upazila level leaders and also the nomination aspirants for the next election," said a central leader, adding that the letter carried six directives.

The BNP took to the streets on August 22 to protest the price hikes.

There are 487 upazila committees, 512 thana committees, 314 municipality committees and 4,573 union committees, party sources said.

This time the party has decided to hold programmes not just at district and upazila levels, but also at union level, as per decisions of the BNP top brass.

The party has decided to extend legal support to the arrested leaders and activists, and to also provide medical support to the wounded.

Senior leaders of the party said these programmes are basically "warmups" for bigger ones leading up to the national elections.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said in the last one week, more than 775 leaders and activists were injured in 26 districts and cases were filed against a few thousand BNP men.

"Common people along with the party's leaders and activists are participating in the ongoing programmes spontaneously. This has frightened the Awami League and they started attacking us. Our pro-people issue-based programmes will continue," he said.

In Sunday's meeting of its standing committee, the highest policymaking body of the party, senior leaders decided to continue the ongoing programmes to "establish control of the streets".

Party sources said leaders and activists are charged up about the movement and determined to continue it till the election.

A standing committee member said the party leaders were able to show their strength on the streets despite attacks from the ruling party, and this will give confidence to other leaders, as well as the people, to take to the streets.

Sources said the ongoing programmes will be continued till September 10 and then fresh programmes would be announced for all its 81 organisational districts, and gradually the protests will move forward to divisional headquarters and then into Dhaka.

US approves updated Pfizer, Moderna shots targeting Omicron

AFP, *Washington*

US health officials yesterday authorized updated Covid-19 vaccinations by Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech that specifically target the latest strains of the Omicron variant, with the goal of jump-starting a new booster campaign.

The two updated booster shots aimed at providing "better protection against Covid-19 caused by the Omicron variant" are approved for people age 12 and above for the Pfizer shot and 18 and older for Moderna, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said in a statement.