



Protesters carrying lit torches march on Dhaka University campus under the banner of Bangladesh Against Rape and Abuse yesterday evening. Top right, former and current DU journalism students demonstrate in front of Raju Sculpture. Bottom right, students of printing and publications department take out a procession.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN, ANISUR RAHMAN

Six more land in jail

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officer-in-charge (OC) of Gouripur Police Station.

The girl's father filed a rape case following the incident on March 6.

The victim is now undergoing treatment at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, said police.

In Narayanganj, a 40-year-old man was sent to jail in a case filed on charges of raping his sister-in-law on multiple occasions.

According to the case statement, he first raped her in May last year and filmed the incident. Then, he raped her multiple times, blackmailing her with the tape. He last raped her on February 15, this year.

Police arrested him yesterday following the case filed by the victim, said Araihaaz Police Station OC Enayet Hossain.

In Rangpur, a 50-year-old man was sent to jail in a case filed over the rape of a nine-year-old child.

Ruhul Amin, of Mithapukur upazila, appeared before the district court yesterday with a bail prayer. The court rejected it and sent him to jail, said Mithapukur Police Station OC Abu Bakkar Siddique.

Ruhul raped the girl on February 21 morning, when she went to Ruhul's yard to collect flowers, according to the case filed by the girl's father.

In Savar, two men were sued in two separate cases filed over the rape of their stepdaughters – one of whom is a 10-year-old and the other is a 14-year-old.

The victims' mothers filed the cases with Ashulia Police Station—one on Wednesday and the other yesterday.

The accused are on the run, and police are trying to arrest them, said Ashulia Police Station Inspector (Investigation) Kamal Hossain.

According to the case statements, the 10-year-old girl was raped on March 9 at her residence. The 14-year-old victim was first raped around one year ago, and a second time on February 15 this year.

In Dinajpur, a teenage boy was sent to jail yesterday for attempting to rape a fourth grader at Biral upazila.

In Bandarban, a man was sent to jail yesterday for attempting to rape a mentally challenged girl at Rowangchhari upazila.

In Netrokona, Rab early yesterday arrested Shahidul Islam, 22, a rape accused who fled from police custody on February 17 from Dhaka court premises.

[Our correspondents from respective districts contributed to this report.]

Trial may begin in a week

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trial may proceed without the DNA report. This will depend on the judges' satisfaction," he noted.

Meanwhile, an ordinance amending the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act is expected to be issued next Sunday.

The amendment will introduce provisions for the establishment of special tribunals to expedite trials in cases of child rape and abuse, he said.

According to the proposed draft, the time frame for investigating rape cases will be reduced to 15 days from 30 days, while the trial period will be shortened to 90 days from 180 days.

Asif Nazrul further said, "The government has taken all necessary steps swiftly. There has been no negligence on the part of the authorities."

He also assured that all future actions would be carried out with diligence.

"If we make any errors, you are welcome to point them out, but creating chaos and causing suffering to people will not be tolerated."

Nation engulfed by grief and anger

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made it through, I would never have let her go anywhere alone again."

She added that she wants to see the perpetrators meted out the highest punishment.

The girl's death touched off a wave of outrage in Dhaka and other parts of the country, as reports of children being raped continued to come from different parts of the country – a grim reminder of the persistent threat to women and children's safety.

Netizens flooded social media with posts expressing both sorrow and anger. One of them, writer Sohel R Rana, shared a photo of the victim's crying sister on Facebook.

He wrote, "Today, when the girl was crying and saying, 'My sister, who will I talk to now?' I couldn't bear this! As an ordinary citizen of the country, I can only say that I demand justice. I demand severe punishment for this brutality. No ifs or buts. Full stop!"

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus expressed deep sorrow and instructed the authorities to bring the culprits to justice without delay.

Fisheries and Livestock Adviser Farida Akhter, along with the girl's mother, accompanied the body on the helicopter to Magura.

"The state and the government are treating this with utmost importance. The rape of such a young girl is unimaginable and unacceptable," Farida told reporters.

Earlier in the afternoon, the Inter-Services Public Relations Directorate said the girl could not be saved despite advanced medical care and the best efforts of specialist doctors.

In a statement, the ISPR said the child, who was transferred to the CMH in a critical condition on March 8, suffered three cardiac arrests in the morning. While doctors managed to stabilise her after the first two, she did not regain a pulse after the third.

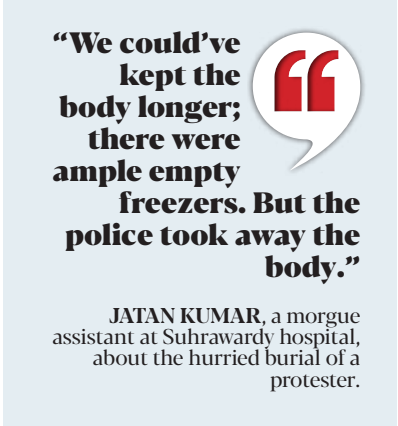
AL govt sought to hide true extent of massacre

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Constable Salauddin of Shahbagh police collected eight of these bodies from Dhaka Medical, and Sub-inspector Shakil Joarder of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar police collected another body from Suhrawardy Medical.

In both instances, Anjuman received the bodies from the respective police stations rather than directly from the hospitals, documents show.

Asked why he rushed the burial of these individuals, Shahbagh police Constable Salauddin said he just followed orders from Shahbagh's then officer-in-charge Mostajizur Rahman. Two other police officers gave a similar version. Mostajizur could not be reached for comments.

Both the DMCH authorities and Salauddin claimed that no other bodies related to the protests were sent to Anjuman.



MEDICAL RECORDS TAMPERED
Apart from DMCH, two other hospitals in Dhaka store unclaimed bodies—Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Sir Salimullah Medical College (Mitford Hospital).

Both hospitals claim they haven't dealt with any protest-related unclaimed bodies.

Our findings about Suhrawardy Medical contradict this. (We did not investigate Mitford hospital's claim.)

Mahin Mia, one of the six confirmed

The Bangladesh Army extended its condolences to the bereaved family and pledged to stand by them in their time of need, the ISPR said.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir also called for exemplary punishment to those responsible. "The way the child left us, leaving us in sorrow and shame, is beyond words," he said in the press release.

According to a case filed by her mother on March 8, the third-grader was raped while visiting her elder sister's house in Magura town between the night of March 5 and the morning of March 6.

Her sister's husband, his parents and brother were arrested and placed on remand.

Her mother yesterday alleged that her elder daughter, who is 14 years old, was also beaten up severely on March 8. She was confined to a separate room as she warned of informing her parents about the assault.

GRIEF AND ANGER

The village in Magura was in mourning as the news of the child's death spread at noon. Ohidur Rahman, a villager, said, "We are speechless. I have just one thing to say: complete the trial as soon as possible and ensure the hanging of the rapist."

The girl's father, a person with disability, was numb with grief.

A relative said, "We could not save her despite all our efforts. Now, all we want is the maximum punishment for the criminals as soon as possible."

Magura District Bar Association General Secretary Shahed Hasan said the lawyers decided not to provide any legal assistance to those accused in the case.

District Mahila Parishad General Secretary Laboni Zaman echoed similar sentiments and promised to stand by the child's family until the trial is completed.

National Citizen Party leaders Hasnat

Abdullah and Sarjis Alam, and Khelafat Majlish Amir Mamunul Haque also visited Magura.

"It's a shame for entire Bangladesh. We, the nation, apologise to our sister," said Sarjis. "We have to ensure exemplary punishment to those responsible within the 90-day time frame."

A gayebana janaza (an absentee funeral) for the girl was held at 7:30pm at Dhaka University's VC Chattar, organised by the Dharshan Birodhi Mancha. Another such funeral was held at Jagannath University.

Following the funeral, the protesters marched to the Raju Bhaskarjo, where female college and university students delivered speeches.

They urged the public to stand in solidarity with the Mancha's five-point demand and support the platform in pressuring the government to expedite justice for rape victims.

Demonstrators of another platform, Bangladesh Against Rape and Abuse, brought out a torch procession on the campus.

Many protesters stressed that the government should refrain from making populist decisions and instead focus on reforming the laws related to women and children's safety for a permanent solution.

They also called for clarifying the legal definitions of rape, which they say are currently ambiguous.

The protesters said Home Adviser Lt Gen (ret'd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury will have to step down if he fails to ensure justice for rape victims and improve women's security.

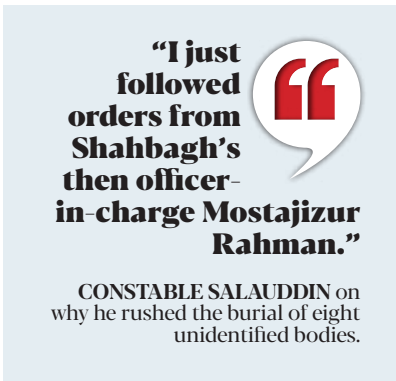
In a statement, the National Citizen Party said, "The torture inflicted on the child and her subsequent death is a severe disgrace to our state and societal systems."

It called on the interim government to restore citizens' trust by ensuring justice through a proper investigation into incidents of rape and abuse.

their autopsy reports and other relevant documents.

Dhaka Medical's claim that only eight uprising victims were sent to Anjuman is also questionable.

For example, Ahmed Jilani was killed on August 3. His autopsy was conducted



CONSTABLE SALAUDDIN on why he rushed the burial of eight unidentified bodies.

On August 13 at DMCH, and he was buried at Rayerbazar on August 31. The autopsy report shows he had gunshot and stab wounds on the back of his head.

Based on the autopsy numbers of the other eight bodies and Jilani, The Daily Star can confirm that Jilani is not on the DMCH list of the eight unnamed bodies buried at Rayerbazar.

Our suspicion that medical and burial records were tampered with to conceal the true extent of the massacre aligns with the UN fact-finding report.

The report, published last month, mentions that state agencies confiscated medical records and CCTV footage in many hospitals, without due process, and medical staff were pressured to withhold proper medical documentation.

In some hospitals, deaths from gunshot wounds were recorded as "accidental" under threat of legal action. From July 18 onwards, autopsies were often delayed or not conducted at all, violating national and international standards, the report adds.

Read Part 3 tomorrow on how state agencies sought to cover up bodies, and how families were denied time to find their loved ones.

China urges 'diplomatic' Iran nuclear solution ahead of Beijing talks

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday called for a "diplomatic" resolution to the Iran nuclear issue as it prepared to host diplomats from Tehran and Moscow for talks.

The United States withdrew from a landmark deal, which had imposed curbs on Iran's nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief, during President Donald Trump's first term.

Tehran adhered to the 2015 deal for a year after Washington's withdrawal but then began rolling back its commitments.

Efforts to revive the pact have since faltered. Beijing is set to host Russia and Iran – both key diplomatic partners – on Friday for trilateral talks on Tehran's nuclear programme.

"In the current situation, we believe that all parties should maintain calm and restraint to avoid escalating the Iran nuclear situation, or even walking towards confrontation and conflict," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told a regular briefing.

The meeting will be attended by China's Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxue, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi, Beijing has said.

Iran's foreign ministry has said the meeting would focus on "developments related to the nuclear issue and the lifting of sanctions".

Over 5,600 children raped

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alleged rape is dismayingly high: At least 318 such cases had been reported in the last 10 years, according to ASK.

In the latest horrifying incident, an eight-year-old girl of Magura, who was allegedly raped earlier this month, died yesterday at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in the capital.

According to a report on rape cases from the Police Headquarters (PHQ), 5,191 cases were filed in 2023.

In 2024, the number stood at 4,394. From January 2023 to January 2025, a total of 9,977 rape cases were recorded across the country.

This translates to an average of 13 women and children being raped each day.

An analysis of rape cases filed in January of 2023, 2024, and 2025 shows that the highest number of cases was recorded in January of the current year. In January 2023, 354 rape cases were filed. The number dropped to 308 in January 2024 and 392 in January 2025.

DELAYS IN PROBE, TRIAL

On May 3 last year, a 9-year-old girl was raped and killed allegedly by her 30-year-old cousin in Babuganj Upazila of Barishal.

Her mother filed a case three days later with Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal in Barishal, accusing Farid Ahmed Towhid of rape and murder and his father Sultan Howlader of trying to pass the homicide as suicide.

Police have yet to press charges as they still do not have the autopsy report, and the accused who were arrested earlier, had been released last month after the High Court granted them bail.

Contacted, Inspector Muhammad Towhiduzzaman of Wazirpur Police Station said, "Once we receive the autopsy report, we may be able to submit the charge sheet."

Her mother said she was heartbroken when the accused got bail. "The killers are walking free. I doubt if I will ever get justice," she said.

Experts say prompt legal proceedings and gender equality are needed to lower the frequency of violence against women.

"If we ensure prompt trials for only one or two cases [that cause public outrage], similar crimes will continue to occur. We must establish a system of expedited and fair justice," Fauzia Moslem, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, told The Daily Star.

30 parties miss deadline

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two more days to submit their feedback.

"Some parties have asked for an extended deadline, but we told them that it is not possible as it would delay our work. We urged them to submit their feedback as soon as possible," said Riaz, who led the Constitution Reform Commission.

The BNP, currently the largest active political party in the country, has opted to prepare a detailed report to inform its stance on the reform recommendations, The Daily Star has learnt with people informed with the proceedings.

Merely submitting feedback by ticking checkboxes could lead to confusion, they said. Instead, the party intends to prepare a comprehensive report alongside the provided form.

Some BNP leaders have also raised concerns about the commission's dialogue process, particularly whether it will include only registered parties or unregistered ones as well.

If limited to registered parties, groups like Jamaat-e-Islami and the newly formed NCP would be excluded.

The issue needs clarification as inviting unregistered parties could open the door for many other groups to participate, they said.

However, the commission has urged all parties, including the BNP, to submit their feedback within five days.

Meanwhile, 14 parties, including the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), have not submitted their responses

"Perpetrators of rape often commit the crime as an assertion of power. There is a culture of exerting power in our society – be it in the family, administration, or other spheres. Since women are in a weaker position, men exploit this power dynamic to assert dominance over them. This is why it is essential to establish the idea that men and women are equal," she added.

Prof Omar Faruk, who teaches criminology and police science at Mawlana Bhasani Science and Technology University, said the conviction rate in cases of violence against women and children is very low.

Victims of gender-based violence face numerous challenges during the investigation process and many do not seek legal remedy because of fear of harassment.

A new government initiative to reduce the time for investigation is commendable, he said. "But appeals for time extension for investigations should not be entertained, because that would undermine the initiative."

DNA matching should be mandatory in investigations as it is globally recognised as an effective tool to identify perpetrators. Unless it's mandatory, there is a risk that false cases would be filed, he said.

GOVERNMENT STEPS

Amid widespread outrage against sexual violence, the PHQ launched a hotline (01320002001, 01320002002, 01320002222) through which people can report violence, offensive behavior, derogatory remarks, harassment, and sexual abuse.

On March 9, Home Adviser Lt Gen (ret'd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said, "Those guilty of violence against women or rape would be brought to book."

Law Adviser Prof Asif Nazrul recently said that the existing laws in cases of rape and abuse of women will be amended to reduce the investigation time from 30 days to 15 days.

Additionally, the trial for rape cases will be completed within 90 days instead of the previous 180 days. DNA evidence will be required in rape cases, said the adviser.

The amendments would be made after consultations with stakeholders on this matter.

If a judge believes that the investigation and trial of the case can proceed based solely on the medical certificate, they will be able to make such arrangements, added the law adviser.

nor contacted the commission.

Speaking to The Daily Star, CPB General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince said that responding within the given timeframe was not feasible.

"We are currently analysing the reform proposals. Since we do not believe it is possible to provide feedback simply by ticking 'agree', 'disagree' or 'partially agree', my party thinks that a dialogue is necessary."

The CPB needs more time for a comprehensive response, he added.

When asked about the timeline for discussions given the commission's previous statement that talks would begin in mid-March, Riaz said the commission would meet next Sunday to determine the next course of action.

However, he expressed hope that discussions could begin with parties that submit their feedback by the third week of March.

On the implementation of several recommendations from six reform commissions, Shafiqul Alam, the chief adviser's press secretary, said that some reforms do not require consultation with political parties.

A 30-page document is being prepared, which will be sent to the respective ministries for administrative implementation within their jurisdiction, he said during a media briefing yesterday.

The chief adviser has urged the ministries to take swift action on the decisions, Alam added.