

## Man found guilty of trying to kill Salman Rushdie

AFP, New York

An American-Lebanese man was found guilty Friday of attempting to kill novelist Salman Rushdie when storming a stage and repeatedly plunging a knife into the "Satanic Verses" author.

Hadi Matar faces up to 25 years in prison and will be sentenced in April after being convicted of attempted murder and assault charges over the 2022 attack.

Matar's legal team had sought to prevent witnesses from characterizing Rushdie as a victim of persecution following Iran's 1989 fatwa calling for his murder over supposed blasphemy in "The Satanic Verses."

Rushdie had told jurors of Matar "stabbing and slashing" him during an event at an upscale cultural center in rural New York.

"It was a stab wound in my eye, intensely painful, after that I was screaming because of the pain," Rushdie said, adding he was left in a "lake of blood."

He said it "occurred to me I was dying" before he was helicopter to a trauma hospital.

Jurors heard closing arguments from both prosecutors and defense lawyers before retiring briefly to consider their verdict Friday. They deliberated for less than two hours.

Matar was found guilty of stabbing Rushdie about 10 times with a six-inch blade that had been shown to witnesses and the court.

The defendant shouted pro-Palestinian slogans on several occasions during the trial.

- Free speech v. blasphemy -

Matar, from New Jersey, previously told media he had only read two pages of "The Satanic Verses" but believed the author had "attacked Islam."

After the novel was published in 1988, Rushdie became the center of a fierce tug of war between free speech advocates and those who insisted that insulting religion, particularly Islam, was unacceptable in any circumstance.

Books and bookshops were torched, his Japanese translator was murdered and his Norwegian publisher was shot several times.



Workers unload a truck of school books at Jibon Shingho Union Model High School in Bakerganj Upazila of Barishal. The books will be distributed among students.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

## Local polls possible by June

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Each local government body will have a legislative wing and an executive wing. The elected chairperson or mayor will head the executive wing.

The legislative wing will operate like a mini-parliament. All elected members of the organisation will elect a speaker for their respective body, who will then chair the legislative wing.

All, except for the chair and executive wing, will also elect a shadow parishad, recommends the commission, adding that the "village court" should be abolished.

Instead, courts will be empowered in upazilas to deal with criminal and civil cases, and arbitration.

In addition, arbitration systems are to be set up at the ward and community levels. The commission recommended that this be done in two years.

In the Chattogram Hill Tracts, reforms are recommended to incorporate indigenous circle chiefs, village heads and karbaris into the administrative bodies.

Circle chiefs would become regular members of the zila parishad, while one headman would be included in the union parishad. Each headman or karbari would nominate a male and a female representative from their community to be included in the upazila parishad and the municipality.

## Man killed on the day of his return home after 15 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A man who had just returned from Oman was allegedly killed by his relatives at his younger sister's in-laws' house in Chattogram's Mirsarai upazila on Friday night.

The incident occurred just hours after he returned home from Oman after 15 years, police said.

The victim, Mohammad Mohiuddin, 45, was the son of the late Fazlul Hoque of Nandigram village under Ichhakhalia union in the upazila.

"He was allegedly beaten by members of his younger sister Selina Akhter's in-laws, including her husband Md Sharif, over a family feud," the OC said, adding that the accused fled after the incident.

## Concentration of power stifles democracy

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service but as a shortcut to financial advancement. The situation is not confined to the national level but affects all tiers of governance, from local councils to parliament.

Rehman Sobhan observed that the intertwining of politics with business interests has created a "winner-takes-all" mentality, where political power is seen as a way to access financial fortune.

Additionally, he said, violence has become a part of the political culture and political discourse in Bangladesh is often characterised by lies, abuse, and personal attacks rather than reasoned debate.

"Unless we break away from the culture of violence and abuse, democratic participation and public reasoning will remain severely compromised."

He also criticised the politicisation of the judiciary, stating that it has become increasingly instrumentalised to serve the needs of the ruling regime.

"The judiciary, once independent, has now been co-opted by political interests," Sobhan, also the chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) said.

Rehman Sobhan also called for urgent and sustained reform in the country's judiciary and political system. "This is a process that will take time, but it is essential for the future of Bangladesh."

Presiding over the session, Prof Rounaq Jahan, a distinguished fellow at CPD, said while political parties readily put reform commitments on paper, actual implementation remains elusive.

"The non-party interim government system was ignored, and the commitment of wealth declarations by parliament members remains unmet."

In the keynote paper, Mirza M Hassan, a senior research fellow at Brac Institute of Governance and Development, said new democratic concepts need to address the power asymmetries rooted in the political economy and social structures that favour a small group of elites.

"Our concern is to guard the guardian, that is, to prevent

political party elites from capturing accountability institutions," he added.

Supreme Court Senior Advocate Barrister Sara Hossain said the voice of marginalised people is always silent in the current governance system.

"The participation of women is very little. The voices of those who have disabilities and those who are raised in some particular areas, like Geneva Camps, are not considered important," she said, adding that there should be a mechanism to hear the voices of various communities in the country.

Dr Ali Riaz, head of the Constitutional Reform Commission, said, the central question during the reform commission's work was how to build institutions that prioritise accountability and checks and balances.

"These aspects have been systematically undermined in the past 52 years, particularly over the last 16 years," he said, adding, the rules of governance over the years have led to a personalistic autocracy, concentrating power in the hands of a few.

Dr Riaz, also a distinguished professor at the US's Illinois State University, also highlighted the importance of dispersing power across various institutions to ensure more balanced governance.

"The prime minister, elected by the party, holds multiple positions at once, with no accountability even to the party themselves."

He concluded by noting that the creation of a more democratic and accountable political framework is crucial for Bangladesh's future, urging continued efforts toward institutional reforms.

"If we are looking at the current political arrangements, elites, and settlements, a liberal democratic mechanism needs to be created first," he added.

Among others, Ruhin Hossain Prince, general secretary of Communist Party of Bangladesh, Prof Asif M Shah, of development studies at Dhaka University, and Sarwar Tusher, co-convenor of Jatiya Nagorik Committee, spoke at the event.

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