

AL leader sued for attempted rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

The president of a local Awami League unit was sued on Friday for attempted rape a five-year-old in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila's Nargoon Union.

Humayun Kabir, 55, president of AL ward-4 unit, had allegedly assaulted the girl on September 15 after he lured her to his home with food.

According to the victim's mother, the accused said that they would have to face dire consequences if the matter was disclosed. The victim's family was too scared to report the incident earlier.

The girl, who had been sick since after the assault, was admitted to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital on October 4 after the local quack was unable to help improve her condition.

According to the doctors, the victim was not raped but sexually assaulted. After receiving this information, the girl's father filed a case with Thakurgaon Police Station Friday evening.

"We can confirm the type of the assault after we get all the reports," said Kamal Hossain, the officer-in-charge of the station.

"They are trying to defame me over family feud," Humayun had told The Daily Star yesterday night, refuting the allegations.

Meanwhile, protesting locals blocked the Thakurgaon-Dinajpur highway in Khochabari area around 7:00pm demanding Humayun's arrest.

"The accused is absconding. We are trying to make the arrest as soon as possible," the OC added.

Thai massacre families pray as king says 'I share your grief'

AFP, Na Kiang

Heartbroken families prayed yesterday for the victims of a Thai nursery massacre as the king offered his support, telling relatives he "shares their grief" in a rare public interaction with his subjects.

King Maha Vajiralongkorn met survivors and relatives at a hospital in northeastern Nong Bua Lam Phu province late on Friday, a day after an ex-policeman murdered 24 children and 12 adults on a three-hour gun and knife rampage in a sleepy rural area.



The road under the Jatrabari flyover in the capital's Shonir Akhra area remains damaged for over three months, but the authorities seem to be uninterested in fixing it. Locals say accidents take place frequently here on the rainy days. Long tailbacks have become a regular scene here. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

World in midst of '5th wave' of debt crisis

Says World Bank chief, calls for more support for countries in distress

AFP, Washington

The world is facing a "fifth wave of debt crisis," World Bank President David Malpass warned Friday, calling for more support for countries in distress.

The pandemic forced many countries to take on more borrowing, and the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have warned that many are already facing or at risk of debt distress amid soaring global inflation and rising interest rates.

"I'm worried about the debt levels, worried about the individual countries," Malpass told reporters.

"In 2022 alone, around \$44 billion in debt service payments from bilateral and private debt service have become due" in some of the poorest countries, bigger than the foreign aid flows the countries could hope for, he said.

"Right now we're in the midst of what I think is a fifth wave of debt crisis."

According to the World Bank, there have been four waves of debt accumulation in the global economy since 1970, and have generally sparked financial crises in many emerging and developing economies.

Speaking days before policymakers gather in Washington for the annual

meetings of the IMF and World Bank, Malpass called for "radically more transparency" from creditors and borrowers on the debt levels.

His comments come at a difficult time for the world economy, which is grappling with surging inflation and rising interest rates that threaten to ripple around the globe and derail nascent recoveries.

Some observers have warned that aggressive interest rate hikes by major economies could trigger a global recession, but policymakers say allowing high inflation to take hold would be even worse.

"It's very important, as we face these financial crises around the developing world, that we recognize the supreme importance of the advanced economies in terms of restoring growth and moving towards a faster growth environment," Malpass said.

Developing countries also need more capital flows, and although the World Bank is expanding help for countries, it is "simply not enough," he said.

Last Monday, UNCTAD, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, urged central banks to loosen their belts in order to avoid a global recession, saying

financial tightening risked pushing the world into grim prolonged stagnation.

According to Unctad, rapidly-rising interest rates and financial tightening in advanced economies, combined with multiple crises resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine, have already turned a global slowdown into a downturn, with the desired soft landing looking unlikely.

"We need to warn that we may be on the edge of a policy-induced global recession," Unctad Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan told a press conference in Geneva.

The agency said inadequate financial support could leave developing countries exposed to the cascading crises of debt, climate shocks and pandemic recovery.

However, "there's still time to step back from the edge of recession," Grynspan said, adding countries "have the tools to calm inflation and support all vulnerable groups".

"This is a matter of policy choices and political will. But the current course of action is hurting the most vulnerable, especially in developing countries, and risks tipping the world into a global recession."

Miladunnabi today

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people of the country and the Muslims across the world on the occasion.

The president in his message said the Prophet's (PBUH) teachings in religious and worldly life are for all mankind to follow. "May the life and philosophy of the Prophet (PBUH) enlighten all our lives, may it guide our journeys," he said.

Hasina in her message said, "I believe that peace, justice and welfare of the world can be ensured only through following the unique lifestyle of the Prophet (PBUH), his universal teachings and Sunnah in today's conflict-stricken world."

She urged all to follow the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The day is a public holiday.

Different government and non-government organisations, including the Islamic Foundation, have drawn up elaborate programmes to mark the day.

The state-run Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar will broadcast special programmes highlighting the importance of the day.

Reality contradicts

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It was only towards the end of the month, on September 23, 25, and 28, that load shedding began to get more prominent, with outages over 700MW.

September 1 had the highest demand for electricity (14,026MW) and no load shedding.

The current demand is 1,350MW less but the government is unable to deliver, resulting in more outages.

Bangladesh Power Development Board's Member (Generation) Mohammed Ashraf Islam attributed the outages to "caution".

"Since we experienced a trip in the grid, we are wary of the load. We are generating about 10,000 megawatts of electricity every day and aim to take it up to 12,000."

ADB ready to give \$20b but has concerns

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project management unit (PMU) or project implementation units (PIUs) staff, frequent changes of project directors, understaffed PIUs, and lack of coordination among supervision consultants and contractors delay the project implementation too.

FIDIC rules are the standard forms of contract for use between employers and contractors on international construction projects.

Poor supervision by consultants and repeated replacement of experts are responsible for weak contract management in many cases.

Besides, the settlement of audit observations takes a long time, which results in non-compliance of

financial management. Many audit observations are pending for a long time for most projects, the report observes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The ADB recommends strengthening the reviewing capacity of the implementing agencies and experts to improve the quality of project design, cost estimate, and procurement packaging.

Dedicated management teams at PMUs and PIUs, who are familiar with and experienced in working with the ADB in areas that include procurement, financial management, and FIDIC contracts, should be assigned.

The consultant recruitment and procurement should be streamlined.

The ADB also suggests using its project readiness facility to improve design, procurement readiness and establishment of a management team.

For land acquisition and resettlement, competent NGOs should be selected and the budget should be sufficient.

The ministry concerned and the Planning Commission should take necessary measures to reduce the time for DPP and revised DPP or technical project proposal approval to expedite progress.

To be able to meet the ADB's project readiness criteria, advanced contracting and retroactive financing may improve project readiness for approval and reduce the risk of implementation delays, it

adds.

The ADB has identified 16 road and railway projects the lender will finance in the next three years.

The projects include Laksam-Chattogram Dual Gauge Railway Project (\$300 million); Dhaka-Sylhet Corridor Road Investment Project (\$500 million); Dhaka Northwest Corridor Road Project-Phase 3 (\$400 million); Line 5, Southern route of Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Development Project (\$300 million); Phase 1 of Dhaka-Cumilla Chord-line Project (\$300 million); Phase 1 of Dhaka-South Corridor Road (\$400 million); Dhaka-Chattogram PPP Highway Project (\$400 million); and Phase 2 of Dhaka Northwest Corridor Road Project (\$200 million).

Work as public servants, not party activists

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According to EC officials, there was a ruckus at the meeting when Election Commissioner Anisur Rahman was talking about allegations that many officials act out of bias while discharging their duties, and also in many cases, they do not spend the allocated budget properly.

Expressing disappointment, the commissioner said several officials at the meeting talked about increasing their benefits, but they said nothing about allegations raised against the way electioneering for the zilla parishad polls is going on.

"There are allegations that the officials work in league with the MPs and ministers. Many, while taking part in the talks with the Election Commission, also raised the allegations of the officials' bias.... have our officials become toothless?" an EC official quoted Anisur as saying.

The commissioner alleged that magistrates do not get the budget allocated for them as fuel cost. Several DCs protested his statement, said an SP.

Anisur said he had proof of this

and he won't speak if the officials didn't want him to. He then asked them if he would continue speaking. As some officials said "no", the commissioner stopped.

After the meeting, the CEC along with three other commissioners joined a press conference, but Anisur was not there.

This correspondent went to Anisur's office around 2:30pm for his comments but found he was away. He also didn't pick up the phone and answer text messages.

Many opposition political parties, including the BNP, allege that massive ballot-stuffing took place on the night before the election day in 2018. They also allege that police and local administration officials, who carried out election duties, were either involved in ballot-stuffing or looked the other way.

Electoral irregularities like stamping ballots the night before the polling day and ballot-stuffing by capturing booths took place in 47 out of 50 constituencies, found a TIB survey in January 2019.

Other irregularities include

"silence" of the law enforcers and administrative officials; casting of fake votes; barring voters from going to polling stations; and forcing voters to cast votes for a specific symbol, the study said.

Speaking at the meeting yesterday, Election Commissioner Brig Gen Ahsan Habib Khan (retired) also stressed the need for maintaining impartiality by the DCs and SPs.

He said proceedings of the cases filed against political activists would continue. "But all concerned should show a transparent attitude towards these matters. It should also be kept in mind that panic must not be created among the candidates or their supporters," Ahsan Habib added.

According to EC officials, some DCs and SPs urged the commission not to use EVMs in remote areas. They said many voters are still wary of using EVM as they are not comfortable with using technology.

The CEC said many officials have urged them to arrange massive campaigns and voter education on the use of EVM. "We have plans to

hold campaigns and educate voters on EVM."

Speaking to journalists after the meeting, Akter Hossain, senior secretary at the Public Security Division of the home ministry, said many officials suggested reducing the number of polling stations and increasing the number of booths instead so that enough law enforcers can be deployed to maintain law and order.

He said officials would remain impartial while discharging election duties.

Responding to a question, the senior secretary said the allegations of cases being filed to harass opposition activists during elections were not discussed. However, he said, there is no scope for filing such cases.

An EC official said DCs and SPs proposed that there should be coordination between them and the local election officials regarding the selection of polling centres and presiding officers. They said smooth voting cannot be ensured unless the presiding officers remain impartial.

BGB seized 2kgs of crystal meth, 80k yaba

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Border Guard Bangladesh yesterday seized 80,000 pieces of yaba tablets and 2.12 kilograms of crystal meth from two separate drives in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf upazila. The illegal substances have a street value of around Tk 14.5 crore.

"We saw two people crossing the Naf river around 4:00am yesterday. They were trying to enter the country through the Beribadh of Hoaikhong union's Kharankali area," said Lt Col Sheikh Khalid Mohammad Iftakhar, the commanding officer of BGB 2 battalion.

They started swimming back after being chased by BGB personnel, leaving behind a plastic bag which contained 2.12 kilograms of crystal meth and 30,000 pieces of yaba tablets," he added.

Meanwhile, the BGB yesterday recovered another 50,000 pieces of yaba tablets from an easy bike at Hoaikhong check point on Cox's Bazar-Teknaf highway. The BGB has seized the vehicle while the driver fled.

Positivity rate on the rise

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Covid-19 positivity rate increased to 13.60 percent yesterday from the previous day's 10.76 percent, said a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services.

At least 299 new Covid cases were recorded against 2,199 tested samples in 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday.

A total of 690 patients recovered from the disease during the same period. The recovery rate stands at 97 percent.

The number of Covid deaths in the country is 29,380.

The figure of Covid cases has been on the rise since early last month, with the highest daily positivity rate of 15 percent recorded on September 21.

The number started declining from October 2, but it is increasing again.

250 pilot whales die in remote New Zealand stranding

AFP, Wellington

About 250 pilot whales have died after beaching on New Zealand's remote Chatham Island where the shark risk makes attempts to refloat them too dangerous, the government said yesterday.

The pilot whales, members of the dolphin family, were reported to have been stranded Friday on the northwest of the island, New Zealand's department of conservation said.

"We do not actively refloat whales on the Chatham Islands due to the risk of shark attack to both humans and the whales themselves," it said in a statement.

A trained team euthanised surviving whales to prevent further suffering, the department said. Indigenous peoples of New Zealand and Chatham Island were present to give support, it added.

"All the stranded pilot whales are now deceased and their bodies will be left to decompose naturally on site," the conservation department said.

Blast damages

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train and collapsed two car lanes of the giant road and rail structure.

The bridge, personally inaugurated by President Vladimir Putin in 2018, is a vital transport link for carrying military equipment to Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine.

It is hugely important to the Kremlin, and Moscow had maintained the bridge crossing was safe despite the fighting.

While some in Moscow hinted at Ukrainian "terrorism", state media continued to call it an "emergency situation."

Ukraine's presidential advisor Mykhailo Podolyak earlier took to Twitter posting a picture of a long section of the bridge half submerged. "Crimea, the bridge, the beginning," he wrote.

"Everything illegal must be destroyed, everything stolen must be returned to Ukraine, everything occupied by Russia must be expelled."

The Ukrainian post office announced it was preparing to print stamps showing the "Crimean bridge" — or more precisely, what remains of it.

The Kremlin's spokesman said Putin had ordered a commission to be set up to look into the blast on the bridge which is hugely symbolic and logistically crucial for Moscow.

Officials in Moscow stopped short of blaming Kyiv.

But a Russian-installed official in Crimea pointed the finger at "Ukrainian vandals." Another in the neighbouring Kherson region said repairs could "take two months".

And the spokeswoman of Russia's foreign ministry said that Kyiv's reaction to the blasts showed its "terrorist nature."

Some officials in Moscow and in Russian-occupied Ukraine called for retaliation.

There have been several explosions at Russian military installations in the Crimean peninsula.

Authorities in Crimea appeared to downplay the blasts and tried to calm fears of food and fuel shortages in Crimea, which is fully reliant on the Russian mainland since Moscow annexed it in 2014.