

RAHIMA'S 'ABDUCTION' Families of the accused seek fresh probe

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

The family members of the five accused in the Rahima Begum abduction case yesterday demanded immediate release of their relatives from jail.

Speaking at a press conference at the Khulna Press Club, they also called for a fresh investigation into the case.

The demands came after Syed Mushfiqur Rahman, superintendent of police working at Khulna Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI), said arrestees Golam Kibria and Mohiuddin would be remanded as Rahima in her statement before a Khulna court named the duo as her abductors.

The other accused are Rafiqul Islam Palash, Mohammad Jewel and Helal Sharif. All the five accused are Rahima's neighbours.

Rahima, 55, was allegedly abducted on August 27 from her house in Khulna city's Uttar Banikpara. The next day, her daughter Adri Akhter filed the case with the Daulatpur Police Station, accusing the five.

The PBI is now probing the case.

The family members of the accused yesterday alleged that the abduction was planned and plotted by the abductee and her daughter Mariam Mannan.

Rahima went into hiding voluntarily to get the arrestees into trouble as she was involved in a land related dispute with them, the family members told journalists at the press conference.

The families also claimed that Rahima and Mariam were trying to distort facts by providing false information to law enforcers.

"My husband has not committed any crime. He was arrested on August 30, about a week before my daughter was born. This left me helpless," said Helal's wife Monira Akhter.

She also said she would take legal action against Rahima once her husband is cleared of the charges.

Rahima was found unharmed on September 24, living as a guest at his former tenant Kuddus Molla's residence in Faridpur's Boalmari upazila, said Abdur Rahman, additional deputy commissioner of Khulna Metropolitan Police, who lead the rescue team to Faridpur.

She, however, didn't tell how and why she travelled to Faridpur, Rahman added.

On September 23, Mariam identified a body, recovered by police, as her mother's at Phulbari Police Station in Mymensingh.



Among remains of a building in the town of Izium, volunteers search for bodies of people killed during Russia's attack on Ukraine. The photo was released yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Russia issues new nuke warning

Wraps up contested Ukraine referendums; Europe suspects sabotage as mystery gas leaks hit Russian pipelines

REUTERS, *Zaporizhzhia*

An ally of President Vladimir Putin yesterday issued a stark new nuclear warning to Ukraine and the West as Russia began releasing results of referendums it bills as a prelude to it annexing four Ukrainian regions.

Moscow's latest broadside came as European countries rushed to investigate unexplained, major leaks in two Russian natural gas pipelines under the Baltic Sea, which posed risks of explosions and the sinking of any ships that enter the area.

The Kremlin, which has blamed technical problems for earlier cuts in Russian gas supplies to Europe, said it could not rule out sabotage, without

saying who was to blame.

Yesterday's nuclear warning by Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, is one of several issued by Putin and his associates in recent weeks.

Analysts say they are designed to deter Ukraine and the West by hinting at a readiness to use tactical nuclear weapons to defend newly annexed territory.

Medvedev's warning differed from earlier ones in that he predicted for the first time that the Nato military alliance would not risk a nuclear war and directly enter the Ukraine war even if Moscow struck Ukraine with nuclear weapons.

"I believe that Nato would not directly interfere in the conflict even in this

scenario," Medvedev said in a post on Telegram. "The demagogues across the ocean and in Europe are not going to die in a nuclear apocalypse."

First partial voting results from four regions of Ukraine partly occupied by Russia and its proxies showed overwhelming majorities in favour of joining Russia, Russia's state news agency RIA reported.

It was a widely anticipated announcement after a five-day referendum that Kyiv and the West have denounced as a sham and say they will not recognise. Ukraine urged the EU to impose new punitive sanctions in response to votes it said were carried out at gunpoint in many cases.

18 more bodies

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a large number of Hindu devotees were crossing the Karatoa on Sunday on two boats of moderate size to go to the Bodeshwari Temple to take part in rituals centring Mahalaya. There was strong current in the river at the time.

"My 11-year-old nephew Sajib, my wife Sumita and I boarded the boat. There were some 100 to 120 passengers on our boat," he said.

"It started wobbling just after leaving the ghat. The wobbling got worse as we moved a short distance ahead. All the passengers were panicking. At one stage, the boat tilted to one side and water started gushing in and then it finally overturned," Solin said.

"I kept holding Sajib's and Sumita's hands tightly, but both slipped away due to the strong current. I cannot say how I was able to swim to shore," said Solin.

On Monday, their bodies were recovered from the river bank in Basuli village of Khansama upazila, said Rudreshwar Chandra Roy, Solin's younger brother.

Family members and relatives of the people missing were desperately searching for their near and dear ones. They were seen walking listlessly on the bank and around the control room.

"My two little sisters – Joty and Joya – drowned. Joty is two years old and Joya is four. Joty's body was found on Monday. But Joya is still missing," said Santa Roy, 16, a resident of Ghatiarpara village in Panchagarh Sadar upazila.

Immediately after the accident, the district administration formed a five-member probe body led by ADC Dipankar Roy. The body was asked to submit the probe report in three days.

"We have almost completed our work. We hope to submit the report to our higher authorities tonight [last night]," Dipankar said yesterday.

Meanwhile, many people of the area were angry and alleged that authorities concerned did not take any measure to construct a bridge on this river, despite repeated appeals in the past.

"We have been demanding construction of a bridge here for long," said Sakhawat Hossain, 45, a resident of Mareya Sardarpara village in Boda upazila.

On Sunday, the engine-boat flipped over with around 100 passengers.

The bodies of victims recovered yesterday are: Dola Rani, 5, Kabita Rani, 9, Driti Rani, 10, Sajib Roy, 10, Putul Rani, 15, Bhumika Roy Puja, 15, Akhi Rani, 15, Polash Chandra, 15, Shoilobala, 51, Sonaka Rani, 55, Hori Kishore Roy, 45, Sintu Barman, 32, Mohon Chandra, 30, Sumi Rani, 38, Ratna Rani, 40, Molindranath Barman, 56, Monibhushan, 46, and Monika Rani, 36.

[Our Thakurgaon and Dinajpur correspondent contributed to the report]

A steely resolve that sets her apart

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attempts on her life including the grisly grenade attack on August 21, 2004, and the massacre in Chittagong's Laldighi in 1988.

Braving it all, she is still going strong in the pursuit of the "Sonar Bangla" her father dreamed of.

The eldest among five children of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib, Hasina was born at Tungipara in Gopalganj on September 28, 1947, the year marking the births of two countries – India and Pakistan.

In 1968, she married nuclear scientist Dr Wazed Miah.

In 1981, while exiled in India, she was elected the president of the Awami League, one of the oldest political parties in the country. She has been leading the party since then and has taken it to power four times.

Her political career started much earlier though. She was involved with student politics while in college and was elected the vice-president of

the students' union at Government Intermediate College (now Begum Badrunnesa Government Girls' College) for the 1966-67 term.

She became the prime minister for the first time in 1996 and after that, she became prime minister in 2009, 2014 and 2019, becoming the country's longest serving premier.

Hasina placed Vision 2021 in Awami League's manifesto before the national election of 2008 with an aim to transform Bangladesh into a middle-income country.

She came up with Vision 2041 before the national election of 2014, this time aiming to eradicate poverty on way to becoming a developed nation by 2041.

During her leadership as head of the government, she took steps to initiate the war crimes trials and also the trial of the Bangabandhu murder case.

Hasina showed her courage and determination by completing the

construction of Padma Bridge, which many thought a near impossible task.

Apart from the river's own mysterious character and its extremely strong currents, there were myriad challenges and obstacles – from the uncertainty over funds to opposition from various quarters.

But nothing could deter her. A singular-minded Sheikh Hasina stood firm and made the impossible possible. The Padma Bridge, which opened on June 25 this year, will shine brightly among her many achievements.

Due to her astute leadership, she stood apart from many of her peers after Bangladesh and the world alike faced the invisible enemy – the Covid-19 pandemic – that plunged the economy into deep contraction and created an acute health crisis.

Her government, against all odds, managed to tackle the situation.

Her role in managing and getting vaccines to eligible people was phenomenal. When many countries

EXPORT TO OTHER COUNTRIES

India has offered free transit via its territory for export to other countries through certain land customs stations, airports, and seaports.

The neighbouring country made the offer during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's recent state visit to India.

Moreover, a BR official said the Indian finance ministry in November 2018 issued a circular to facilitate exports of Bangladesh to other countries via India.

In June 2020, the effectiveness of the circular was extended until further notice, he said.

As per the circular, transshipment of goods by railways to other countries can be done through Nhavasheva port in Mumbai, he added. Formally known as Jawaharlal Nehru Port, it is the second largest shipping container port in India.

Rail can rev up trade with India

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In February 1972 while operation of passenger trains resumed in April 2008.

Around 120 freight trains now operate between the two countries every month using five railway interchanges.

Trains carrying shipping containers have been bringing goods from India since July 2020, nearly three years after a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between Container Corporation of India Ltd (CONCOR) and Container Company of Bangladesh Ltd.

Even though there were demands, Bangladesh could not export goods by trains due to restrictions in India, a BR official said.

However, the Indian authorities, following Bangladesh's request, lifted the bar in May this year and informed the BR via the foreign ministry, he said,

wishing not to be named.

The railways ministry on September 13 approved the shipping costs, another BR official said, seeking anonymity.

The BR then sent a draft Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to the CONCOR, he said, adding that the draft was prepared following discussions between the two sides. It is expected that the Indian side will not take much time to finalise it.

"Export to India by trains is going to start after over 50 years of independence. This is huge," the BR official said.

But freight operations across the border are suffering because of a scarcity of locomotives, operators and infrastructure.

"These issues should be addressed to reap the benefit of the new initiative," he said, seeking anonymity.

BNP plans to hold rallies in 10 divisional headquarters

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The previous 16 protest programmes in Dhaka North and South ended yesterday.

The party, however, was unable to hold two scheduled rallies in Pallabi and Lalbagh, and it has decided to hold those next week, party leaders said.

The BNP has also decided to bring back leaders and activists who were earlier expelled on different grounds at different times.

"The final decision of withdrawing the expulsion orders will be taken by Tarique Rahman, the party's acting chairman," a senior leader said.

Since August 22, the BNP has been organising demonstrations across the country to protest the price hikes and later held rallies in Dhaka for the same cause along with the killing of its four leaders.

On July 31, a BNP man was killed in a clash between police and party activists in Bhola town when they were staging demonstrations against power outages and "mismanagement in the energy sector".

On August 3, Chhatra Dal leader Noore Alam died at a hospital in the capital from the injuries he suffered in the clash.

In Narayanganj, another BNP activist was killed in another clash with police on September 1 and in Munshiganj, a Jubo Dal leader was injured and later died in Dhaka Medical College Hospital on September 22.

The highest policymaking body of the party also decided to fix a day to mourn those who have been killed, BNP sources said.

The BNP also discussed taking legal action to challenge the government's move to prepare a list of the party

leaders and activists, but could not yet decide how it should proceed.

While The Daily Star could not independently know why the list is being made by the government, BNP leaders allege "it is only to harass them".

The party is also planning to take legal action challenging the purchase of wheat from Russia at an "excessive price".

The BNP's agitation programmes before the 2014 national election faced a lot of flak from home and abroad due to their violent nature.

Before the 2018 parliamentary polls, the party failed to wage any strong movement.

This time, the party leaders said they will stage protests over pro-people issues.

It has decided to continue its ongoing movement till the next general election, scheduled for late December next year or early January in 2024.

Covid positivity crosses 15 percent

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health officials yesterday reported Covid positivity rate of 15.42 percent, the highest in the past two and a half months.

The Directorate General of Health Services also reported 737 new cases after testing 4,781 individuals, said a press release.

The tests were done in the 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday, it said, adding that a woman aged over 60 died with Covid during the period.

On July 10, the DGHS reported a positivity rate of 17 percent.

Schoolteacher killed in Natore road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Natore*

A teacher got run over and killed by a truck in Jalora area of Baraigram, Natore, yesterday morning.

Rawshan Ara Begum, 40, was on her way to school when the incident happened.

Her husband Firoz Ahmed was taking her to work, at Satoil Government Primary School, on his new motorcycle, said Abu Siddique, officer-in-charge of Baraigram Police Station.

She fell off the bike when Firoz braked after seeing a truck coming from the opposite direction.

Rawshan got run over and she died at the scene.

The truck has been seized, but the driver and his assistant managed to flee, the officer added.

Man to die for killing 2-yr-old in Sirajganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Pabna*

A Sirajganj court yesterday sentenced a man to death for abducting and killing a two-year-old boy.

Amir Chan, 28, was also sentenced to 14 years in prison and fined Tk 50,000 for abduction and demanding ransom.

In August 2018, the convict abducted a toddler in Shahjadpur upazila, and demanded a ransom from his family.

He then killed the child and dumped his body.

World News Day

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print and digital adverts and use their social media channels, newsletters and other platforms to highlight the critical message that journalism matters and is worth supporting, promoting and defending.

On this occasion, a 90-minute in-person event from The World News Media Congress in Zaragoza, Spain, will be live-streamed on YouTube at 15:00 CET (7:00 pm BST). Vivian Schiller, executive director of Aspen Digital, The Aspen Institute, will chair proceedings which will feature David Walmsley, editor-in-chief, The Globe and Mail; Warren Fernandez, editor-in-chief, The Straits Times; Alessandra Galloni, editor-in-chief, Reuters; Kathy English, chair, The Canadian Journalism Foundation; Shirish Kulkarni, Journalist, Community Organiser, The Bureau of Investigative Journalism and Phoebe Connelly, Director of Next Generation Audiences, The Washington Post.

People can view the session on the verified World News Day YouTube channel.

The World News Day campaign is organised by The Canadian Journalism Foundation (CJF) and WAN-IFRA's World Editors Forum. It is sponsored by Google News Initiative. It was initiated as an industry campaign in 2018 by David Walmsley, then Chair of the Canadian Journalism Foundation.

"On World News Day we will showcase some of the best journalism that our industry has to offer – it is not just about one day – it's about the work that professional newsrooms do all year round. World News Day is about drawing inspiration and renewing our commitment to purposeful journalism," said Warren Fernandez, editor-in-chief of the Straits Times, Singapore, and President of the World Editors Forum.

Tk 642cr EVMs unusable

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Raquibul further said that if these machines could be fixed, they would be used in the upcoming polls.

Many EC officials blamed the absence of EVM storage guidelines for the damage of the machines.

In India, there is a manual on EVM storage. It says the storage site should be free from dampness, pests, rodents, water-logging and leakage. And it should have proper ventilation.

During non-election period, storage of EVMs should be in treasury, district headquarters or local levels. It should have foolproof security and fire safety measures, according to the Indian Election Commission's website.

Raquibul said they already proposed setting up 10 warehouses in 10 regions

for proper preservation of EVMs, with foolproof security, firefighting equipment and temperature control under a Tk 8,711cr project.

Each warehouse will have space for around 45,000 EVMs.

The EC drafted the project proposal for buying another two lakh EVMs and sent it to the Planning Commission for approval.

The move to buy the additional EVMs follows the EC's decision on August 23 to use the devices in up to 150 constituencies in the next national election despite major opposition parties' objection.

According to the minutes of the election commissioners' meeting on August 23, the commission had 1.3 lakh usable EVMs, which could be used in polls to 70-80 constituencies.