

15-yr-old raped at gunpoint

Parents also attacked; two held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Police yesterday arrested two men for their involvement in the rape of a 15-year-old in Noakhali's Subarnachar upazila.

Moazzem Hossain, 35, and Didar Hossain, 30, were arrested after the victim's mother filed a case against 11 named and 7-8 unnamed people, accusing them of attacking her family and raping her daughter, said Joyal Abedin, officer-in-charge of Char Jabbar Police Station.

Around 40-50 attackers barged into the victim's house around 11:30pm while they were asleep. They tied her parents, while two of them raped her in turns at gunpoint, said the victim while talking to The Daily

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RCC goes to polls on Dec 27

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Elections to Rangpur City Corporation will be held on December 27 with electronic voting machines, Election Commission Secretary Jahangir Alam yesterday said while announcing the polls schedule.

He said CCTV cameras would be set up in and outside the polling stations.

Aspirants of RCC elections can submit nomination papers until November 29, according to the schedule.

The papers will be scrutinised on December 1, and the last date for candidature withdrawal is December 8.

The voting will start at 8:30am and continue until 4:30pm without any break.

The RCC last went to elections on December 21, 2017.

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Participants at a discussion titled "Bangladesh Economy: The Way Forward", organised by The Daily Star at its office in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Ukraine hails new air defences

Warns power situation 'tense' after Russian attacks on energy facilities

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine announced yesterday it had received more air defence systems from Western military allies, as officials in Kyiv said the situation with supplies was "tense" after protracted Russian attacks on energy facilities.

Attacks by Moscow's forces, including with Iranian-made drones over the past month, have destroyed around 40 percent of Ukraine's power stations and the government has urged Ukrainians to maximise electricity savings.

Kyiv has been rocked by barrages of Russian attacks on the first day of each week for nearly a month but air raid sirens were quiet yesterday with residents out as normal.

In a grey and foggy Kyiv -- conditions that military observers say make attacks with missiles and low altitude drones more difficult -- residents were unfazed by

the threat of fresh strikes yesterday.

"To be honest, it's not only Mondays, it's been eight months that we know this can happen every day and we adapted. I'm not going to change my routine for that. I'm coming to work... just like every other day," 21-year-old Kyiv resident Alyona Plekh told AFP.

Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov announced yesterday that Ukraine had received National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System (NASAMS) and Italian Aspide air defences, adding to weapons supplied by Germany.

"We will continue to shoot down the enemy targets attacking us. Thank you to our partners -- Norway, Spain and the US," Reznikov added.

Weeks of Russian attacks have caused sweeping blackouts and restrictions on energy use across Ukraine, and authorities in the capital have asked residents and businesses to reduce consumption.

Those pleas come just one day after Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko warned of a possible total blackout in the capital, saying that city authorities were preparing for the worst and bracing for "various scenarios".

The Ukrainian presidency meanwhile said yesterday that, over the last 24 hours, Russia had fired four missiles and carried out more than 24 air strikes across Ukraine.

The Deputy Head of Presidency Kyrilo Tymoshenko said one person was killed by Russian shelling in the partially Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia region of Ukraine and another was killed in the northeastern Sumy region.

Those attacks came a day after Russian-installed authorities in the southern region of Ukraine, Kherson, said attacks by Kyiv's forces had cut power and electricity to the region's main city, also called Kherson.

Timely steps can help avert crisis

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Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, moderated the event.

At the discussion, Debapriya said Bangladesh's economy started to deteriorate over the last five months.

He said the measures that the government took so far -- such as import control, marginal adjustment of annual development programme and so on -- were not interconnected.

"The government has responded belatedly and half-heartedly without coordination and adequate follow-ups. But doing partial adjustments will not help overcome the problem," he said.

"Given the circumstances, the government has two immediate policy choices -- flexibility in foreign exchange rate and interest rate adjustments."

He said timing and sequencing will be most important. There must be a transparent policy package and strategy for implementing the package.

LACK OF CLARITY, COORDINATION

Ahsan H Mansur said there was still a lack of clarity from the government about the problem and the steps it was taking, despite these problems existing in the economy for some time.

He said the depth and width of the problems had still not been determined.

"I have not seen any action from the government's side, except shutting down the electricity during daytime or talking about a probable famine in the foreseeable future. The government has not made an analysis of the current economic situation yet, particularly on the critical areas of the economy."

Mansur said there was a lack of coordination in economic management. Nothing had been managed or planned by the politicians.

"Bureaucrats are running the show," he said.

In the last four months, the taka depreciated to a large extent.

There are still four rates for the US dollar in the market, which is not rational, he said.

The multiple exchange rates are not sustainable and has not helped avert foreign exchange depletion.

He said the country's foreign exchange reserves are now depleting by around \$1.2 billion per month.

The country's net foreign

exchange reserves are now around \$27 billion. If there is depletion of \$5 billion more in the next four months, the economy will go from yellow to red, he said.

"This will also erode confidence in the economy. We can't go to that level; something has to happen before that, or the situation will become ugly and we do not want that."

"We should avoid such a situation. The management side is still not rational and the government has not taken any moves to generate confidence [in its ability] to tackle the situation," he said.

"Interest rate flexibility is highly important given the current state of the economy."

The central bank, however, has allowed banks to impose interest rates beyond 9 percent in some cases. But it is not documented as the central bank has given the instruction verbally.

"We need to have more clarity regarding what we are doing and what we want to do."

The current status quo cannot continue for several months, and the government should devise a strategy right now.

"It can't be the role of the prime minister; it is the role of the finance minister along with an economic team comprising three-four ministers who work with the economy," he said.

Nobody has consulted with the business community, professionals or bureaucrats in a concerted manner.

INTERLINKED PROBLEMS, DISJOINTED SOLUTIONS

Salehuddin Ahmed, former governor of Bangladesh Bank, said most of the steps were taken here and there.

"If it continues, the problems will not be solved," he said, adding that the economic issues are linked.

The government must go for in-depth policy packages and identify the linkages among them, he said.

The interest rate should not be fixed at 6 to 9 percent because the cost of funding depends on many things, such as under-the-table dealings and transport costs, he said.

The Bangladesh Bank can work to minimise the spread rate between the lending and deposit rates as it is sometime very high, added Salehuddin.

The central bank needs to have the courage to implement its policies like an autonomous body, he said.

"Autonomy is not given; it needs

to be earned. When I first launched monetary policy in 2006, I did not even ask the finance minister about it."

He suggested that wastages from other sectors be cut instead of reducing subsidies for the agricultural sector.

Foreign exchange reforms are necessary, because four rates in the banking sector for dollars cannot be efficient, but rates can instead be dictated by the market, he said.

He suggested a package that should be well thought out and not time-consuming in implementation, adding that fine tuning would not work now as it was time for blunt action.

MM Akash, professor and chairman of Department of Economics, Dhaka University, said the problems Bangladesh was facing was not created all of a sudden. There were cumulative factors, he said.

He said the power struggle between the two big political parties would heighten centring the next parliamentary election.

So, along with the current economic crisis, Bangladesh could fall into a political crisis next year, he added.

BGMEA Vice-President Miran Ali said, "We need to free the exchange rate to whatever extent that is possible. We need to address the problem. We just want the government or policymakers to make business easier for us."

Sayama Haque Bidisha, professor of economics at the Dhaka University, spoke in favour of foreign exchange rate flexibility to reduce the difference between the kerb market and official rates.

She said the problem of fixing the exchange rate was that it could trigger inflation.

"We have to take the risk. Maybe we can change the rate gradually," she said, suggesting countering the inflationary risk by reducing regulatory and other duties, VAT and other taxes.

POVERTY WILL RISE, BUT FAMINE UNLIKELY

Akash, however, said he did not think there would be famine in the country.

"But there is localised hunger," he said, adding that if the prices of essential commodities increased further, many would find it difficult to pay for basic necessities.

Debapriya said, "Whatever we do, dealing with inflation should be the anchor."

A questioned designed

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were: 1) From which country did Mir Zafar come to India from? 2) "If someone at home is untrustworthy, anything is possible for outsiders" -- explain. 3) Compare Nepal to Mir Zafar's character from the drama "Sirajuddoula". 4) "Bringing calamity by one's own imprudence" -- how does this saying apply to both the story of Nepal and that of Mir Zafar?

Rana Dasgupta, general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad, said, "The question contains communal provocations. People who are spreading communalism in the education sector should be identified and punished."

Such questions would appear in exams under the Pakistan regime to embarrass minorities and foment communalism, he said.

"Incidents like this show that Bangladesh is gradually transforming itself into an Islamic country. These have been increasing the inferiority complex among the minorities."

Education Minister Dipu Moni yesterday reiterated that Bangladesh is a secular country.

"It is unfortunate and unacceptable for a question paper of an exam to contain matters that can stoke communalism," she said after attending a programme in the capital.

She added that action will be taken against whoever set the question paper and whoever moderated it.

"Once those responsible are identified, we would know if those who sow the seeds of communalism in

the minds of students are involved in the question setting and moderation process."

The setting and moderation of question papers are done in such a manner that once it is completed, no one has the scope to check, she added.

Meanwhile, an HSC exam was postponed in many places across the country due to a mishap, as students who followed the old syllabus got questions from the new one, while those who followed the new one got questions from the old one.

Dipu Moni said, "We don't think the education board has done that [on purpose]. It seems some mistakes took place during the printing or packaging of the question papers."

Forex reserves slip

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clear tomorrow, said a BB official. Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves have been under strain since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as the conflict increased commodity prices, creating volatility in the foreign currency market for import-dependent nations such as Bangladesh.

The reserves were also hit by falling remittance and export receipts. Money sent home by expatriate Bangladeshis fell 7.4 percent to \$1.52 billion while exports declined 7.85 percent to \$4.35 billion last month.

Since November last year, the reserves have fallen by more than 23 percent.

IMF enquires about loan

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tour to work out the conditions for the prospective \$4.5 billion loan, also wanted to know if the economy would come under pressure for future debt repayments.

Bangladesh's foreign loan servicing burden will peak in fiscal 2029-30 with a repayment of \$5.15 billion, according to a projection made by the ERD, which manages foreign debt repayment activities, in May-June as part of the government's updated medium-term debt strategy.

After that, it would successively decline. For instance, in fiscal 2034-35, it would be \$4.45 billion.

"There will be no pressure on the economy," the ERD officials told the IMF mission.

The team also wanted to know the loan commitments and expected disbursement for the next ten years to get a proper sense of Bangladesh's foreign loan scenario.

At present, \$50 billion of foreign aid

committed remains in the pipeline.

The mission called for ways to speed up disbursement from the pipeline.

It also wanted to know about the delays in mega projects.

The ERD officials told the delegation that the delays were due to teething problems; now, implementation of the projects is in full swing.

The team, which will wrap up its tour tomorrow after a meeting with Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, also wanted to know from whom Bangladesh has sought budget support.

So far, the country has sought budget support from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

Save for Jica, everyone has expressed interest in extending budget support.

Schoolteacher murdered in home

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Police yesterday recovered the body of a female schoolteacher from her house in Kushtia town.

Roksana Khanam, 52, a senior teacher at Kushtia Zilla School, died after being hit on her head with heavy object. Injury marks were also found on different parts of her body, said Delwar Hossain, OC of Sadar Model Police Station.

The victim mostly lived alone in her Housing area house as her husband Mostafizur Rahman, an accountant at the LGED, works in Jashore.

The couple have no children.

Her husband said they did not have any dispute with anyone.

"We are trying to find out the killers," the OC added.

The body of the schoolteacher was sent to Kushtia General Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Man killed by uncle over land dispute

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A man was killed allegedly by his uncle over property-related disputes in Mymensingh's Phulpur upazila yesterday.

Nurul Islam Pathan, 60, son of late Abul Hashem Pathan of Bonuakanda village, was involved in a long-standing feud over land with his uncle Azman Ali Pathan, 55, said Abdullah Al Mamun, OC of Phulpur Police Station, quoting the victim's family members.

They alleged that Azman and his men attacked Nurul after he went to build a fence around that land. His son Maruf Pathan, 30, was also injured while trying to save him from the attackers.

Nurul was rushed to the upazila health complex, where the doctors declared him dead. His body was to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital for autopsy, the OC added.

No case was lodged until the filing of this report at 8:40pm.

Poacher held with 21kg of venison

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Police yesterday arrested a poacher with 21kg of venison in Bagerhat town.

The arrestee, Taib Ali Sana, 61, of Satkhira's Assani upazila, used to hunt deer in the Sundarbans and sell venison across the country for a long time, said Inspector SM Ashraf Alam, chief of Bagerhat police media cell.

Acting on a tip-off, a DB team raided in Khardwar area around noon and arrested Taib.