Tongi madrasa teacher denied bail over rape of student

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Gazipur*

A Gazipur court yesterday denied bail to a madrasa teacher accused of sexually abusing a seven-year-old student.

The Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court in Gazipur passed the order after hearing a bail petition filed on behalf of the accused, Moslem Uddin, vice-principal of Qariul Quran International Madrasa in the Madhya Auchpara area of Tongi.

Court Inspector Ahsan Ullah Chowdhury confirmed the matter to The Daily Star.

Investigation Officer Ziaur Rahman said the case was filed with Tongi West Police Station on Thursday under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000, incorporating provisions introduced through the 2025 amendment.



Customers crowd around an OMS truck in the capital's Nilkhet area to buy rice and flour at subsidised prices yesterday. Rice is sold at Tk 30 per kilogram and a 2kg packet of flour at Tk 55. Each customer can purchase up to 5kg of rice and 4kg of flour per day. PHOTO: **PRABIR DAS**

Sayeedi case complainant buried under tight police security

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Pirojpur*

Manik Posari, 87, a gazetted freedom fighter and complainant in the war crimes case against former Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delwar Hossain Sayeedi, was laid to rest in Pirojpur Sadar upazila early yesterday amid heightened tensions.

Manik was buried around 2:00am at his family graveyard in Chitalia village under Shankarpasha union under heavy police security after local Jamaat leaders and activists opposed the state honour and sought to disrupt the burial process.

According to family members, Manik had been staying at his son-in-law's home in Tungipara, Gopalganj, after his home in Chitalia village was set on fire following the fall of the Awami League government on August 5, 2024.

He died there around 10:00am on Saturday after suffering from illness for the past two months.

His body was brought to the Pirojpur Sadar Upazila Parishad premises around noon. Following his arrival, local Jamaat-e-Islami leaders and activists gathered there in protest against the decision to accord him a guard of honour.

Police later escorted the body to Pirojpur Police Lines, where Manik received a guard of honour around 5:00pm under tight security.

Meanwhile, a group of people filled in a grave that had been prepared for his burial in Chitalia village on Saturday evening.

Pirojpur municipality Jamaat Ameer Abdur Razzak Sheikh claimed that Manik was a "fake" freedom fighter and said they had opposed both the guard of honour and his burial in the area.

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Saudi downs missiles, drones over Riyadh

King Khalid Int'l Airport partially resumes operations despite fresh Houthi threats

REUTERS

Saudi Arabia intercepted drones and missiles over its capital Riyadh and southern areas yesterday, the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen said, as fighting with the Iran-aligned Houthis persisted.

The conflict has become an increasingly destabilising front in the US-Israeli offensive against Iran, turning US ally Saudi Arabia into a pressure point in the wider war.

Yesterday, Saudi civil defence authorities issued emergency alerts for Riyadh, Abha and Khamis Mushait, before announcing minutes later that the danger had passed.

The coalition said two drones and a ballistic missile were launched towards Riyadh, and a cruise missile towards the southern city of Khamis Mushait. It later said it intercepted ten ballistic missiles fired towards southern Saudi Arabia.

The Houthis warned they could again target Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport, which partially resumed operations yesterday following a deadly attack earlier this month. The flight tracking data from Flightradar24 showed little traffic at the airport.

The Houthis said they attacked the airport and Saudi oil facilities on Saturday. Saudi authorities did not comment directly on the Houthi statements.

Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Saree said the airport remained a "military target" and warned all airlines, airport staffers and travellers against using it.

Late on Saturday, the airport said Terminal 1 would be designated for domestic flights and Terminal 2 for international flights operated by national carriers.

The airport halted operations on October 10 following an attack - claimed by the Houthis - that killed 13 people and wounded more than 300 others, the deadliest in the kingdom in more than a decade.

27 carriers leave CAAB chasing

FROM PAGE 1

CAAB's member for Air Traffic Management, said an airline is charged between $300 and $450 for each overflight, depending on the plane's size and weight.

"The fee is a one-time charge for an aircraft's passage from entry to exit, rather than a per-minute charge," he said.

An overflight fee or en-route air navigation charge is a toll levied by a country on an airline for flying through its sovereign airspace without landing in or departing from that country.

An airline is expected to pay the fees within 14 days of CAAB issuing the bill.

Asked what steps CAAB has taken to recover the dues, Mohammad Nazmul Hoque, a member (finance) of CAAB, said the aviation regulator repeatedly approached the embassies of all countries where the debtor airlines are based, asking them to take measures regarding the outstanding bills.

"We wrote to the embassies of the countries concerned regarding the dues. Most recently, we sent such letters in June."

In reply to a query, he said the recovery of dues becomes very difficult if an airline goes bankrupt.

Nazmul pointed out that in some cases, pursuing legal action may cost more than the amount owed.

He also said CAAB sometimes takes steps to withhold approval for remittance to debtor airlines if they fail to clear dues.

Citing an example involving Jet Airways, he said CAAB had alerted Bangladesh Bank when it learnt that the airline had pending remittances, leading to the suspension of a fund transfer.

This correspondent sent emails to three debtor airlines -- SpiceJet, Turkmenistan Airlines and Alliance Air -- that are operating flights regularly.

Only SpiceJet sent a reply. It neither confirmed nor disputed CAAB's figures.

"Reconciliation and discussions are underway, and such issues have been resolved with CAAB in the past," said a spokesperson for the airline.

The unpaid dues persist while CAAB is recording higher earnings from aircraft crossing Bangladesh's airspace.

According to CAAB data, overflight revenue rose to Tk 558.61 crore in January-August this year from Tk 502.32 crore in the same period last year. It was Tk 443.12 crore in January-August 2024.

Overflight movements have also gone up. At least 121,516 flights crossed Bangladesh's airspace in the first eight months of this year, compared with 116,054 during the same period last year.'

Several CAAB officials said the installation of a new radar in January helped expand the regulator's capacity to generate revenue. They, however, noted that the rise in earnings should not be attributed directly to the radar.

HOW OTHER COUNTRIES DEAL WITH ARREAS

India has brought the collection of overflight charges directly under the Airports Authority of India (AAI), replacing the previous arrangement involving the International Air Transport Association.

Since April 1, 2022, route navigation facility charges for aircraft overflying the Flight Information Regions (FIRs) of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai have been collected directly by AAI, according to India's Aeronautical Information Publication.

FIR is a specific block of airspace defined by an aviation authority within which two primary services are provided: Flight Information Service and Alerting Service.

If dues owed by a foreign airline or an operator overflying Indian airspace exceed 75 percent of its bank guarantee, AAI can encash the guarantee and place the operator on a cash-and-carry basis. The policy also provides that the airline's operations may be stopped, said the Airports Authority of India's Credit Policy (Traffic).

Another South Asian country, Sri Lanka, requires aircraft overflying the Colombo FIR to pay en-route navigation charges within 30 days of receiving an invoice, according to the country's En-route Navigation Facility Charges Regulations, 2023.

If an airline fails to pay on time, the unpaid charges could be treated as a debt carrying interest of 2 percent per month. Any outstanding dues from earlier years will also remain payable to the state.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Aviation expert ATM Nazrul Islam, a former wing commander, said CAAB could pursue the recovery of unpaid dues through legal action in the country where the debtor airline is based.

"Cases can be filed with courts in that country as there is no separate international financial court for this," he told this correspondent.

Former CAAB chairman M Mafidur Rahman said arrears piled up largely because Bangladesh has yet to introduce an automated billing and payment system.

"In many countries, the process is automated. There is a gateway, and the money comes in automatically... However, billing here is still done manually."

He said airlines that operate flights regularly could be compelled to settle dues by imposing restrictions on their operations. CAAB had recovered dues from a number of such carriers in the past but faced difficulties in cases of airlines that operated irregularly or on a non-scheduled basis.

Acknowledging shortcomings in CAAB's follow-up efforts to recover dues, Mafidur said, "There was a lack of persuasion in some cases. Our people were sometimes less forceful in pursuing these matters. That's one of the reasons why the dues remain pending."

He further said CAAB had previously taken initiatives to automate the system but those did not materialise as the government agencies concerned could not reach a consensus on the revenue collection mechanism.

Mafidur suggested introducing automated billing and payment systems as early as possible, while also engaging counterpart civil aviation authorities and diplomatic channels to collect dues.

NEW RADAR, NEW SCOPE

Noor-e-Alam said a new radar system, which became operational in January, has transformed the tracking system.

With surveillance now extending over a wider area, aircraft movements can be monitored more effectively, reducing the likelihood of unrecorded aircraft movements and missed revenue, he noted.

He further said the integrated radar system linked Dhaka with Chattogram, enhancing communication capability up to about 600 kilometres southwards from the port city.

Schools up, pupils down

FROM PAGE 1

including the impact of Covid-19, subsequent financial difficulties faced by families, rising child labour, and shifts towards other educational institutions."

Educationists point to several other possible reasons, including early marriage and concerns about girls' safety.

Some families may also be choosing madrasas or English-medium schools over general secondary schools, they said.

Prof Siddiqur Rahman, former director of Dhaka University's Institute of Education and Research, said, "The dropping number of schoolchildren is a sign of a lack of planning. We don't know how many schools we actually need, how many students there will be, what types of schools and colleges we need, or what kind of higher education is required."

Non-government institutions account for around 97 percent of Bangladesh's secondary schools.

Government schools, however, remain highly popular, particularly at district and upazila levels. Yet, these institutions are losing students, challenging the notion that free education alone is enough to keep children in school.

The decline is in both boys and girls, but the fall has been considerably steeper among boys.

The number of boys enrolled in government secondary schools dropped from 3.21 lakh in 2018 to 2.33 lakh in 2025, a reduction of 87,824, or 27.4 percent.

Over the same period, the number of girls fell from 2.64 lakh to 2.25 lakh, a decline of 39,018, or 14.8 percent.

Educationists say that although government schools charge nominal fees, families still have to pay for coaching, guidebooks, transportation, school supplies, and other educational expenses.

Talking to this newspaper, Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), said public and social investments in education were not producing the expected results.

"This means that simply making education free does not necessarily ensure that everyone will attend school. Many have come to believe that government schools don't provide quality education."

MADRASA EDUCATION

While enrolment in general secondary schools has fallen, the number of students in classes VI-X at registered Alia madrasas has increased.

However, Banbeis has no official mechanism to track whether students leaving general schools move to Alia madrasas, Qawmi madrasas, English-medium schools or technical institutions, or enter the workforce.

Its data shows that the number of students in classes VI-X at Alia madrasas rose from 3.62 lakh in 2018 to 3.98 lakh in 2025, a rise of 36,660, or 10.1 percent.

Enrolment in classes VI-X at English-medium schools increased modestly, from 22,554 students in 2018 to 24,530 in 2025, a rise of 8.8 percent, according to Banbeis.

However, education officials say these figures do not present the complete picture, as many English-medium schools remain outside the reporting system.

Banbeis also does not maintain official statistics on Qawmi madrasas because the education stream operates outside government regulation, said an official of the organisation.

Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon told parliament on July 14 that there are around 25,000 Qawmi madrasas in the country, with approximately 70 lakh students.

Prof Emeritus Manzoor Ahmed of enrolment is not itself a concern. The priority, he said, is to understand why general secondary schools are losing students.

"We will examine why this is happening and explore ways to improve enrolment and retain students."

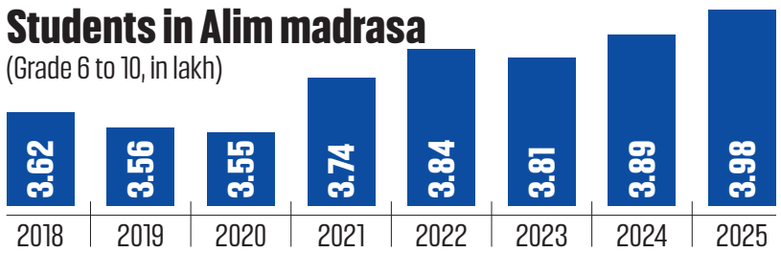
He said the government would also work to promote vocational and employment-oriented education, which could help raise enrolment at the secondary level.

REASONS

Not every child leaving a general secondary school necessarily moves to another institution. For some, the decline in enrolment may mean dropping out.

Educationists say financial hardship, rising living costs, and the need to earn an income can force children out of classrooms and into work.

Prof Siddiqur said, "When parents fall below the poverty line, child labour tends to increase. Nowadays, a family often cannot survive on one person's income."



BRAC University told The Daily Star, "... Students rely on costly private coaching and commercial guidebooks. Those who cannot afford these costs send their children to less expensive madrasas."

Prof Siddiqur also identified the growth of madrasas and the increasing attraction of English-medium education as possible reasons for the decline in general school enrolment.

He said some middle-class parents considered non-government schools better than government institutions, while English-medium schools were often perceived as better.

"Since people have a tendency to send children to madrasas at the lower levels, including primary or Ibtedayi education, and they have a soft corner for religion, the number of madrasa students is gradually increasing.

"Some students may be moving to Qawmi madrasas. Many people believe that Qawmi madrasas place greater emphasis on religious education than Alia madrasas."

Child education activist Rasheda K Choudhury said the enrolment in Alia madrasas, the mainstream madrasa stream, remains stable. "Although madrasas face various kinds of criticism, people still have confidence in Alia madrasas."

For DSHE DG Al Mahmud Sohel, however, the increase in madrasa

Available data suggests that child labour has gone up substantially.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and Unicef's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) show that the proportion of children aged five to 17 engaged in labour rose from 6.8 percent in 2019 to 9.2 percent in 2025, an increase of 2.4 percentage points.

Educationists say girls may face additional barriers to continuing their studies, including early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and concerns about travelling long distances to school.

Rasheda K Choudhury cited child labour and early marriage as longstanding challenges at the secondary level.

Prof Manzoor said for some families, moving children to less expensive institutions may be an option. For others, the cost of education may simply become unaffordable.

The financial burden on households is substantial. Families bear 71 percent of total education expenditure in Bangladesh, according to Unesco's Global Education Monitoring Report 2022.

CAMPE's Education Watch studies found that out-of-pocket education expenses increased by 25 percent at the primary level and 51 percent at the secondary level in 2023 compared with 2022.

Here motherhood costs cricket career

FROM PAGE 1

officials and selectors view women players. Some cricketers delay marriage to prolong their careers, while others conceal their marital status.

"In the BCB's system, there is a stigma against married players. Officials and selectors assume that once a female player marries or has a child, she won't play long, viewing further investment in her as a waste of time," Sanjida said.

She believes proper maternity support would allow women to continue playing much longer after marriage and childbirth. Sanjida recently interviewed for a women's divisional coaching position but was not selected, for reasons that remain unclear.

Suraiya's experience reflects the same assumptions about marriage and motherhood. "Once a player gets married or reaches a certain age, people assume she won't play anymore. And if she has a baby, then playing again is completely out of the question."

The board's silence also affected her willingness to continue. "If I saw they had responded positively, if my willingness for return was 60 percent it would have increased to 100 percent," she said. Although encouraged by her husband to seek leave, she felt the board had failed to value her. She last played for Gulshan Youth Club in the 2025 Dhaka Premier Division Women's Cricket League.

Former national cricketer and international umpire Sathira Jakir Jessy also struggled to balance motherhood and cricket. "Even when I got married, I was the vice-captain of the national team, and I had a feeling that I might not be able to continue for long. I continued playing after becoming a mother, but it wasn't easy at all.

"Many are still afraid of having a baby because they feel it could bring their careers to an end."

She added, "Even at the stage I am at now, I think twice about having another baby because I wonder whether BCB would support me during that time, allowing me to return to the level of umpiring I have reached."

LESSONS FROM ABROAD

On June 22, International Cricket Council (ICC) introduced Return to Play Post-Pregnancy Guidelines for female cricketers. Its six stages -- Ready, Review, Restore, Recondition, Return and Refine -- cover recovery, medical assessments, gradual training and monitoring. The guidelines help member boards develop policies but do not guarantee paid leave.

Cricket Australia and New Zealand Cricket provide paid maternity leave to contracted players, while Pakistan introduced a Parental Support Policy in 2021. A year later, Bismah Maroof captained Pakistan at the World Cup, six months after giving birth, with her child and a support person.

Former Bangladesh player and current Qatar women's team head coach Fatema Tuz Jahara, who has worked in Australia and China, said the contrast was stark. In Australia, she said, maternity leave is fully paid, with board-supervised medical care and health and fitness assessments before a player returns.

"In our country, when they get contracted as national players, [they] rely on that salary to support not just themselves but their entire family. So when pregnancy comes up, she has to think ten times." she said.

"That's why our female players get married very late... [and] cannot think long-term about family life or pregnancy during their active playing careers, because there is no security provided in our country. When it comes to protecting women, economically or socially, we are far behind compared to other countries."

WHAT BCB SAYS

BCB Women's Wing chairman Rafiqul Islam Babu said the board would follow ICC guidelines. "In the future, anyone who becomes pregnant or takes maternity leave will certainly be granted leave, and we will follow ICC's policy in this regard," he said, adding that he did not know why a guideline had not been introduced by this time.

Asked about Suraiya's unpaid salary, leave and contract, Babu said her dues would be paid soon. "Everything is under process."

BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury acknowledged the absence of a formal maternity policy. "These matters are being addressed on a case-by-case basis.

"The POSH [Prevention of Sexual Harassment] Policy and the Safeguarding Policy have already been introduced," he added. "As for the other issues, we will implement the other policies as soon as possible."