

HC asks DC, SP to protect Barguna child rape victim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the Barguna deputy commissioner and its superintendent of police to provide protection to the child rape victim, whose father was found dead a day after he filed a case in that regard, and her family.

It also ordered the government to assign a social welfare officer to take necessary measures for the welfare of the child, a fifth grader.

At the same time, the HC asked the authorities concerned of the government to ensure the security of the family of Magura's child rape victim, who died at Dhaka Combined Military Hospital (CMH) on March 13 and to take necessary care of her elder sister.

The HC bench of Justice Farah Mahbub and Justice Debasish Roy Chowdhury issued the orders

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A woman cries while sitting on the rubble of her house, destroyed in an Israeli strike, in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza Strip yesterday; Palestinians ride on a truck as they flee their already destroyed homes in northern Gaza after the Israeli army issued fresh evacuation orders; and people search for items to salvage in a building destroyed in Israeli strikes.



PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

Contractor shot dead in Jashore over 'extortion'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A contractor was shot dead by assailants in the Rail Bazar area of Jashore town last night for allegedly refusing to pay extortion money.

The victim is Mir Sadiq, 35, of the Rail Gate Pangu Hospital area.

Extortionists had been demanding money from him for long which was refusing to pay, his family said.

Talking to media, police and witnesses said Sadiq was returning home on a motorcycle when he was attacked near the Pangu Hospital.

A local criminal named Sumon, also known as Tattoo Sumon, shot Sadiq five to six times in the chest and fled, said Jashore Kotwali Police Station acting officer-in-charge Kazi Babul Hasan quoting family and witnesses.

"Sadiq, a contractor of buildings and roads, taken to Jashore General Hospital in a critical condition. As his condition deteriorated, he was referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. However, he died in the ambulance on the way around 12:30am," the OC added.

JU suspends

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at a press briefing yesterday, following a syndicate meeting held on the previous day at the university's new administrative building.

Prof Kamrul, who presided over the meeting, said the university formed a high-level committee to further probe the incidents.

Among the suspended BCL activists, those who have already graduated will have their academic certificates withheld, while those who have completed their exams and viva will have their results withheld.

The VC added, "Nine teachers have been suspended for their alleged role in abetting the attacks. A committee has been formed to gather further evidence against other teachers who may have been involved."

Besides, former JU VC Prof Md Nurul Alam and former registrar Abu Hasan, who have retired, will have their pension benefits suspended due to their alleged complicity, the VC added.

The nine suspended teachers are former Pro-VC (Academic) Prof Mohammed Mostafa Feeroz, ex-proctor Prof Mohammad Alamgir Kabir, Prof Esrafil Ahmed, Associate Prof Mehedi Iqbal, former dean of Faculty of Social Sciences Prof Bashir Ahmed, Associate Prof ASM Firoz ul Hasan, Associate Prof Hosne Ara, Associate Prof Nazmul Hassan Talukder, and Prof Tajuddin Shikdar.

Meanwhile, JU pro-VC (administration) Prof Sohel Ahmed, also a syndicate member, told this correspondent that the six-month suspension of six students for their alleged involvement in the killing of BCL leader Shamim Mollah will end on March 19.

Shamim was beaten to death on the university campus on September 18 and the suspension was imposed the following day.

Besides, the withholding of academic certificates for six months of two students allegedly involved in the murder will expire on March 19.

In another major decision, the university syndicate has decided to rename the dormitories named after the family members of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina. A committee has been formed to oversee the renaming process, said JU Registrar ABM Azizur Rahman.

Meanwhile, July 15 has been officially declared as Black Night at JU to observe the violent attack on students, the registrar added.

Israel shatters truce, kills 413 Gazans

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war for the 2.3 million inhabitants of Gaza, where most buildings have been reduced to rubble.

"This level of casualties is reminiscent of the first one or two months of the war, and comes when theoretically a ceasefire is still in place," Michael Spagat, Professor of Economics at Royal Holloway College, University of London and Chair of Every Casualty Counts, which monitors deaths from armed conflict around the world.

Israel's military also ordered an evacuation of parts of eastern Gaza, hours after launching the strikes. The evacuation orders, which cover the northern town of Beit Hanoun and other communities further south, suggest that Israeli troops may launch renewed ground operations within hours.

Families in Beit Hanoun, in the northern Gaza Strip, and eastern areas of Khan Younis in the south fled their homes, some on foot, others in cars or rickshaws, carrying some of their belongings after the Israeli military issued evacuation orders warning the areas were "dangerous combat zones".

Israel vowed to continue fighting until all the hostages seized by Palestinian militants were returned, while Hamas, which has not responded militarily so far, accused it of attempting to force it to "surrender".

Netanyahu warned Hamas this month of consequences it "cannot imagine" if it did not free the hostages still in Gaza, and Israeli media has reported on a scheme aimed at ramping up pressure on Hamas dubbed the "Hell Plan".

"Without the release of our hostages, Israel has no alternative but to resume military operations," Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said.

The White House said Israel consulted US President Donald Trump's administration before launching the strikes, while Israel said the return to fighting was "fully coordinated" with Washington.

The United Nations and countries around the world condemned the strikes, while the families of Israeli hostages pleaded with Netanyahu to halt the violence.

Netanyahu's office said the operation was ordered after "Hamas's repeated refusal to release hostages, as well as its rejection of all of the proposals it has received from Witkoff and from the mediators".

"Israel will, from now on, act

against Hamas with increasing military strength," the statement said.

US National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes blamed Hamas, saying it "could have released hostages to extend the ceasefire but instead chose refusal and war".

Hamas said Israel had "decided to overturn the ceasefire agreement", calling it "a decision to sacrifice the occupation's prisoners and impose a death sentence on them".

Hamas also accused Israel of attacking "defenceless civilians" and urged mediators to hold the Netanyahu administration "fully responsible" for "violating and overturning" the ceasefire.

Hamas said the head of its government in Gaza, Essam al-Dalis, was among several officials killed.

In the southern Gaza Strip, AFP footage showed people rushing stretchers with wounded people, including young children, to hospital. Bodies covered with white sheets were also taken to the hospital's mortuary.

Mohammed Jarhoun, 36, was sleeping in a tent near his destroyed house in Khan Yunis when he was awakened by huge blasts.

"I thought they were dreams and nightmares, but I saw a fire in my relatives' house. More than 20 martyrs and wounded, most of them children and women."

Ramez al-Amarin, 25, described carrying children to a hospital southeast of Gaza City.

"They unleashed the fire of hell again on Gaza," he said of Israel.

The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said the bodies of 413 people had been received by Gaza hospitals, adding "a number of victims are still under the rubble".

A spokesman for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said at a briefing in Geneva "that many medical facilities are literally overwhelmed across Gaza".

UN chief Antonio Guterres was "shocked" by the renewed strikes, a spokesperson said, while UN rights chief Volker Turk said he was "horrified".

Meanwhile, Tom Fletcher, head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, yesterday said the Israeli strikes have plunged residents of Gaza into "abject fear" once again.

"Overnight our worst fears materialized. Airstrikes resumed across the entire Gaza Strip," he told the UN Security Council in a video

meeting.

The council meeting was called -- prior to the air strikes -- by several member states to discuss the humanitarian situation as Israel has blocked aid into Gaza Strip since March 2.

Britain and France both called for the renewed hostilities to end.

Hamas backer Iran denounced the wave of attacks as a "continuation of the genocide and ethnic cleansing" in the Palestinian territories.

Russia and China warned against an escalation, while Egypt, Qatar, Jordan and Turkey condemned the violence.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said in a statement that the strikes were part of "deliberate efforts to make the Gaza Strip uninhabitable and force the Palestinians into displacement".

Trump has floated a proposal to move Palestinians out of Gaza, suggesting that Egypt or Jordan could take them in.

Both countries have rejected the notion, but some right-wing politicians in Israel have embraced it. Netanyahu's Likud movement yesterday said that the far-right Otzma Yehudit party would rejoin the government, having withdrawn in January in protest of the truce.

Brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the United States, the ceasefire took effect on January 19, largely halting the war triggered by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

That first phase of the deal ended in early March, and the two sides have been unable to agree on the next steps.

During the first phase, Hamas released 33 hostages, including eight deceased, in exchange for Israel freeing around 1,800 Palestinian detainees.

Hamas has consistently demanded negotiations for the second phase, which should lead to a lasting ceasefire. Israel had sought to extend the first phase until mid-April, cutting off aid and electricity to Gaza over the deadlock.

Critics of Netanyahu said the Israeli PM, in the first place, had any intention of moving to the second phase of the ceasefire, which would have meant Israeli forces withdrawing from Gaza, in effect leaving Hamas as its de facto ruler.

Since October 7, 2023, the Israeli offensive in Gaza has killed at least 48,577 people, also mostly civilians, according to figures from the two sides.

system also fell apart.

Digital displays showing directions were largely ignored by motorists.

In 2023, a Tk 62 crore AI-assisted system also failed to deliver.

It was first installed at Gulshan-2 at a cost of Tk 60.47 lakh. But it did not make much impact.

At other intersections, police had to manually control traffic during peak hours. The DSCC later conducted a feasibility study at 54 intersections, and scrapped the initiative in July last year.

Prof Shamsul says without trained personnel and a fundamental shift in discipline, future projects are likely to meet the same fate as previous ones.

The cantonment area can be a model because traffic lights have functioned effectively for over two decades, he says.

"The number of vehicles must be proportionate to road space. The government should discourage car ownership and invest in better public transport."

BRTA's poor regulatory oversight needs to change too, he says.

Strong evidence found

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However, the trial is expected to begin after a few other cases.

The probe report will be submitted on time, but the trial may commence in the second or third stage, said the tribunal's Chief Prosecutor Md Tajul Islam.

This was because his team wanted to test the waters with the other smaller cases.

It would help the prosecution identify the weaknesses they might have in putting together the case against the former prime minister.

"The case filed over the killing and burning of six bodies in Ashulia or the case filed over the killings and crimes against humanity in Chankharpool are likely to kick off the trials as these are straightforward."

Although the prosecution toiled day and night, they still need more time to investigate the atrocities of Jatrabari, Uttara, and Badda as these places had a high number of casualties, Tajul said.

However, the final report will be ready any time now. "We have already received a draft report on the Ashulia incident. All cases are in their final stages."

The tribunal's investigation agency, however, is yet to submit a probe report in any of the 23 cases, three of which charge Hasina with crimes against humanity for her command responsibility, said an investigator preferring anonymity.

As many as 143 others, including former ministers, Awami League leaders, and law enforcers, are also accused in the cases.

Hasina would be charged with all elements of crimes against humanity for ordering systematic and widespread killings, said an investigator preferring anonymity.

The investigation agency has already gathered concrete evidence to charge the former premier, currently sheltered in India, with command responsibility.

Her crimes include murders, burning bodies, enforced

disappearances, confining people to secret detention centres and political persecution.

Asked about the authenticity of a leaked audio clip featuring a voice like Hasina's that was ordering the use of lethal weapons against the July uprising protesters and the arrest of student coordinators, Tajul said, "We have already received a forensic report certifying that the voice is indeed of Sheikh Hasina."

About the British international human rights lawyer Toby Cadman's suggestion to refer the cases of the July-August massacres to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, Tajul said, "Toby may have proposed this to strengthen global opinion against Hasina. That decision is yet to be finalised."

The trial process would continue notwithstanding developments on that front.

The investigators and prosecutors said the probe report will provide details of murders like that of Abu Sayed in Rangpur, Ashabul Yamin in Savar, Hridoy in Konabari, Imam Hasan Taim in Jatrabari or Anas in Chankharpool.

Those murders were particularly horrifying and some of them were widely seen as social media video clips went viral.

The probe will also include the case of law enforcers shooting an unarmed man hanging from the cornice of a building in Rampura, and the burning of six bodies in Savar.

The report will hold Hasina responsible for all incidents that took place across Bangladesh.

She used police, other law enforcement agencies and armed party members to kill protesters. She even ordered helicopters to fire upon people, the investigators said.

That was the reason so many people had died, the investigators also said, adding that the prosecution would also mention the UN fact-finding report, which put the death toll at 1,400.

ARSA chief, 10 others held

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ARSA came to light after the attacks on around 30 police and army posts in the early hours of August 25, 2017, triggering a ruthless military counter-attack that has driven around 740,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh.

After the prosecuted Rohingyas took shelter in the squalid camps of Ukhiya and Teknaf, ARSA members have been continuing their targeted killing missions in the camp directed by its commander.

Hundreds of Rohingyas were killed by ARSA members over the years after the exodus in 2017.

ARSA was found to be involved in criminal activities including murder, smuggling, abduction, trafficking and extortion in the camps.

Many activities of the militant group were against the Rohingyas' repatriation process to Myanmar.

ARSA's activities came to discussion broadly after Rohingya rights activist and leader Mohib Ullah was killed at the Kutupalong camp.

Mohib Ullah, the chairman of the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights, who advocated for repatriation, was shot dead on September 29, 2022.

Soon after the murder, Mohib's brother Habib Ullah claimed that ARSA, locally known as Al Yakin, was behind the assassination.

Although ARSA leader Ataullah denied the armed group's involvement in the killing, a former high-ranking ARSA commander, however, informed that ARSA leaders

had discussed the assassination of Mohib Ullah, according to a report of the rights group Fortify Rights, launched yesterday.

"Bangladesh should cooperate with the International Crimes Tribunal and hand Ataullah over to the court to be investigated and held accountable for international crimes," John Quinley, Director of Fortify Rights, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Ataullah is a scourge on the Rohingya community.

"He is responsible for overseeing widespread violations against civilians. Bangladesh did the right thing in arresting Ataullah. This is an important day for Rohingya refugees in Myanmar Bangladesh," he added.

Besides on November 23, 2022, the ARSA's commander-in-chief Ataullah was named as the prime accused along with 65 others in the case filed over the murder of a DGFI officer near the Tumburu border in Bandarban's Naikkhangchhari on November 14 of the year.

Bangladesh Air Force Squadron Leader Rizwan Rushdee, who was serving in DGFI, was killed and Rab official Sohel Barua was injured as drug smugglers opened fire during a clash near the Tumburu border.

Later, Mohammad Anwar Hossain, a DGFI field officer in Cox's Bazar, filed the case with Naikkhangchhari Police Station.

[Our Narayanganj and Cox's Bazar Correspondent also contributed to this report]

Dhaka to get semi-auto signals to tackle jam

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The move follows a two-decade-long struggle to implement an efficient system of traffic management. Over the years, the authorities spent over Tk 119 crore on modernising the equipment, but Dhaka traffic is mostly managed manually.

Under the new initiative, DNCC will oversee 14 intersections and Dhaka South City Corporation eight.

In the beginning, DSCC will install lights at the intersections near InterContinental hotel and Banglamotor, and DNCC at Saarc Foara roundabout and Farmgate.

Whether more places will see the change will depend on the outcome of the lights at the four intersections, officials say.

There will be a switch at the traffic police booths, allowing officers to toggle between automatic and manual modes. Cameras and loudspeakers will be installed for better enforcement, they add.

ENDLESS TAILBACKS

On a recent afternoon at the Sergeant Ahad Police Box in Gulistan, one of

the Dhaka's busiest intersections, an officer was struggling to manage the countless cars, buses, and rickshaws.

He was using a piece of rope when he needed to stop the flow.

Across the city, pedestrians dart across streets amid moving traffic, motorcyclists risk their lives jostling for space, and motorists park near schools and hospitals.

Jaywalking, the lack of crosswalks, inadequate number of footbridges, illegal parking, and rickshaws weaving through traffic are obstacles to the flow, officers say.

A sergeant, requesting anonymity, says there are simply too many vehicles to keep the vehicles moving.

"VIPs, politicians, and even law enforcement personnel often disregard the rules, making the general public unwilling to abide by the laws," says an officer.

Transport expert Prof Shamsul Hoque says nothing would succeed without proper enforcement.

"You can launch as many projects as you want. But without proper enforcement, both automatic and

semi-automatic systems will fail," he says.

For traffic lights to work, there must be enough pedestrian infrastructure like footpaths, and BRTA, the road transport authority, must regulate the number of vehicles, he adds.

The junctions at Gulshan-2, Hatirjheel, and Dhaka Cantonment seem orderly because of strict enforcement, he says.

"In Gulshan, there are no rickshaws, easy bikes, or erratic buses."

EARLIER ATTEMPTS

In the last 20 years, the authorities installed automatic lights, countdown timers, digital displays, and even AI-aided systems at major intersections spending over Tk 119 crore. But nothing reduced the length of tailbacks.

Automatic traffic lights installed between 2001 and 2005 went out of order allegedly because of poor maintenance.

In 2012 and 2013, DSCC revived the system, but it barely lasted a month.

At one point, police used remote controls to operate the lights. But that