

AL leader, 3 others sued for raping woman

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Four people, including a local Awami League leader, have been sued for raping a young woman after tying her companion to a tree in Sunamganj's Dowarabazar upazila.

The 27-year-old victim filed the case with Dowarabazar Police Station following the incident on Saturday. Police then admitted her to the One-Stop Crisis Centre at Sunamganj District Hospital.

The accused are Afsor Uddin, general secretary of Awami League's ward-4 unit under Mannargaon

According to the case statement, the incident took place when the woman and her companion reached Sunamganj around 11:00pm on Friday to get married.

union parishad, Abdul Karim, an auto-rickshaw driver, Foyzul Bari, and Soyful Islam. They all are from Dowarabazar upazila.

The victim, from Habiganj's Madhabpur, was in a relationship with the man she was with. The man, from Sunamganj's Bishwambharpur, worked as a carpenter in Habiganj.

According to the case statement, the incident took place when the woman and her companion reached Sunamganj around 11:00pm on Friday to get married.

After reaching Sunamganj, they hired an auto-rickshaw to reach their destination. But the driver Abdul Karim took them to a different location and called Afsor Uddin.

Then Abdul Karim and Afsor Uddin took them to Foyzul Bari's house at Jalalpur village where the woman was raped early Saturday, the case statement said.

Later around 4:00am, the accused left the woman and her friend on the road at Katakhal. Then they took shelter in a house nearby.

AL's Dowarabazar upazila unit organising secretary Asit Kumar Das confirmed Afsor's identity and said the accused is now on the run.

Rajon Kumar Das, additional superintendent of police in Sunamganj, said, "Being informed by locals, the victim was rescued and sent to the hospital. A case has been filed in this connection and police are looking for the accused."



The lesser-known marvels of Baldah Garden

AYMAN ANIKA

Although many of us have known or heard of Baldah Garden, how frequently have we visited this century-old botanical paradise? Perhaps, not often enough to know what a splendid recreational space this garden can be!

Established in 1909 by the nature lover and landlord of the estate of Baldah, Narendra Narayan Roy, in Wari, Baldah Garden has long been considered the lungs of Old Dhaka. It is, however, high time we got acquainted with the marvels it nurtures and the historical value this serene garden carries.

Baldah Garden has two parts – Psyche and Cybele – each one a botanical treasure hub of its own. The garden's design, with its intricate pathways, ponds, and plants make it a perfect place to take a morning walk. As dawn breaks and the city stirs to life, a walk through Baldah Garden unfolds like a story from a bygone era, revealing the splendour of nature and history intertwined.

From the majestic Amazon water lily, with its large leaves floating like green islands on the pond's surface, to the delicate orchids that dance in the breeze, Baldah Garden is a living library of botanical wonders.

The Garden remains open from

8:00AM to 5:00PM, and everyone is welcome to come here for a leisurely walk or energetic jog. Morning walkers can bask in its fresh air and natural beauty, starting their day amidst the garden's calming environment.

Among the garden's most enchanting features is the Joy House, a historical edifice that once

history and nature.

Adjacent to the Joy House lies the soothing Shankanand Pond, a body of water that adds to the garden's tranquil ambience. The pond's gentle waters, reflecting the lush greenery and sky above, create a picturesque setting for quiet walks and introspection.

The sound of water and the sight of



hosted Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore. Enchanted by the camellias of Baldah Garden, Tagore wrote his poem "Camellia." This architectural gem, nestled within the garden's confines, stands as a symbol of cultural heritage and artistic inspiration.

Visitors are drawn to the Joy House not only for its historical significance but for the beauty and tranquility that surrounds it. It serves as a reminder of the garden's role in fostering creativity and contemplation, making it a cherished destination for poets, artists, researchers, botany students, and anyone captivated by the muses of

aquatic plants thriving along its banks evoke a sense of peace and harmony – making the Shankanand pond a focal point for those seeking a momentary escape from the demands of daily life.

As we rediscover Baldah Garden, we are reminded of the importance of preserving such spaces where history, culture, and nature converge. The garden offers a unique opportunity to connect with the natural world, providing a much-needed respite from urban life.

Its beauty and tranquillity serve as a source of inspiration and rejuvenation, making it an invaluable asset for the community and a splendid recreational space for all who visit.

Tender floated for offshore oil, gas exploration Expose, punish wilful loan defaulters

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Contracts will be signed with the IOCs in line with the Model Production Sharing Contract (PSC) 2023, the notice said.

On July 26 last year, the government approved the PSC that allowed the government's profit share to be 40 percent at least and 65 percent at best in the case of shallow blocks. For deep sea blocks, it would be a minimum of 35 percent and a maximum of 60 percent.

This is the first attempt to get IOCs in offshore exploration after 2016.

In 2019, Petrobangla had finalised a PSC but stopped short of floating the tender saying that the IOCs were not interested in participating.

At that time, the gas price was fixed at a rate, but the new PSC said the price would be fixed at 10 percent of Brent Crude price.

The other attractive features of the tender include full repatriation of profit, no signature bonus or royalty and oil price determined based on the fair market value prevailing in South and South East Asia.

The contractor's corporate income tax liability will be borne by Petrobangla, while there is a provision for assignment of interest and share transfer and 100 percent cost recovery with a yearly cap of 75 percent.

There will be no duty for equipment and machinery imported for petroleum operations.

The contractors will be allowed to sell their share to a third party if Petrobangla refuses to buy it. In the case of shallow sea blocks, the state-owned exploration company BAPEX will have a 10 percent carried stake.

Yesterday's notice said the bidders must buy the available 2D multi-client seismic data against the blocks they intend to bid for from the TGS-Schlumberger.

A joint venture of TGS-Schlumberger has recently completed the multi-client survey of the Bay of Bengal.

The Petrobangla has mainly two types of data available to sell to the

bidders: a basic geological information package for \$300 and a promotional data package at \$10,000 or equivalent Bangladeshi taka.

The promotional data is optional and some more data packages are available at different prices, the notice added.

Interested companies may ask for clarifications on the terms and conditions of the bid by the next 30 days.

The submission deadline for bidding documents will be 1.00 pm on September 9. At around 2.00 pm on the same day the public opening of the documents will take place, it added.

"The 'once blessed offshore resources' are going to be a curse at some point in future – we will have to buy our own resources with a higher price from the IOCs," said Anu Muhammad, former member-secretary of the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports.

Besides, the IOCs will produce gas more and more for their own interest to recover their costs and to get profit.

"This may create a financial burden for us. Say we can't buy that much gas in future due to financial crisis or something else, we will lose our extracted gas under the provisions of exporting gas in the new PSC."

Offshore gas exploration has been under discussion since 2008.

"The government has always said that we do not have the capacity to extract gas by ourselves. We had enough time to build our capacity but we didn't focus on that," Mohammad added.

The move to get IOCs involved in offshore exploration has come belatedly, said Badrul Imam, honorary professor of the University of Dhaka's geology department.

"We needed to appoint the IOCs many years ago. If we had been appointed them 10 years ago, we could have gotten gas from there now. I don't know why the government made such a delay [in engaging the IOCs]."

The relaxation of some terms

and conditions in the PSC to attract international companies is acceptable.

"We still don't know what opportunity is there. If the companies start offshore exploration, we will get more data and will be able to identify new opportunities. At that point, we can bargain to increase our stake."

Schools to stay shut

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students and their parents would suffer and traffic congestion would worsen if schools are kept open during the Ramadan.

However, many guardians were confused whether the schools would remain open or not until yesterday evening as the school authorities were yet to make any decision to this end.

"We are not sure whether we would have to send our children to schools during Ramadan. The education offices should clarify the matter as soon as possible," said Sharmin Rahman, a mother from Mirpur.

The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education said they were waiting for the copy of the court order.

"We will take steps as per the rules once we get the copy," Prof Nehal Ahmed, director general of the DSHE, told The Daily Star in the evening.

Yesterday, the HC issued a rule asking the authorities concerned to explain in four weeks as to why the notifications issued on February 8 ordering that primary and secondary schools be kept open during Ramadan should not be declared illegal.

Petitioner's lawyer Faiz and Deputy Attorney General Sk Shaifuzzaman told this newspaper that the schools would remain closed for 30 days during the Ramadan.

Shaifuzzaman said the government would move an appeal before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court challenging the HC order.

Lawyer Mahmuda Khanam also appeared for the petitioner.

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punishing wilful and unintentional loan defaulters.

Sometimes, Bangladeshi exporters land in trouble when foreign buyers become loan defaulters. But they are not treated as unintentional defaulters, said Hatem, adding that the government should think about a separate policy for them.

Md Habibur Rahman, deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank, said the country is under pressure due to external challenges and it is reflected in elevated inflation, unstable foreign exchange rate, and reserve management issues.

"The elevated inflation in particular is a headache for Bangladesh Bank," he said.

A high volume of non-performing

loans and a lack of good governance are also major challenges, he said.

To tackle these challenges, BB has already made a roadmap through the financial company and bank company acts. "We will do it with a strong hand," he said.

Now there is no alternative to increasing interest rates to control inflation. Other countries around the world have made aggressive interest rate hikes for a long time.

"However, we have increased the interest rate very late considering the businesses."

He said many criticise the "SMART rate" and some even claim that it was introduced on the advice of the IMF and the World Bank. "That's not right."

Sheikh Mohammad Salim Ullah, financial institutions division

secretary of the finance ministry, said the Bank Company Act has been amended to reduce default loans and that work was on to establish good governance in the banking sector according to the roadmap.

The condition of the banking sector will be better soon, he claimed. Finance Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali said the upcoming budget for 2024-25 will be encouraging for the private sector.

The private sector will be given importance in the budget, he said, hoping that the momentum of economic growth would continue. Among others, Abu Hena Rahmatul Muneem, chairman of the National Board of Revenue, and Ashraf Ahmed, president of the DCCL, spoke at the event.

PM's press secy Ihsanul Karim no more

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chief editor of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS).

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has expressed profound shock and sorrow over Karim's demise.

In a message of condolence, she prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family.

Karim joined BSS in 1972 and served in different capacities over nearly four decades at home and abroad.

During his long career in journalism, he also served several foreign media like British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Press Trust of India (PTI) as their Bangladesh correspondent.

Karim was born on January 5, 1951. He obtained his master's degree in economics from Dhaka University.

He joined the Liberation War in 1971 and fought on the western frontier as a member of the Bangladesh Liberation Force (BLF).

Day labourer hacked to death over trivial matter

UNB, Dhaka

A man has been hacked to death over a trivial matter in the capital's Mirpur area yesterday.

The deceased has been identified as Al Amin, 30, a day labourer by profession.

The incident took place in front of Mukut Bangla Market of Shah Ali police station in Mirpur last morning, Mirpur Division Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Masuk Mia confirmed.

He said Al Amin went to the Shah Ali area looking for work early yesterday. There was a conversation between a contractor and a worker named Roni about hiring a man but Al Amin interfered with the conversation and got the job. When Al Amin was leaving with the hirer, agitated Roni hit him on his head from behind with a spade, leaving him seriously injured on the spot.

Later, his co-workers rescued him and brought him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where the doctor declared him dead at around 10:00am.

Efforts are on to arrest Roni, said Maudud Howladar, officer-in-charge (OC) of Shah Ali Police Station.

The body has been kept in the morgue of the emergency department for post-mortem, said Inspector Bachchu Mia, in charge of Dhaka Medical College and Hospital police outpost.

Toddler drowns in pond

UNB, Lalmonirhat

A two-year-old drowned in a pond near his house while playing there in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Tamim Rahman, son of Moshir Rahman of Mirerchak area of Komolabari union.

According to locals, the child was playing beside the pond while his uncle was working there.

"His family members started looking for him but he was not seen anywhere after a while. At one stage, Tamim's body was found floating on the pond," said Mahmudun Nabi, officer-in-charge of Aditmari Police Station.

UPRISING CRUSHED BY CHINA

Exiled Tibetans mark 65th anniversary

AFP, Dharamsala

Tibetans in India yesterday waved the flag of their homeland in protests marking 65 years since a failed uprising was crushed by China, driving the Dalai Lama and thousands of compatriots to flee.

Leaders warned of an "existential threat" to the decades-long struggle by Tibetans in exile to win greater autonomy for a homeland many have never seen.

Yesterday, hundreds of Tibetans gathered in the northern Indian hill-town of Dharamsala, the adopted home of the Dalai Lama since he fled Tibet days after the March 10, 1959 uprising.

"The commemoration today is not just a way to amplify the voices of Tibetans to the international community but a time for all Tibetans to reflect," said Lhagari Namgyal Dolkar, 37, a member of parliament in the Tibetan government in exile, which is based in India.

Intense politicking

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votes were cast for four presidential candidates, which is a blatant manipulation. I demand a reelection of the SCBA under an independent election commission."

Replying to a question, Mahub Uddin, a joint secretary general of BNP and former SCBA secretary, said he will hold talks with senior lawyers to take necessary steps so that the SCBA polls are held transparently and peacefully in future.

Meanwhile, newly elected SCBA Secretary Shah Monjurul Hoque told The Daily Star that the voting and vote counting in this year's polls took place in a very peaceful, fair and transparent manner.

"Before the counting of votes, we received a message that outsiders on behalf of a candidate will hijack the ballot boxes. Then we demanded giving the ballots to the police and to count the votes later."

"In this situation, they attacked the lawyers involved in polling activities," he said, adding that the men of pro-BNP candidate Mahub Uddin Khokon brought the extra ballots

during counting of the votes.

Shah Monjurul, a senior pro-AL lawyer, said he will definitely take an initiative to stop such violent activities in future SCBA elections.

Senior lawyer and Editor of Dhaka Law Reports Khurshid Alam Khan said unexpected violence took place over the last few years centring the SCBA polls due to impatience and misunderstanding of lawyers, which is very unfortunate.

Most of the candidates in the elections are directly or indirectly involved with political parties, he added.

Advocate Mohammad Shishir Manir, a young lawyer of the Supreme Court, said the violence centring the SCBA elections keeps occurring because of "serious mistrust amongst the members of the bar; failure to follow the rules and regulations formulated by the bar association; extreme partisan politics and political influence; degradation of professionalism; failure of senior lawyers to train juniors properly, and some seniors sheltering disobedient juniors".