

RAMISA MURDER

Verdict today, just 19 days after incident

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

ADhaka court is set to deliver its verdict today in the rape and murder case of eight-year-old schoolgirl Ramisa Akter, just 19 days after the crime that sparked nationwide outrage and prompted the government to pledge swift justice.

Judge Masrur Salekin of the Children Violence Suppression Tribunal in Dhaka Metropolitan, is scheduled to announce the verdict around 11:00am, Special Public Prosecutor Azizur Rahman Dulu said.

The tribunal concluded the trial in five hearings, with charges framed on June 1 and witness testimony completed the following day.

In the closing arguments on June 4, the prosecution sought death penalty for prime accused Soheli Rana, 31, and his wife, co-accused Swapna Khatun, 26, arguing that the charges had been proved beyond reasonable doubt through witness testimonies and cross-examinations.

The defence, however, sought a lighter sentence, claiming the charge sheet was based on the prime accused's

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A farmer uses a pair of buffaloes to plough a field in Tilak village of Khulna's Rupsha upazila yesterday. While modern farming machinery is now widely available, many farmers in rural areas continue to use buffaloes to prepare land for cultivation as the traditional method remains more affordable.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh heats up faster than before

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The BMD defines a heatwave based on actual air temperature, counting it when the daily maximum reaches at least 36°C for two or more consecutive days. On the other hand, the Heat Index or apparent temperature used by the Climate Change Knowledge Portal combines air temperature and humidity to estimate how hot it actually feels.

RISING FASTER, AND SPREADING Bangladesh is already one of the most heat-exposed countries in the world.

In 2024, it ranked fourth globally in the number of days with a Heat Index above 35°C, behind only Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Unlike these desert countries, however, Bangladesh's heat is intensified by high humidity, making it more dangerous for human health.

Due to its high humidity, Bangladesh has historically ranked among the world's top 10 countries for the number of days each year with a "feels-like" temperature above 35°C.

During the monsoon season (June-September), relative humidity across Bangladesh regularly reaches 80-85%, peaking at 90%, compared to much lower levels in the dry winter and pre-monsoon months.

"Deforestation also contributes to extreme heat by reducing evapotranspiration – the natural process through which trees and vegetation release moisture into the atmosphere, helping cool the surrounding environment. As green cover declines, this cooling effect weakens, increasing the risk of higher temperatures."
Golam Rabbani, researcher, BRAC University.

In this moisture-heavy air, sweat does not evaporate easily, making it harder for the body to cool off. As a result, the "feels-like" temperature can be much higher and more dangerous than the actual temperature.

Although the country has long been a global hotspot for humid heat, such conditions were manageable in the past. However, the situation has worsened over the past 15 years, with extreme heat days becoming increasingly frequent and hazardous.

During the 2010s, Bangladesh on average experienced 91 such days a year when the apparent temperature exceeded 35°C. Between 2015 and 2024, the country recorded more than 100 such days each year on average, according to the WB-compiled data.

A long-term review of climate data also shows an alarming upward trend.

In the 1950s, Bangladesh experienced fewer than 30 days per year on average when the heat index crossed 35°C. That number has steadily increased each decade, nearly quadrupling over time.

It accelerated sharply in the 2010s, which saw nearly 300 additional days above this threshold compared to the previous decade. This spike continued in the 2020s.

Regional patterns also show how widespread the change has become. Khulna has consistently been the hottest division, with heat days rising from around 51 days per year in the 1950s to about 132 days in the 2020s.

Chattogram, historically the least affected, still records fewer heat days than other divisions, but it now experiences more extreme heat than the hottest regions did in earlier decades.

Md Rabiul Awal, chairman of the Department of Meteorology at Dhaka University, attributed this rise in extreme heat to global warming.

"According to most climate projection models, this trend is expected to continue in the coming

4,000 per month.

In a country where millions rely on daily earnings to survive, such losses can have serious consequences for household income and food security.

The Daily Star spoke to four rickshaw pullers aged 50-65 in

significantly raise the "apparent" temperature, making heat more dangerous.

By the end of the century, humidity is expected to become the region's dominant climate stressor, increasing discomfort and risk in these already waterlogged, riverine landscapes.

WHAT'S CAUSING IT

According to Lancet Countdown, climate change was responsible for 51 out of 86 heatwaves recorded in Bangladesh between 2020 and 2024. While climate change is identified as the primary driver of extreme heat in Bangladesh, experts and a growing body of research point out that local factors also play a role.

For example, rapid urbanisation is increasing heat exposure, especially in cities like Dhaka. Concrete buildings, roads, and infrastructure trap heat, create what is known as the Urban Heat Island effect. This causes cities to become significantly hotter than surrounding rural areas.

Bangladesh is also losing tree cover at a faster rate than before.

Between 2001 and 2024, the country lost an average of 10,906 hectares of forest each year, according to satellite data from Global Forest Watch, which tracks canopy cover at a 30% density threshold. The annual loss has increased over time – from about 4,394 hectares in the 2000s to over 17,000 hectares in the 2020s.

While deforestation does not immediately raise temperatures in a single year, long-term loss of tree cover reduces a country's natural cooling capacity, which makes heat more intense over time.

Golam Rabbani, director of the Centre for Climate Change and Environmental Research at BRAC University, said that temperature levels tend to rise with increasing human and industrial activity.

"Urbanisation undoubtedly influences local temperatures. Expanding industrial operations, growing vehicle use, dense construction, and rising population concentrations all contribute additional heat to the urban environment," he told this newspaper yesterday.

As the intensity of these activities varies across different parts of the city, temperature readings can also differ between areas such as Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Farmgate, and Jatra Bari, he said.

"Deforestation also contributes to extreme heat by reducing evapotranspiration – the natural

Ad-din probe only blames nurse, janitor

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with an earlier claim by a senior hospital official, who told this correspondent that such a protocol existed.

The six newborns, aged between one and four days, died between 5:00am and 9:00am on May 27, triggering widespread public outrage and prompting health authorities to shut down the post-operative room and form two investigation committees.

The DGHS probe committee found clear negligence by hospital authorities, nurses, and staff, as well as the absence of an on-duty physician, to be responsible for the deaths of the six newborns, Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Husain told reporters on Thursday, citing the probe report.

The committee found that severe overcrowding in a small post-operative room, coupled with an air conditioner remaining switched off for a prolonged period and the absence of any alternative ventilation system, created conditions unsuitable for the survival of newborns.

Additionally, the building's infrastructure was unsuitable for operating as a 700-bed healthcare facility, and the post-operative ward in question was wholly inadequate for providing post-operative care, it said.

It also found that those responsible for hospital administration had failed to comply with the basic requirements for operating the facility.

The DGHS, on the same day, issued a show-cause notice to the hospital, seeking an explanation within 5:00pm today as to why its licence should not be cancelled over the deaths.

The Ad-din committee, led by Prof Afiquor Rahman, an adviser to the Ad-din Foundation that runs the hospital, said its air-conditioner technician inspected the system and found no evidence of leakage.

According to the report, during routine rounds of Post-Operative Ward 2 at around 10:00pm on May 26, the on-duty doctor examined the mothers and newborns and observed no abnormalities.

The report said the on-duty nurse switched off the air-conditioner around 2:00am after the mother of one newborn requested it. It was turned back on around 3:00am, meaning it remained off for about one hour.

At around 4:00am, one newborn began crying and was immediately taken to the Neonatal Emergency unit. After checking the baby's vital signs, the duty doctor found the newborn stable and sent the baby back to the post-operative ward, according to the report.

During a follow-up at around 6:00am, the on-duty nurse found one newborn in critical condition and arranged to transfer the babies to the Neonatal Emergency unit one by one with assistance from their guardians.

The first newborn taken to the emergency unit was declared dead after resuscitation efforts failed. Four others were later shifted to the NICU and placed on life support but could not be saved, the report said.

The report added that the guardians of the sixth baby were advised to take the baby to the emergency unit but they did so only around 8:30am.

"Had the nurse followed up on the newborns between 4:00am and 6:00am, it would have been possible to transfer them to the NICU in time

Ukraine fires wave of drones as Russia hosts key forum

AFP, Saint Petersburg

Ukraine fired hundreds of drones at Russia early yesterday, leaving one person dead and setting an oil depot ablaze on the final day of the country's flagship economic forum in Saint Petersburg, officials said.

Many of the drones targeted Saint Petersburg itself, the second Ukrainian attack on the city in less than a week, although authorities reported no major damage.

Moscow and Kyiv have intensified drone strikes on each other in recent months as US-led diplomatic efforts to end the war, now in its fifth year, remain stalled over the conflict in the Middle East.

The strikes come a day after Russian President Vladimir Putin rejected Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky's proposal for a meeting, drawing criticism from Zelensky, who accused him of "choosing war again".

Russian air defences intercepted a total of 376 drones "over Belgorod, Bryansk, Kaluga, Kursk, Leningrad, Novgorod, Oryol, Pskov, Rostov, Ryazan, Smolensk, Tver, and Tula regions, Moscow region, Crimea Republic, Abkhazia Republic, and over the waters of the Azov and Black Seas," the Russian defence ministry said.

Over 140 drones were shot down over the Leningrad region, which surrounds Saint Petersburg, governor Aleksandr Drozdenko said.

and provide treatment," the report said.

The report also said a janitor had been "not responsible enough" in transferring the babies from the post-operative ward to the emergency unit.

The committee recommended suspending both the duty nurse and the janitor.

COMPENSATION

Meanwhile, the families, many of whom had previously accused the hospital of mismanagement leading to the deaths in media statements, held a joint press conference at a city hotel with senior hospital officials.

The deaths of six newborns were the result of "unexpected negligence", said Shishir Manir, a lawyer for the victims' families, who initiated mediation between the victims' families and the hospital.

He said the hospital authorities have also decided to provide lifelong free treatment and adequate compensation to the victims' families, among other measures.

The victims' families wanted those responsible for the deaths to be punished, but also wanted the hospital's services to remain operational, said Shishir, well-known Supreme Court lawyer and a Jamaat-e-Islami leader.

He said the hospital authorities have already suspended two staffers in connection with the incident and will take steps, following the recommendation of the internal probe committee, to prevent such an incident.

Habibur Rahman, one of the victims' fathers who filed a police case over the incident, said they want those responsible for the deaths to be punished but do not want the hospital's services to be stopped.

When journalists asked whether they had been "managed by the hospital authorities with money or force", he rejected the allegation.

"Except for the benefits announced for us, we did not get any money. We don't want people to suffer because of the closure of the hospital," he said.

Regarding the show-cause notice issued by DGHS, Shishir said the notice is "unlawful", and that they would respond legally. He said they would seek personal hearing with the DGHS over the notice.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Sakhawat yesterday stressed that the government's show-cause notice to Ad-din Medical College Hospital adhered to the relevant laws and regulations.

"We are thoroughly examining the legal provisions, the regulations governing hospital establishment and all relevant laws. Based on our observations, we are moving forward firmly and in compliance with the law," Sakhawat said at a press briefing at his official residence.

"If we receive the response tomorrow [Sunday] afternoon, we will proceed accordingly. If they fail to reply, we will see what the law provides and act accordingly," he added.

Responding to a question about some victim family members attending a press conference alongside the hospital representatives, where they demanded that the hospital not be shut down, he said this would not weaken the case against the hospital.

"An offence has occurred, and six babies have died. A case has been filed, and we are the authority responsible for issuing hospital licences. The hospital has committed wrongdoing," he added.