

Quick-witted decision saves girl from child marriage

Father jailed for 10 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A quick-witted decision has saved a seventh grader in Thakurgaon municipality from child marriage.

The girl was about to be married to a twenty-year-old of Thakurgaon Sadar Upazila Sunday night, but her resolve and the help from a classmate's family prevented the illegal nuptial.

Finding no other options, the 15-year-old student of a local girls' high school on Sunday morning told one of her classmates about the marriage which she didn't agree to for the sake of continuing her education.

The classmate immediately informed her mother Nazma Begum, a district unit member of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, who later shared the information with Sucharita Dev, another member of the organisation.

Later that day, both activists went to the office of Thakurgaon's Deputy Commissioner Md Mahbubur Rahman and informed him about the girl's situation. The DC promptly

In Bangladesh, at least 11,000 school children were married off by their families between March 17, 2020, and September 12, 2021.

directed the Upazila Nirbahi Officer Abu Taher Mohammad Samsuzzaman to take necessary steps in this regard.

The UNO along with the activists of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and members of the police went to the girl's house at 11:45 last night and stopped the child marriage.

As the underage bride's father was found guilty, the mobile court led by the UNO, who is also an executive magistrate, sentenced him to ten day non-rigorous imprisonment.

The court also handed the girl to Bangladesh Mahila Parishad's custody for her safety.

Sucharita Dev said Bangladesh Mahila Parishad will take the next course of action as per the direction of the central committee of the organisation.

In Bangladesh, at least 11,000 school children were married off by their families between March 17, 2020, and September 12, 2021, according to data The Daily Star gathered from different districts.

This means all these children are victims of what is now a crime as per the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, which stipulates that girls must be aged at least 18 to be eligible for marriage and boys 21.



Water from Fakirapool Wasa pump station being drained over the pavement as a new water pump is being installed there yesterday. The authorities apparently had no regard for the difficulties they were putting pedestrians into. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

EU-US DATA FLOWS Meta hit with record 1.2b euro fine

AFP, Dublin

Facebook owner Meta has been fined a record 1.2 billion euros (\$1.3 billion) for transferring EU user data to the United States in breach of a previous court ruling, Ireland's regulator announced yesterday.

The Irish Data Protection Commission (DPC), which acts on behalf of the European Union, said the European Data Protection Board (EDPB) had ordered it to collect "an administrative fine in the amount of 1.2 billion euros".

The DPC has been investigating Meta Ireland's transfer of personal data from the EU to the United States since 2020.

It found that Meta, which has its European headquarters in Dublin, failed to "address the risks to the fundamental rights and freedoms of data subjects" that were identified in a previous ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).

The CJEU interprets EU law to make sure it is applied in the same way in all member states.

In response, Meta said it was "disappointed to have been singled out" and the ruling was "flawed, unjustified and sets a dangerous precedent for the countless other companies".

"We intend to appeal both the decision's substance and its orders including the fine, and will seek a stay through the courts to pause the implementation deadlines." Meta president of global affairs Nick Clegg and chief legal officer Jennifer Newstead said in a blog post.

"There is no immediate disruption to Facebook in Europe," they added.

EU regulators have already hit Meta with fines of hundreds of millions of euros over data breaches by its Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook services.

It is the third fine imposed on social media giant so far this year in the EU and the fourth in six months.

In January, the DPC fined Meta 390 million euros for breaking data rules in its use of targeted advertising on its apps.

In March, Meta was made to pay 5.5 million euros for breaching the GDPR with its WhatsApp messaging service.

In 2021, online trader Amazon was fined 746 million euros in Luxembourg for infringing the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Following the previous fines, Meta said it was committed to changing its terms of use in Europe so that it can continue to collect and process the personal data of its European users.

ROHINGYA REFUGEES WFP to cut their rations once again

AFP, Dhaka

The United Nations food agency yesterday said lack of funding has forced it to cut food aid for around one million Rohingya refugees living in camps in Bangladesh for the second time in three months.

Rations would be cut from \$10 per person per month to \$8 from June 1, World Food Programme (WFP) spokesperson Kun Li told AFP in an email.

The full ration of \$12 had already been cut in March. "The reasons for the ration cuts are lack of funding. We need urgently \$56 million to restore the full ration (\$12)," Kun Li said.

Aid groups said the cut in March caused hardship in the overcrowded camps, where malnutrition was already rampant.

Khin Maung, who heads the Rohingya Youth Association inside the camps, told AFP the new food cut decision came as a surprise to the refugees and that it would lead to hunger.

"It's a shameful action by the United Nations," he said.

BGB protests BSF's killing of Bangladeshi stone quarry worker

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) yesterday protested the killing of a Bangladeshi worker allegedly by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) in Panchagarh's Tetulia upazila.

The protest was made at a battalion commander-level flag meeting held between BGB and BSF at the Zero Line on Bhutipukur border in Tetulia upazila in the afternoon.

Panchagarh BGB 18 Commanding Officer Lt Col Jobayed Hasan led the 12-member BGB team while Sunil Kumar, commander of BSF Battalion-195, represented the BSF side.

The meeting started around 1:00pm and lasted for half an hour.

However, BSF denied the allegation of shooting the stone quarry worker, Lt Col Jobayed Hasan told The Daily Star.

On Sunday, a BSF team reportedly shot dead a Bangladeshi stone quarry worker at Baguladangi village along the border in Tetulia upazila.

7th-grader hacked to death in Mirpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A seventh-grader was hacked to death in the capital's Darussalam on Sunday night.

Siam, 14, a student of Kabi Nazrul High School in Mirpur, was attacked in the Basupara area of Lalkuthi around 8:30pm by unknown assailants.

He was rushed to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College, where on-duty doctors declared him dead.

"My son went out to have snacks in the evening. Later, we were informed he was killed," Siam's mother Swarna Begum told The Daily Star.

She demanded that the killers be brought to justice, in the hope that it would deter such crimes in future.

Contacted, Aminul Bashar, officer-in-charge of Darussalam Police Station, said the victim's mother filed a case over her son's murder.

"Police collected CCTV footage from the scene of the crime and are trying to arrest the culprits."

Lightning strikes kill 2 schoolboys

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Two schoolboys were killed and two other children were injured in separate lightning strike incidents in Mymensingh's Gafargaon and Trishal upazila Sunday evening.

Md Asif, 15, son of Johir Uddin of village Talli, was a ninth-grader; and Md Junayed, 9, son of Abul Farazi of Coatpara village, was a third-grader.

Raju Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Pagla Police Station in Gafargaon, said Asif died on the spot after being struck by lightning when he along with other boys were playing football at a local field.

Junayed also died on the spot and two other children sustained critical injuries when they were struck by lightning while picking fallen mangoes during a nor'wester at Coatpara village, said Md Mainuddin, officer-in-charge of Trishal Police Station.

The injured children were admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

Russia attacked

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been wounded and three houses and an administrative building damaged.

The Telegram channel Baza, which has links to Russia's security services, said there were indications of fighting in three settlements along the main road leading into Russia. The "Open Belgorod" Telegram channel said power and water had been cut off to several villages.

Reuters was unable to verify the reports and the Ukrainian military was not immediately available for comment.

A group calling itself the Liberty of Russia Legion - a Ukraine-based Russian militia led by Russian opposition figure Ilya Ponomarev that says it is working inside Russia for Putin's overthrow - said on Twitter it had "completely liberated" the border town of Kozinka. It said forward units had reached the district centre of Graivoron, further east.

"Moving on. Russia will be free!" it wrote.

In a written statement to Reuters, senior Zelenskiy aide Mykhailo Podolyak agreed with Ukrainian military intelligence.

Fresh US sanctions will be unfortune

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Meanwhile, the US embassy in Dhaka on Sunday issued an alert for the American citizens, advising them to be careful ahead of the elections as there might be violence.

Momen said the alert was issued at a time when the Bangladesh's national election was seven to eight months away.

"You ask them why they did so. No one is shooting people in the meetings. It may happen if you have enmity with someone," he said.

There is no reason why the US citizens will be targeted here, the minister said, adding that the Americans are not doing anything wrong and the law and order is much improved.

Govt appoints chairman

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he wishes and the internal situation in the agency is very bad, read the letter. "No one dares to speak against him for fear of getting fired. A government agency cannot run this way."

Speaking to The Daily Star over the phone from Canada, Mostofa yesterday said, "It is normal that the government will make someone the new chairman as my tenure ended about six months ago."

"The new chairman has a close and warm relations with MD Taqsem A Khan," a Wasa board member told this correspondent wishing not to be named.

Some Wasa officials said that the appointment of the new chairman is linked with the recent remarks of Mostofa.

"The immediate past chairman performed his duties for six months beyond his tenure as the government was happy with him. We assume that he [Mostofa] has been removed for talking against the Wasa MD in public," Dhaka Wasa Sramik Union President Anisuzzaman Shaheen Khan told this newspaper.

In recent years, Taqsem hogged the headlines many times over

different issues, including getting reappointments for five times since being appointed as MD in 2009 and his wilfulness.

Recently, three employees' associations of Dhaka Wasa demanded immediate action against Mostofa for what they claimed tarnishing the image of the state-run agency.

In a letter to the Local Government Division on May 11, Dhaka Wasa Sramik Union, Dhaka Wasa Engineers Association, and Dhaka Wasa Diploma Engineers Association said the chairman tarnished the organisation's image by making remarks in a TV talk show.

On May 17, a faction Dhaka Wasa Sramik Union sent a letter to LGRD Minister Tazul Islam saying that the three employees' unions in their May 11 letter resorted to "falsehood" and it was done "intentionally".

Mostofa had been the chairman of Dhaka Wasa board from 2009-2012. Later, Mohammad Rahmatullah and Habibur Rahman resigned as chairman before completing their tenures.

Wasa officials said the two chairmen resigned over dispute with Taqsem.

"Rather, there should be an alert that if you go to America, you should be careful about going to malls, schools and bars. That seems to be more relevant," Momen said.

Meanwhile, Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud yesterday said the US alert was the result of the BNP's "evil politics", reports BSS.

Replying to a question from a journalist at his ministry, he said, "It is very simple for the US embassy to do this. The US has warned its citizens after seeing the BNP vandalising vehicles and setting those on fire."

"If the BNP and its alliance continue such arson, many [countries] would issue warnings," he said.

Backlog at PSC eating away precious years

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not have its own manpower to prepare question papers and evaluate answer scripts. We have to depend on government officials and teachers of universities and colleges to have those work done," a PSC member told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

As the PSC staffers are not involved in the evaluation of answer scripts, the commission can't do much to reduce the time needed for doing the job, he added.

"Again, there is the issue of the third examiner. If the difference of marks awarded to a candidate by two examiners is more than 30 percent, the answer script is referred to a third examiner. In that case, the evaluation process is delayed further," the PSC member said.

Another reason for the delay in publishing the results is the large

number of candidates qualifying for viva. A total of 13,000 candidates of the 41st BCS exam qualified for the viva, up from the usual 5,000 to 6,000.

Former PSC chairman Muhammad Sadique said there are many reasons behind the backlog. "There are two parts of a BCS exam - exam management and result management. Completing both takes time."

The commission also has to take some other public recruitment exams, he told The Daily Star.

The PSC in 2021 formed a probe body to investigate the delay in publishing the results of the 41st BCS written test.

The commission held 318 examiners responsible for negligence in evaluating the answer scripts, said PSC sources.

It later set a time frame for the examiners to complete the evaluation and also decided to drop examiners,

who would fail to return the answer scripts within the stipulated time.

The PSC held several workshops for the examiners to show them the mistakes often made during the evaluation of the answer scripts. The commission decided that an examiner who would commit the same mistake again would be dropped.

Sources in the PSC said the commission is working to bring the written examination process under an automated system to reduce the time of evaluation. Implementing the automation process in the preliminary exam is yielding a positive result as the results of the 44th BCS preliminary test were published 26 days after the test was held.

Also, the PSC has the plan to set up a printing press of its own to reduce the dependency on others for printing question papers.

Polls on Thursday, yet voters unenthused

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Zahangir, who was elected Gazipur mayor in 2018 on the AL ticket, vied for the ticket again, but it went to Azmat.

He had bought nomination forms for himself and his mother, but the Election Commission cancelled his nomination during scrutiny. Zahangir has been campaigning for his mother.

Since the BNP has boycotted the polls, the main battle for ballots is expected to be between Azmat and Zaida.

Even though Gazipur is known as a stronghold of the ruling party, Azmat has to worry about the supporters of Zahangir working for Zaida and the number of votes he is going to get in Tongi area, locals said.

AL sources claim that most of their leaders and activists are behind Azmat, but Zahangir's followers may not vote for the AL nominee.

One of the sources said, "The leaders of Awami League and its associate bodies are campaigning for the boat, but many are doing so because they were forced to or out of

fear of punitive party action."

Zahangir kept in touch with his followers even after he was suspended from the mayor post in November 2021.

Around 200 AL leaders loyal to Zahangir were served show-cause notices by the Gazipur city unit AL, of which Azmat is the president.

Of the 200, at least 19 held different posts in the city AL unit and the rest are leaders and activists of different ward units.

Party insiders said these leaders are now campaigning for Azmat, but they have grievances.

Zahangir said, "Yes, leaders are not with me in the campaign, but all the activists and supporters are with me. They cannot campaign publicly fearing repression."

Zahangir was expelled from the AL in November 2021 after a video clip of him making derogatory remarks about Bangabandhu and expressing doubts about the number of martyrs in the Liberation War went viral.

After the AL granted him general amnesty on January 1 this year,

61 councillors wrote to the local government ministry to reinstate Zahangir as the mayor of Gazipur city. These councillors were then served show-cause notices. The councillors are saying in public that they are now behind Azmat, but many voters doubt their commitment.

Azmat has another worry. Even though his home is in Tongi and he served as mayor of the municipality thrice, he may not get the number of votes he needs from there.

Sarker Shahnoor Islam Rony, an independent and the nephew of BNP central executive member Hasan Uddin Sarker, is popular in Tongi.

Like Rony, the mayor candidate of Islami Adhdon Bangladesh is also from Tongi.

Mohammad Jalal Uddin, president of Gazipur District Nagorik Forum, said voters have mixed feelings about the election as there have already been some stray incidents of violence.

About 11,79,486 voters are to decide who would be mayor and councillors of 52 wards in Gazipur City Corporation.