

Man arrested for abetting rape of college student, circulating video

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Police yesterday arrested a man on charges of assisting the abduction and rape of a college student and subsequently circulating a video of the incident on social media.

Shahriar Mohammad Hridoy, 22, was the second of three accused in the rape case filed by the victim's father at Chakaria Police Station on Thursday night.

The other two accused are -- Riaz Uddin, the prime accused, and Ramjan Ali, a member of a local union parishad.

According to the case statement, Riaz often harassed the girl and gave her indecent proposals.

In May, Riaz abducted her with the help of Hridoy. Subsequently, Riaz raped her and filmed the incident, which was then circulated on Facebook.

Following the incident, the local UP member Ramjan tried to stop the victim's family from taking legal action, saying he would ensure justice.

"Riaz and Ramjan are currently absconding. Drives are underway to arrest them," said Mohammad Abdul Jabbar, inspector (investigation) of Chakaria Police Station.

Thai parliament to hold next PM vote on July 19

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's parliament yesterday confirmed that it would vote again on a new prime minister next week, after pro-royalist lawmakers foiled liberal frontrunner Pita Limjaroenrat's bid for the top job.

Deputy house speaker Pichet Chuamuangphan told AFP that the ballot would take place next Wednesday.

Pita's Move Forward Party (MFP) won the most seats in May elections, buoyed by young Thais eager for progressive reforms after nine years of army-backed rule.

But the Harvard-educated millionaire's campaign to lead the next government was knocked back Thursday by the legislature's military-appointed senators, who consider his pledge to reform the kingdom's strict royal defamation laws a red line.

Pita was the sole candidate in Thursday's ballot but fell 51 votes short of the 375 lawmakers he needed to secure his appointment.

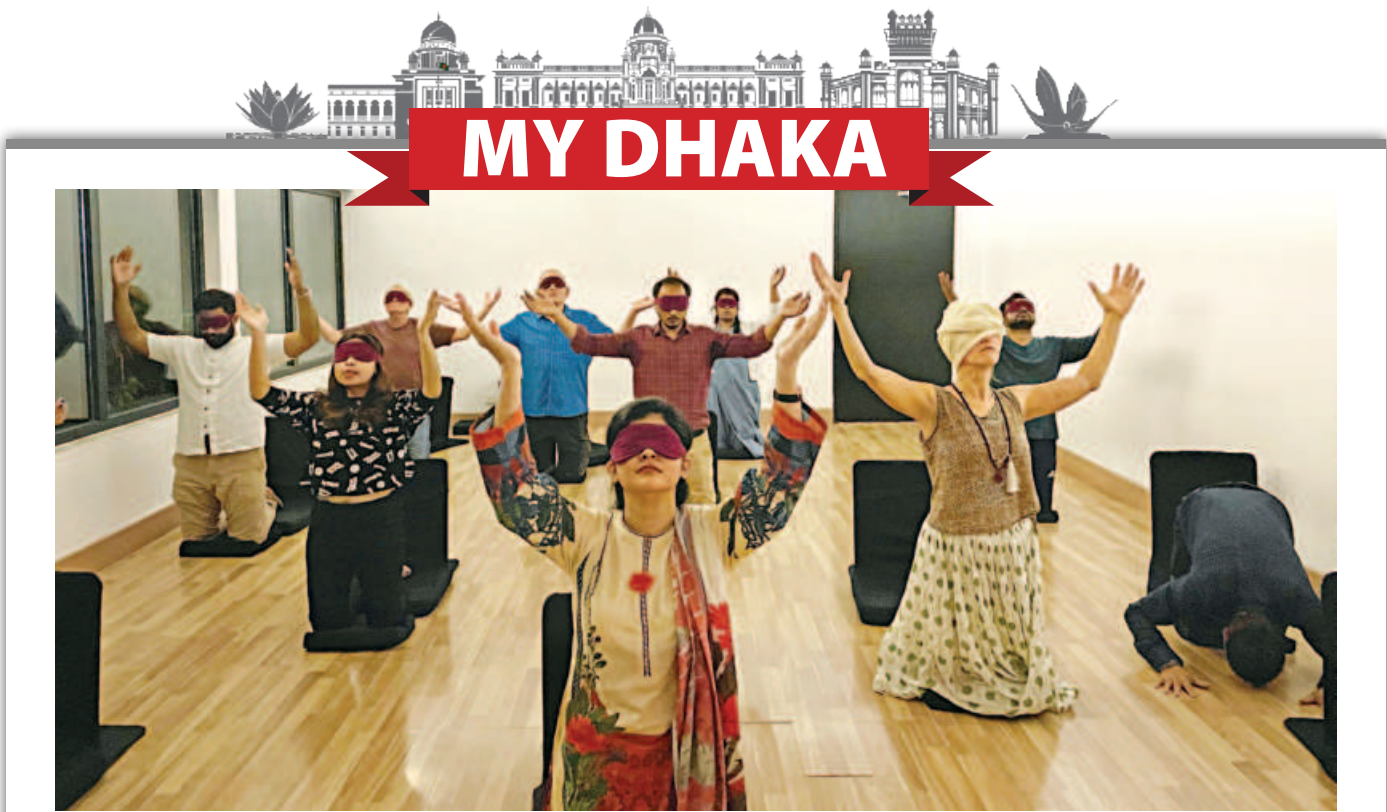


PHOTO: SATORI MEDITATIONS

INNER PEACE with Satori Meditations

RBR

Turn off your mind, Relax and float down stream, It is not dying, It is not dying...

When I entered the quiet, peaceful hall at Satori Meditations, the song by The Beatles, Tomorrow Never Knows, was ringing in my mind. I went for their Full Moon meditation session, being a moon child, born under the Zodiac sign of Cancer, the idea pulled me. I can never sit still and just do nothing, so this meditation was a challenge. How am I to empty my mind, peel off my thoughts like an onion and just be at the core of my being?

It is a very difficult task to adhere to their mantra to awaken your inner child. In Satori Meditations, a concern of Satori Foundation, they believe in this time and space we are just sleepwalking through life, not knowing fully what we are going through.

"To awaken means to become conscious on every level of an individual's being. A lot of people in Dhaka are struggling with

mental health problems; for them, meditation helps improve the quality of their lives and get back the childlike joyous and non-serious attitude towards life. It helps the process of unlearning the societal and cultural programming we have gone through all our lives," explains Sameera Afreen, communication in-charge, and facilitator at Satori Meditations.

"Meditation gives us back the beautiful perception we had in our childhood, non-judgmental, and full of wonder and receptivity. We are chasing through life in search of peace and happiness when the treasure that we are looking for lies within us, ignored, and unacknowledged" -- a mystical thought no doubt.

When their trained meditative therapist, Rusaasvaad -- a professional name which in Sanskrit means authenticity -- says it in his soft flowy voice, the meditation helps to connect with our inner being.

Satori Meditations has been working for seven years and now their centre is in Banani. They offer

different kinds of sessions to free you from mental distress and help you understand where to focus. Meditative therapies include meditation sessions done for a certain period of time like No-Mind Meditative Therapy, Born Again, Reminding Yourself of The Forgotten Language of Talking to Your Body-Mind, and many more.

"We also have hypnosis and de-hypnosis therapy. In a session through guided relaxation, people are taken into a state of neither sleep nor wakefulness and it is where the therapist works on your subconscious to programme or de-programme certain patterns or help sort your problems such as self-esteem issues, reasons for anxiety, panic attacks, or insomnia. Hypnosis speeds up the process and works inside out to undo the problem.

"Your acceptance and trust are very important to us, as your intention alone gets half the work done. We offer various energy work sessions, such as zen counselling methods following the Eastern approach of psychology. Eastern therapies are a holistic approach to healthcare, it is focused on proactive, self-directed, self-care through meditation, breathing exercises, and physical activities," explains Sameera.

Dhaka has these zen counselling and energy healing choices. They are scientifically designed for the modern individual and are effective to suit different people according to their different situations.

Tourist ban lifted from Ruma, Thanchi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Bandarban district administration yesterday lifted the ban on domestic and foreign tourists travelling to Ruma and Thanchi upazilas.

However, tourists are still prohibited from travelling to Rowangchhari upazila, said a notice signed by Bandarban Deputy Commissioner Yasmin Parvin Tibriji.

According to the public notice, before travelling to remote areas, tourists must take updated information from the upazila administration.

"Except for Rowangchhari upazila, tourists can now travel to all other upazilas in the Bandarban district," said the notice.

Last year on October 7, the local administration imposed a ban on travel to the three upazilas due to concerns over the overall safety of tourists.

Fruit trader beaten to death by 'muggers'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

A fruit trader was beaten to death allegedly by muggers in Gazipur early yesterday.

The deceased, Momen Sheikh, 50, hailed from Kaliganj upazila.

Siraj Mia, younger brother of the deceased, said, "Like other days, Momen was going to Chandna Chowrasta to buy fruits on a battery-run auto-rickshaw around 5:30am."

"As the vehicle reached the Hankata bridge area, a group of muggers on a pick-up van intercepted it," he added, quoting the auto-rickshaw driver.

"The robbers demanded money from Momen. As he refused, they hit him with an iron rod and ran away. Momen died on the spot," he said.

Ziaul Islam, officer-in-charge of Gazipur Sadar Police Station, said the body was sent to the morgue of Shaheed Taj Uddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital for post-mortem.

"Police are investigating the murder," he added.

Soft drink sweetener 'possibly carcinogenic'

AFP, Geneva

The WHO said yesterday it was now classifying aspartame, an artificial sweetener commonly used in soft drinks, as "possibly carcinogenic to humans" -- though the acceptable daily intake level remains unchanged.

"We're not advising companies to withdraw products, nor are we advising consumers to stop consuming altogether," said Francesco Branca, the World Health Organization's nutrition and food safety director.

"We're just advising for a bit of moderation," he told a press conference presenting the findings of two reviews of available evidence on aspartame.

The WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) carried out its first-ever evaluation of the carcinogenicity of aspartame at a meeting in Lyon, France, from June 6 to 13.

"The working group classified aspartame as possibly carcinogenic to humans," the WHO said.

Eyes on election, not talks or movement

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preparations for an election that would see the participation of all parties.

Party sources also say the AL feels relieved that the recent US delegation visit led by Uzra Zeya, under-secretary of state for civilian security, democracy and human rights, went well.

Talking to this correspondent, ruling party leaders said Zeya, in her meeting with the prime minister, emphasised a free, fair and peaceful election but none of the US delegation members talked about participatory polls. They also said the issue of the caretaker government was not brought up in any of the meetings the delegation attended.

The ruling party believes even if the BNP boycotts the polls, other parties will not, according to sources close to the AL.

The government has repeatedly expressed its commitment to hold a free and fair election. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made the same pledge

to Zeya and the AL will convey the same message in its meeting with the visiting European delegation today, according to party leaders.

Contacted, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif told The Daily Star that the US delegation's recommendation for a free and fair election does not clash with the government's stance on the next parliamentary elections.

About holding a dialogue with the BNP and other parties, he said just like participating in the elections is a democratic right, it is also a party's right not to join the polls. "That's why we will not make any effort to motivate the political parties to join the elections," he said.

Asked about the possibility of the BNP joining the polls at the last minute, Hanif said the BNP is secretly taking preparation for the polls as the party has no other alternative.

"The BNP's one-point movement is nothing but a strategy to inspire its leaders and activists ahead of the election," he opined.

After a meeting at the party chief's Dhanmondi office, referring to the US delegation, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said our foreign friends want free, fair and peaceful elections in Bangladesh and that they did not talk about participatory elections.

Alongside taking preparation for the polls, the AL will also take to the streets to show its strength and counter BNP's anti-government movement, according to party insiders.

The AL has already decided to bring out processions on July 18 and 19 as part of its strategy to counter the BNP's two-day street agitation.

In the run-up to the polls, the ruling party will hold election rallies at the district level, the first of which is scheduled to begin in Rangpur on July 30. AL President Sheikh Hasina will be the chief guest at the Rangpur rally, said party insiders.

Marking the national mourning day, the AL will hold discussions and other programmes across the country

throughout the month of August and ensure maximum participation of its activists in those programmes.

The PM will inaugurate some mega projects in September and October, including the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Tunnel under the Karnaphuli, the second phase of the metro rail operation from Agargaon to Motijheel, the Padma Bridge Rail Link Project and the Dhaka Elevated Expressway. Party insiders say the ruling party will publicise those achievements across the country.

In its nationwide electoral campaigns to be carried out in September, the ruling party will stress two things -- one is the government's achievements and the other is the misrule during the BNP-led four-party regime in 2001-2006.

In October, Hasina plans to make some important foreign trips. Upon her return, the party will go for all-out election preparations as party leaders expect the schedule for the 12th national polls to be announced in October.

Floodwater inundates low-lying areas

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started distributing relief materials among the victims.

In Lalmonirhat, around 1 lakh people of 45 char (shoal) areas and 18 villages have been waterlogged as water of the Teesta and Dharla is increasing, according to the local administration.

The Teesta was flowing 40cm above the danger level at Dalia point of Teesta Barrage in Hatibandha upazila at 6:00am yesterday, while the Dharla was flowing 22cm above the danger mark at Shimulbari point in Sadar upazila, said BWDB officials.

All the 44 gates of the Teesta

Barragewere opened as there was huge pressure of water from upstream, said Shunil Kumar, executive engineer of BWDB in Lalmonirhat.

"Floodwater entered my home on Thursday. My poultries were washed away. I along with my family members have taken shelter on a road," said Achia Bewa, 60, of Falimari village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

"Around one maund of paddy and some rice were washed away from my house. We have been taking dry food since Thursday night as we don't have any scope to cook food," said Nur Haque Mandal, 65, of Char Gobordhan area of Aditmari upazila.

In Kurigram, around 1 lakh people of 35 char (shoal) areas and 22 villages have been affected by flood, according to the district relief office.

The Dudhkumar was flowing 56cm above the danger level at Pateshwari point of Nageshwari upazila at noon yesterday.

The flood control dykes have become vulnerable at four places along the Dudhkumar char areas, said Abdullah Al Mamun, executive engineer of BWDB in Kurigram.

The flood situation is worsening as the Dudhkumar continues to get swollen, he added.

In Nilphamari, around 25,000

people have been hit by flood after low-lying areas of Dimla and Jaldhaka upazilas went under water, according to BWDB.

The Teesta was flowing 32cm above the danger mark at Dowani point near the Teesta Barrage at 6:00am yesterday, said Rashedin Mowla, sub-divisional engineer of the BWDB.

"My house was washed away on Thursday night. Now, we are staying at a relative's house," said Jonab Ali, 55, of Uttar Kharibari village in Dimla upazila.

[Our Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari correspondents contributed to this report.]

US to keep close watch

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A foreign policy analyst said the US appreciated the government's commitment to free and fair polls, but it didn't say anything about the possible implications if the pledge is not met.

"The US takes the commitment seriously, allows time for its implementation and closely watches the situation. It will also observe how the commitment translates into action," the analyst said, preferring anonymity.

Zeya, accompanied by Donald Lu, US assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, left Dhaka early yesterday after a four-day visit.

The US under secretary for civilian security, democracy and human rights visited Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar and met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her Private Industry and Investment Adviser Salman F Rahman, the law minister, home minister, state minister for foreign affairs, and the foreign secretary. She also had talks with the leaders of some civil society platforms.

In those meetings, Zeya spoke about elections, human rights, labour rights, civilian rights, freedom of expression, role of police during elections and voluntary repatriation of Rohingyas.

The ministers pledged to amend the Digital Security Act and Bangladesh Labour Act.

After a meeting with Zeya over dinner on Thursday, Salman F Rahman told reporters that a misunderstanding occurred between Dhaka and Washington, especially with regards to sanctions against Rab, but the distance reduced through the high-level engagement.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam said, "They highly appreciated our openness about dialogue. They invited us to Washington for further talks."

Former foreign secretary Shahidul Haque said the US-Bangladesh relations should be viewed from the

broader perspective of the Indo-Pacific.

Bangladesh has announced its own Indo-Pacific Outlook, which has some values in common with the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, he added.

The US priorities are democracy, human rights and good governance, and that's why they speak about these values, said Shahidul Haque, senior fellow at the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance of North South University.

Another former foreign secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury said Zeya's visit and her public statements indicate that her discussions with government high-ups were very positive.

However, pending issues like human rights, labour rights, and media freedom, should be seriously taken into consideration by the government, he observed.

Seeking anonymity, another foreign policy analyst said Zeya spoke about the PM's commitment to free, fair, and peaceful elections. This means the US will be closely watching the whole election process.

The analyst said the US closely studies an issue for long before taking any actions. The same happened in the cases of sanctions against Rab and the visa policy: The country was not happy with Rab's activities, and allegations of irregularities in the 2014 and 2018 parliamentary polls.

"So, Washington is not likely to reverse these decisions quickly," the analyst told The Daily Star.

The US state department counsellor, Derek Chollet, during his visit to Dhaka in January said erosion of democracy limits America's ability to cooperate with any country.

The US also expressed serious concerns over the Digital Security Act, EPZ Labour Act, and the shrinking space for civil society.

"So, Washington will keep a close watch not only on the government's commitment to free, fair, and peaceful elections but also on labour and civilian rights," said the analyst.