

SAGAR-RUNI MURDER

Timeframe for wrapping up probe not possible

Says law minister in parliament

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It is not possible to give a timeframe for the completion of the investigation into the murder of journalist couple Sagar Sarowar and Meherun Runi, Law Minister Anisul Huq told the parliament yesterday.

Sagar, who was the news editor at Maasranga Television, and his wife Runi, a senior reporter at ATN Bangla, were killed in the early hours of February 11, 2012, in their rented flat in the capital's West Razabazar.

Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, a Jatiyo Party MP from Thakurgaon-3, wanted to know why the investigation has not wrapped up yet 12 years on. Ahmed cited the remarks of the then home minister Sahara Khatun, who said action would be taken within 48 hours.

Since Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan was not present, Huq took all questions from lawmakers on matters concerning the home ministry.

"One thing we must note is that it is not appropriate to end the investigation until those who are investigating can uncover the mystery of the murder," Huq said, adding that the much-talked-about case is a complicated one.

Investigation can be completed swiftly if the perpetrators can be caught easily.

"The Sagar-Runi murder case is a bit difficult to investigate. All I can say is that the investigating agency will investigate the case properly and will resolve it. But I don't want to fix the time of this case. As a lawyer, I know that [fixing the time of investigation] is not feasible."

Earlier on February 2, Huq said that if the investigation needs 50 years to find the killers of Sagar-Runi, then so be it.

The investigators have already taken 107 time extensions to submit the probe report.



Palestinian children wait to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen amid shortages of food supplies in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Gaza sees no let-up in fighting

Israeli forces kill dozens of Palestinians in Khan Younis; thousands flee to Rafah

AGENCIES

Israeli forces have killed dozens of Palestinians in operations throughout the Gaza Strip over a 24-hour-period, the military said in a statement yesterday, citing the southern hub city of Khan Younis as one of the locations.

Israel said the high-ranking Hamas officials are hiding in Khan Younis and the troops continued to conduct "targeted raids", as the southern enclave saw no let-up in fighting.

Rescue teams searched for survivors as local authorities said 30 people were killed in Israeli air attacks on "safe homes" and a mosque in central Gaza.

Thousands of Palestinians also continued to flee to Rafah from Khan Younis, further north, where Israel is now

concentrating its attacks.

"The situation is indescribable," said Said Hamouda, a Palestinian who fled his home in the Gaza Strip to Rafah on the border with Egypt. Dubbed a "pressure cooker of despair" by the United Nations, Rafah now hosts more than half of Gaza's population, displaced due to Israel's assault.

"Whether you have a million dollars or a hundred you are in the same situation," Hamouda said. Sources told AFP they could hear artillery shelling in the areas of eastern Rafah and Khan Yunis, southern Gaza's main city.

At least 128 people, mostly women and children, were killed in Israeli strikes overnight Sunday to yesterday in the besieged territory, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory.

A total of 27,478 Palestinians have been killed and 66,630 have been injured in Israeli strikes on the enclave since October 7, the ministry said in a statement yesterday.

The UNRWA said yesterday that a Gaza food convoy was struck by the Israeli navy, which controls the waters off the territory.

On his fifth trip to the region since the Israel's offensive began in the enclave, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Saudi Arabia yesterday evening. He is also set to visit Egypt, Qatar and Israel later this week.

Ahead of the trip he stressed the need for "urgently addressing humanitarian needs in Gaza", after aid groups have repeatedly sounded the alarm over the devastating impact on the besieged territory of nearly four months of offensive.

Ten to die for rape of woman in Subarnachar

Lives sucked into an abyss of trauma

FROM PAGE 1

Judge Fatema Ferdous of the Noakhali Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-2 delivered the verdict in a crowded courtroom around 12:30pm.

THE CASE

The woman, a mother of four, was raped at Char Jubilee village in the upazila on December 30, 2018, by a group of 10 to 12 men allegedly under the order of Ruhul Amin, a former member of Char Jubilee Union Parishad and the then publicity secretary of Subarnachar upazila Awami League.

According to the victim, she was gang-raped for casting her vote for "sheaf of paddy", the electoral symbol of the BNP, in the 11th national election. Her husband filed the case with the Char Jabbar Police Station under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act on December 31, 2018.

On March 27, 2019, the Detective Branch of police pressed charges against 16 people, including Ruhul, who was expelled from AL following the

incident.

Public Prosecutor Saleh Ahmed Sohel Khan told The Daily Star that in this case, the state has recorded the testimonies of 23 witnesses.

"Charges were framed against 16 individuals, including Ruhul Amin. Police have arrested 15 of them. However, Mintu, alias Helal, 28, is absconding. The court has directed the Noakhali superintendent of police to arrest him as soon as possible."

PLAINTIFF STILL INSECURE

Though the plaintiff was satisfied with the judgement, his family has been living in fear and insecurity.

"We want the court order to be executed quickly. We feel unsafe and need the state to protect us."

After the verdict, the victim told this newspaper, "I trust the court and I'm happy with the verdict. But it needs to be executed soon. Right now, I'm very worried about my family's safety."

RUHUL'S WIFE UNHAPPY

Rupali Begum, wife of prime accused Ruhul Amin, along with her two sisters,

Shahinur Begum and Maryam Begum, were present in court yesterday.

Following the verdict, Rupali expressed her dissatisfaction, saying, "We refuse to accept this judgement."

Rosina Begum, the mother of accused Murad, said her son worked at a local brickyard and was called out by Sohel and Chowdhury on the day of the incident.

"He is innocent. I want punishment for those who called my son."

COURTROOM DRAMA

Shortly after the verdict was announced, the 15 accused present in the courtroom collectively began shouting, expressing their dissatisfaction with the judgment.

Meanwhile, relatives of the accused who were waiting outside the courtroom also screamed and shouted.

Around 1:30pm, they organised a procession outside the court premises, chanting slogans against the verdict.

According to court sources, the ten individuals sentenced to death can appeal to the higher court within the next seven days.

Man dies in jail custody

FROM PAGE 14

not reply. We found an injury mark on his right eyebrow and scars on his body. At that time, he was in one kind of unconscious state and we tried to talk to him but failed," said Rajib, a garage owner.

He added that they immediately spoke to their lawyer and filed an appeal with the court on Sunday seeking an order on the jail superintendent to take steps for better treatment of his brother. The court issued an order in line with their request.

Yesterday, hearing that Rubel died at CMCH, Rajib went there and found his body on a stretcher.

A prison guard said Rubel was rushed to CMCH in the early morning with chest pain and declared dead by doctors, Rajib said, adding, "We found

bruises on the chest, back, private part and hands that indicated that he was tortured before death."

Muhammed Alamin, executive magistrate of the Chattogram district administration, examined the body at the hospital morgue and prepared an inquest report.

He told this correspondent that an injury mark was found on the forehead, scars on different parts and bruises on wrists.

Family said Rubel has two daughters and his wife is pregnant.

Muhammed Manjur Hossain, senior jail superintendent of Chattogram Central Jail, said, "Rubel was suffering from withdrawal symptoms. For this, he was shifted to Padma Ward No 3 from another ward. He complained of chest pain at night and we took him to

the prison hospital."

Rubel was moved to CMCH in the morning, where he was declared dead, Manjur said, claiming that he was not tortured inside prison.

Asked about the injury marks and bruises, he said as he had withdrawal symptoms, he got the minor injury after falling near the toilet. Bruises might have developed due to handcuffs.

However, SI Musa, who arrested Rubel, said, "We did not find any kind of abnormality in his behaviour when he was under our custody."

Rubel's lawyer Ajoy Dhar said the jail superintendent could not deny his responsibility because his client was alright under police custody.

The post-mortem was done around 4:30pm.

End extortion

FROM PAGE 1

She directed the formulation of a five-year action plan based on the Awami League's manifesto. The ministries concerned were instructed to ensure the presence of their representatives in parliament during question-and-answer sessions.

She called for the formation of committees at the local level to address law and order issues like juvenile gangs and mugging, and to ensure the protection of three crop land, reservoirs and rivers, said sources.

She also gave instructions on addressing the mistakes and issues that trigger criticisms in the school textbook.

FROM PAGE 1

Amin, a former member of Char Jubilee union parishad and the then publicity secretary of Subarnachar Awami League.

During the trial the victim told the court she was raped as a "punishment" for casting a vote for "sheaf of paddy" – the electoral symbol of BNP – in the 11th national election.

Yesterday, a Noakhali court sentenced 10 of the accused to death, and six others to life imprisonment for their involvement in the rape.

Joba was finally granted justice. Though the verdict represents a significant milestone in the pursuit of justice for rape victims, it does not change the fact that her life and that of her family have been through a never-ending nightmare.

"I may have been poor, but I lived a life with dignity. Even in the face of food scarcity, we had a peaceful life," said Joba, talking to The Daily Star at her home just days before the verdict was delivered.

But since that incident, nothing was ever the same again.

Five years on, Joba still avoids interacting with people, something she used to love doing before.

At home, she is overcome with a sense of shame when facing her sons or daughters-in-law.

However, it is far more harrowing when she has to live in the same village as those who caused her this life-altering trauma.

"The families of all 16 accused live in the same village as me ... Their relatives continue to harass me and my family."

After becoming a subject of ridicule and gossip in her neighbourhood, Joba had to take the difficult decision to marry her eldest daughter off when she was only in the eighth grade – out of concerns for the child's safety and future.

Evidently, her children and husband were not spared either.

Her younger daughter, who is currently in class eight, is known as the "daughter of Joba the rape victim".

"My child is mocked by everyone, including her classmates and friends ... Often, she comes home in tears. I can't do much other than try to comfort her..."

Joba's husband was the plaintiff of the case in which the sentences were delivered yesterday.

In the face of humiliation and sneers, he stands firm by his wife.

"I choose not to pay heed to their remarks. I will not jeopardise my marriage by giving value to these things."

However, Joba's trauma is not confined to mockery and social humiliation. The psychological impacts are profound.

"I wake up suddenly between 1:00-2:00am and it feels like I'm trapped in the past, in that very incident. I have nightmares about it and can't help crying out loudly."

Joba's daughter stays with her on those nights to comfort her.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Dr Sunjida Shahria, a physician and psychotherapy practitioner who has worked with victims of rape before, explained the level of trauma in such cases.

"Rape victims suffer from post-

traumatic stress disorder and relive the horrific memories of the incident, which results in nightmares, sleeplessness, irritability and difficulty in managing their lives."

She believes it is not only the physical self of the victim that faces the trauma but their psychology, and social and spiritual well-beings are heavily affected.

Meanwhile, like Joba and her family, the families of the accused also continue to face harassment and humiliation for a crime they did not commit.

Prime accused Ruhul Amin left behind his children, including two boys aged one and two, when he was arrested.

"They are now grown up and have spent all these years deprived of a father's love and affection," his wife lamented.

While Joba's daughter is mocked as "daughter of a rape victim", Ruhul's daughter is now labelled "a rapist's child".

"My daughter cries frequently due to the rampant humiliation. We even had family discussions regarding this and my family members have tried to convince the people to not mistreat my children ... None of this is their fault," Ruhul's wife said.

A resident of the village, Md Khalil has been witnessing the transformation in the lives of all those connected to the incident – the victim, her family, and the rapists' wives and children.

"It is devastating to see them all in such a state. All of their lives have been stripped of respect and dignity."

(The victim's name has been changed to protect her identity.)

KARWAN BAZAR INTERSECTION

Microbus driver beats pedestrian to death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man was killed yesterday allegedly by a microbus driver following an argument in Dhaka's Karwan Bazar area.

Deceased Hafizul Islam Razu, 32, was the manager of a shop at Bashundhara City Shopping Complex in the capital's Panthapath.

Confirming the death, Tejgaon Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Mohsin said Hafizul and his coworker Mir Md Mahmudul Haque Shaon were on their way to Karwan Bazar from the shopping mall around 1:00pm.

While crossing the road, Hafizul and Abul Mansur, a driver of a microbus which was heading towards Farmgate, got into an argument. At one stage, Mansur got out of the vehicle and beat Hafizul unconscious, the OC said.

Hafizul was declared dead when brought to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital.

Meanwhile, locals caught the driver Mansur and handed him over to police.

New BGB DG takes charge

UNB, Dhaka

Maj Gen Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui has joined as the director general of Border Guard Bangladesh.

He took over the charge from outgoing BGB chief Maj Gen AKM Nazmul Hasan yesterday afternoon, said a BGB press release.

Ministry of Public Administration appointed Ashrafuzzaman as the new DG of BGB on January 30.

Before joining the BGB, he held many important positions in the army including the director of the Military training directorate and the chairman of the Army Sports Control Board. He also served in the UN Peace Mission, the press release added.

Russian shelling of Kherson kills four

AFP, Kyiv

Russian shelling of the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson killed four people and injured one other person yesterday, a local official said.

Since being recaptured by Ukrainian forces in November 2022, Kherson has faced near-continuous Russian bombardment.

"As of this hour, there are four dead and one wounded," said Roman Mrochko, head of the Kherson city military administration. Among the dead were two men aged 45 and 50 who were in a car, a woman on the street and a 60-year-old man in the city centre, he said.