

11 YEARS OF RANA PLAZA TRAGEDY

Trial of murder case drags on

Building code violation case proceedings yet to start

EMRUL HASAN BAPPI and CHAITANYA CHANDRA HALDER

Even 11 years after the Rana Plaza collapse in Savar, the trial of two cases filed over the incident did not reach any verdict, causing frustration among the victims.

At least 1,136 people, mostly garment workers, were killed and over 2,500 others injured in the deadliest garment factory disaster in history as the nine-storey building came crashing down in Savar on April 24, 2013.

In 2016, a Dhaka court started a trial in the murder case against 41 accused, including building owner Sohel Rana. However, trial proceedings in another case over violating building codes have yet to begin.

On July 18, 2016, Dhaka District and Sessions Judge's Court framed charges against Sohel Rana and 40 accused in the murder case. Since then, 84 out of 594 prosecution witnesses have testified in the case, according to the prosecution.

The court recorded statements of four witnesses on April 21 this year and set April 28 as the next date for witnesses'

statements, said a staffer of the court.

Angered and frustrated over the cases' status, the survivors and victim family members expressed concern about ever being able to see justice.

Jesmin, a survivor, said, "For 11 years, I have been carrying the painful memories in my mind and body. But the culprits have not been punished yet."

Tahera Begum, mother of Shahida, who died in the incident, said, "I lost my daughter 11 years ago. Those involved in the murder of my child haven't been punished yet. I did not get proper compensation either. If I can see the guilty get punished before my death, I can die in peace."

Sheikh Hemayet Hossain, public prosecutor of the court, told The Daily Star, "In the murder case, witnesses are being summoned to testify before the court, but most are coming for statements. So the progress in the trial has been dismally slow."

"Most witnesses don't care about the tragedy now. They are not properly giving their statements. If they continue in such a way, most of the accused may get acquitted," he said.

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Survivors and family members of the victims of Rana Plaza tragedy stand behind the pictures of their loved ones demanding justice and compensation. Marking 11th anniversary of the tragedy, Bangladesh Garments Workers Solidarity organised a two-day photo exhibition in front of the site.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

EC to boost security ahead of upazila polls

Elections postponed in three Bandarban upazilas

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission is set to increase the number of law enforcers to maintain law and order during the upcoming upazila polls.

The EC has also postponed the local government polls in Thanchi, Ruma and Rowangchhari upazilas of Bandarban due to the ongoing military operation by joint forces against the armed hill group Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF).

The commission made these decisions after meeting top officials from various ministries including home, cabinet divisions and chiefs of all law enforcement agencies. This meeting was held in preparation for the upcoming four-phase upazila polls scheduled between May 8 and June 5.

The polls in the aforementioned three upazilas will take place later in a more favourable environment, EC Secretary Jahangir Alam told reporters.

Besides, security deployment during upazila polls will be more this year compared to the previous ones, he added.

The EC aims to assign a minimum of 17 police and Ansar members at regular polling centers and 18 to 19 at risky ones.

In the last election, the numbers were 15 and 16-17 respectively.

The EC secretary said BGB will also be deployed to ensure a free and fair election.

In the first phase of

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INNER CIRCULAR ROAD

RHD to expand two major roads around Dhaka

Tk 2,713.63cr project proposed to ease congestion

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) is going to expand two major roads around Dhaka as part of developing the long-awaited inner ring road, aiming to reduce traffic congestion in the capital.

The 10.64km Postogola-Fatullah-Chasara Road and 14.60km Gabtoli-Dhour Road are to be expanded into four-lane roads with services on both sides.

This 25.24km road is a part of the 88.8 km-long inner circular road around the capital, which is planned to be developed so that vehicles can bypass Dhaka using the road and thus avoid gruelling traffic congestions inside the capital.

RHD has already submitted a Development Project Proposal (DPP) involving Tk 2,713.63 crore to expand the two roads. The deadline for the project is June 2027, officials said.

The commission will hold a project evaluation committee (PEC) meeting today with Mohammad Emdad Ullah Mian, member of the Physical Infrastructure Division, in the chair, they said.

Once the Planning Commission cleared the project, it would be placed before the Ecnc for approval, they also said.

With the expansion of the two roads, RHD is going to start developing the inner circular road to reduce traffic congestion in the capital, Sabju Uddin Khan, additional chief engineer (Dhaka zone) of RHD, told The Daily Star yesterday.

In 2016, the government approved the Revised Strategic Transport Plan for Dhaka city for 2016-2035. As per the RSTP, the government will construct three circular roads -- inner, middle, and outer -- to reduce traffic congestion.

Once the roads are developed, vehicles will not enter the capital but will be able to bypass it using those circular roads, officials said.

Dhaka city, particularly its exit and entry points, is infamous for traffic congestion and the problem intensified after the opening of the Padma Bridge.

Although RHD completed feasibility study of the inner circular road in 2018, the project did not move forward for different reasons, including funding, they said.

Different government agencies, including RHD, Dhaka South City Corporation and Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA), are now working to implement the inner circular road. The entire route is Abdullahpur-Dhour-

Birulia-Gabtoli-Boshila-Babubazar-Sadarghat-Postogola-Fatullah-Chasara-Signboard-Shimrail-Demra-Beraid-Purbachal and Termukh.

There are two parts of the road. BBA is now carrying out feasibility study of the 25.8km long first part, which starts from Demra and ends at Abdullahpur via Beraid, Purbachal, and Termukh.

Out of the 63km-long second part, 4km part from Cunkuthia to Postogola has been developed by RHD under Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga Expressway project.

A total of 15km portion is now under



development under three projects -- BBA is expanding a 5.9km road from Abdullahpur to Dhour under Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway Project, Dhaka South City Corporation is expanding a 6km road from Rayerbazar Sluice Gate to Loharpul under a project, and RHD will expand a 3km road from Shimrail to Demra under Rampura-Amulia-Demra Expressway Public Private Partnership Project.

A proposal for improving the 31.05km road, including the Postogola-Chasara and Gabtoli-Dhour is pending approval with the Planning Commission, while the process for improving the rest of the 12.95km road is still at the preparatory level, RHD sources said.

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A predator on Dhaka streets

Man arrested for child pornography

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Tipu Kibria used to be an author of children's books.

In addition to several popular rhyme books in the market, there is also a horror series for children written by him.

Behind the appearance of a respectable position in society, he has been involved in child pornography for around 30 years.

He is also wanted for this crime internationally, in at least 25 countries outside Bangladesh.

Back in June 2014, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested Tipu based on information from Interpol.

He was in jail for the next six years and got out in November 2020.

But Tipu, now 58, did not change. Recently, the Australian Federal Police informed Bangladesh police about this repeated offender.

Based on that, the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit initiated an investigation leading to the arrest of Tipu and one of his associates, Kamrul, from the Khilgaon area of the capital yesterday.

Confirming the development, Ahamedul Islam, deputy commissioner of the CTTC unit, told The Daily Star, "Tipu got involved in child pornography again after his release from jail. He used to send the videos to Italy and Australia using encrypted apps."

STREET CHILDREN WERE HIS TARGETS
CTTC officials said Tipu's targets were boys aged between 10 and 14 years old.

He has a racket across the capital to bring street children into his den. The members of this gang are mainly addicts.

He provided gang members with amounts ranging from Tk 200 to Tk 500, along with mobile phones and SIM cards, as incentives for each child they brought to him. This network is mainly led by two scrap traders -- Kamrul and Delwar.

Drives are underway to arrest Delwar, said Obain Rakhaine, assistant commissioner of the CTTC unit.

LABS, STUDIOS INSIDE THE HOUSE
The cops rescued two children from Tipu's studio during yesterday's drive.

The studio had a camera for filming and a computer for editing among other tools. Police also recovered a Google Drive link, in which hundreds of photographs of children were found.

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'I cannot avoid responsibility'

Former BTEB chairman says after DB quizzes him over certificate forgery

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB) Chairman Ali Akbar Khan yesterday claimed that he was unaware of the forgery of thousands of certificates, which his wife stands accused of.

However, he said he cannot avoid responsibility for the crime.

"As I am [was] the chief of the board, I cannot shrug off the responsibility," he said after coming out of DB office, where investigators quizzed him for several hours.

"I was definitely asked about it [his wife's alleged involvement in the crime] but I said I did not know anything," he said.

The forgery came to light after detectives arrested AKM Shamsuzzaman, a system analyst

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Drugs worth Tk 1cr arrives in parcel from US

DNC detains three

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A new variant of narcotics -- gummy candies infused with marijuana -- has been recovered by the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) recently.

The consignment came inside a parcel from the US state of California to the Foreign Postal Department of Bangladesh. It was packed inside a colourful packet of children's toys.

Along with the gummies, the DNC officials opening the parcel also found "Kush" (a pure or hybrid cannabis indica strain), alongside chocolate and brownies made of marijuana. The market value of these drugs is around Tk 1 crore, the officials claimed.

Investigators said a network is working behind this smuggling, and an investigation is ongoing in coordination with the US Drug Enforcement Administration to catch the masterminds.

DNC disclosed the developments yesterday, after the parcels arrived on Monday.

Mustakim Billah Faruqui, director general of DNC, said, "We are working to identify those who are sending these drugs from abroad. That's

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JOB OPPORTUNITY

Nitol Insurance Company Limited invites applications from Bangladeshi citizen for the following position:

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Migrants get lower salaries for being unskilled

Says Mashiur Rahman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister's Economic Affairs Adviser Mashiur Rahman yesterday said Bangladeshi migrant workers receive lower salaries as they are not skilled enough.

"We can utilise our surplus manpower. But we lack skilled workers. That is why we cannot send skilled workers to Europe as much as we want... We have to play an

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