TONGI MADRASA CASE

HC asks Rumi to surrender within four weeks

UNB, *Dhaka*



The High Court yesterday directed Shahjalal Rumi, the father of a seven-year-old girl who was allegedly sexually harassed at a madrasa in Tongi, Gazipur, to surrender before a Gazipur court within four weeks in a case filed over the assault of a teacher and vandalism at the institution.

The HC bench of Justice Md Salim and Justice Md Asif Hasan passed the order after Rumi appeared before it seeking anticipatory bail.

Lawyers Mahbubur Rahman Khan, Bellal Hossain and Ruhul Amin Mollah (Hasan) represented Rumi during the hearing.

On October 24, madrasa principal Mohammad Almas Hossain filed a case against Rumi and 14 others, accusing them of entering Qari-ul-

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Garment workers block the Dhaka-Tangail Highway in Gazipur's Kaliakoir for the fourth day yesterday, demanding a minimum monthly wage of Tk 30,000. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

AL leader dies in jail custody

Son alleges negligence in treatment; authorities refute

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bogura*



Zakir Hossain

Zakir Hossain Nawab, 63, organising secretary of the Bogura district unit of Awami League, whose activities are banned, died yesterday morning in the custody of Naogaon District Jail.

His son alleged negligence in his treatment, which the jail authorities denied.

Ratna Roy, superintendent of the jail, told The Daily Star that Zakir fell ill and was sent to Naogaon General Hospital around 11:00am. He died there around 11:45am.

Asked about the cause of death, she said she did not yet know whether he had any chronic illnesses but had heard he suffered a heart attack in the morning.

"His inquest has been completed, and the post-mortem examination is underway," she said, adding that the body would be handed over to the family afterwards.

According to the jail authorities, Zakir was transferred from Bogura District Jail to Naogaon District Jail a year ago in an explosives case and had remained there since.

Dr Rehnuma Munmun, medical officer at Naogaon General Hospital, told local journalists that Zakir died between 11:00am and 12:00pm. He was brought in in a very critical condition, she said.

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Demographic dividend fading

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marginally above the benchmark.

This raises questions about whether the country will have the resources and institutional capacity to support a growing elderly population.

Unlike richer economies, which could strengthen labour markets before building pension systems, Bangladesh must tackle both challenges at once, while its employment and human capital foundations remain weak.

WEAK FOUNDATION

About 84 percent of workers in Bangladesh are informally employed, while female labour-force participation stands at just 38 percent. Informal workers tend to be less productive and earn 45 to 84 percent less than their counterparts in formal jobs.

The problem extends even to educated workers. More than 60 percent of those with post-secondary education in Bangladesh, India and Nepal are employed informally, the report says.

Meanwhile, learning poverty -- the inability of a child to read and understand a simple text by the age of 10 -- stands at 51 percent in Bangladesh.

These gaps limit the country's ability to turn its working-age population into a more productive workforce just as the demographic advantage begins to fade.

Healthcare and old-age security present another set of challenges.

Life expectancy at birth in Bangladesh exceeds healthy life expectancy by about 10 years, meaning people spend a substantial part of their lives in poor health.

Healthcare access is also sharply unequal. Urban areas have 18 times the doctor density of rural areas, even though rural communities account for 70 percent of the population and receive the services of fewer than 20 percent of health workers.

The country is also poorly prepared to support people financially in old age.

Citing 2018 data, Ohnsorge said only 3 percent of adults in Bangladesh save specifically for old age, compared with the South Asian average of 6 percent.

Only about 1 percent of the working-age population contributes to a formal pension scheme, against a regional average of 17 percent.

Social pensions cover about half of older people, but the benefits are meagre, amounting to less than 5 percent of per capita income.

Healthcare costs could further erode the savings of elderly people. Bangladesh has South Asia's highest out-of-pocket share of health expenditure, at around 79 percent.

The government's ability to respond is constrained by its weak revenue base. Tax collection, relative to GDP, is only about a third of the average for emerging market economies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create jobs
- Raise female participation
- Build skills
- Improve healthcare
- Reform pensions
- Extend working lives
- Expand social protection
- Use technology & AI

"Future prosperity will depend increasingly on employment, productivity, human capital, and institutions rather than demographic structure alone," Ohnsorge said.

WAKE-UP CALL

Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of the Power and Participation Research Centre, described the report as a "big wake-up call".

"The warning was not new but had become more urgent given the short time available," he said at the publication event.

The demographic transition, he said, goes beyond population issues, affecting social, economic, institutional and fiscal policies. It should therefore feature prominently in policy discussions.

Nazneen Ahmed, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said discussions on the demographic dividend over the past decade had largely focused on young people, with little attention to the consequences of an ageing population.

"The report shifts the focus to using today's dividend to prepare for an ageing society," she said.

Zonayed Abdur Rahim Saki, state minister for planning, said Bangladesh needed proper planning and must prepare young people for jobs both at home and abroad.

He identified healthcare as a key priority, saying the government planned to raise health spending to 5 percent of GDP and had allocated more than 1 percent in its first year.

Social Welfare Minister Abu Zafar Md Zahid Hossain said Bangladesh has only 24 years to prepare.

"The government must act early and mobilise resources," he said.

TRANSITION FROM AN AGEING SOCIETY TO AGED ONE

- Bangladesh: **24** years
- Other emerging markets/developing economies: **32** years
- Advanced economies: **46** years
- France: **126** years
- US: **72** years

Pointing to initiatives such as the family card scheme, he said the programme had already started working.

Govt expects up to 4,000MW solar power by summer

Says Tarique, announces initial allocation

UNB, *Dhaka*

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday said the government expects to add 3,000-4,000 megawatts of solar power to the national grid before the next summer, as it pursues a plan to reduce dependence on imported energy and ensure a reliable electricity supply.

He made the remarks while inaugurating the first-ever Bangladesh Solar Expo 2026 in the capital's Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

The government has set a target of generating 20 percent of the country's electricity from renewable sources by 2030 and 30 percent by 2040, the PM said.

He said the government allocated Tk 1,500 crore initially to facilitate financing for solar power expansion, adding that further funds would be arranged in phases to ensure that entrepreneurs and investors in the renewable energy sector were not held back by a lack of finance.

Tarique said the government also introduced the Special Solar Power Installation Ordinance 2026 and taken various policy, tax and duty measures to encourage investment in the sector.

Under a special net-metering arrangement, the government will purchase surplus electricity supplied to the national grid from rooftop solar systems at Tk 10.50 per unit, including incentives, by February 2027, he said.

The premier called on public and private offices, educational institutions, hospitals, industries, commercial establishments, and households to use their unused rooftops for solar power generation.



He said he had also installed solar panels at his residence and was already able to supply some surplus electricity to the national grid after meeting household needs.

The PM said Bangladesh had been turned into a country heavily dependent on energy imports, leaving it vulnerable to disruptions in global supply chains caused by international conflicts.

He said the government provided Tk 43,000 crore in subsidies to the power sector in the 2025-26 fiscal year to keep the country's energy and electricity situation as normal as possible.

Instead of spending time debating the failures or roles of previous governments in the power sector, the current government's priority was to meet future electricity demand and ensure uninterrupted supply to households and businesses, he said.

Referring Sfuron, a national sustainable energy idea contest, the PM said the government wanted to make sure that innovative ideas from young people did not disappear because of a lack of funding.

Tarique said Tk 500 crore had been allocated annually in the current budget for startups.

He said over 8,000 new service-provider companies were involved in the solar power sector and urged them to ensure proper installation, regular maintenance, and quality services for customers.

Tarique said the government is aware of the hardships people, particularly those in marginalised communities, are facing due to the country's energy and power situation.

"To address the challenges, it is working simultaneously to stabilise fuel and electricity supplies, review power-sector expenditure and contracts, increase domestic gas exploration, diversify energy sources, and accelerate solar power expansion. The government is taking comprehensive measures to ensure long-term energy security and a reliable electricity supply."

RMG workers fear being short-changed

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recommend an increase of only Tk 1,000 or Tk 2,000, which would not be enough to meet household expenses.

"We expect the wage board's first meeting to take place tomorrow [Wednesday]," BGMEA President Mahmud Hasan Khan told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the board might announce a timeline for finalising the new wage structure and urged workers to return to their factories, adding that it had already started work on determining a revised pay scale.

Babul Akhter, the workers' representative on the wage board, said the situation appeared to be improving gradually, with many workers returning to work after several days of demonstrations.

Factory owners, however, have warned that they may invoke Section 13(1) of the Bangladesh Labour Act, commonly known as the "no work, no pay" provision, as repeated protests continue to disrupt production.

A worker in Mirpur-11, requesting anonymity, said the Tk 30,000 demand also left room for negotiations, but an increase of only Tk 1,000 or Tk 2,000 would not be enough to support a household.

The worker also said police action was making it difficult to hold peaceful protests.

Rezaul, a worker at a knitting mill in Fatullah, Narayanganj, feared that wages might eventually be fixed at Tk 15,000–16,000, which he said would still be inadequate given current prices.

"We want wages of Tk 30,000. Otherwise, prices of everything, including gas and electricity, should be reduced," he said.

"We don't want wages that are just enough to survive. We have survived long enough. Now we want to live like regular people," said Taslim, another worker in Narayanganj.

Speaking to reporters after an inter-ministerial meeting at the Secretariat yesterday, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed warned of legal action against anyone instigating unrest for political purposes.

He said the wage board had begun its work and that representatives of workers and employers would negotiate the new wage. The government had asked the board to consider ways to improve workers' living standards, he added, while steps would be taken to reopen closed factories.

Salahuddin claimed he had spoken to labour leaders and factory owners and that "all sides were satisfied".

He alleged that politically motivated groups were trying to create instability and warned that such attempts would be dealt with firmly.

Abul Hossain, a worker protesting in Gazipur's Naojor, however, said workers wanted a clear timeline for a wage increase. "If they don't increase our wages, we will continue the movement."

VIOLENCE

In Mirpur, police were deployed from the morning to prevent road blockades. Workers from several factories tried to gather in Mirpur-11, while others from sections 2, 13 and 14 marched towards the Mirpur-11 metro station after encountering police.

Around 10:30am, protesters gathered beneath the station and on Kalshi Road. Police chased them, and some demonstrators hurled chunks of bricks and stones. Police responded with tear gas and sound grenades. Chases and counter-chases continued for about half an hour.

In Mirpur-7, demonstrators entered several factories after 9:00am and brought workers outside. Some joined the protests, while others returned home.

Two female workers alleged that outsiders were responsible for sabotage and that police were arresting workers indiscriminately.

Police officials said protesters beat up constable Md Simon on Kalshi Road around 11:00am after he became separated from a police team. He was admitted to Rajarbagh Police Hospital.

Trains did not stop at Mirpur-11 metro station from 10:22am to 12:50pm, said MRT Police Inspector (Operations) Md Mohsin Sheikh.

Following the clashes, more than 100 Jubo Dal and Chhatra Dal leaders and activists took position along Mirpur-11 main road.

Nur Salam, convener of Pallabi thana Jubo Dal, alleged that people linked to the Awami League had infiltrated the protests to create unrest. DMP Deputy Commissioner (POM-South) Touhidul Arif also alleged that outsiders with ulterior motives were behind the violence.

In Ashulia, intermittent clashes broke out along the Baipail-Abdullahpur road from around 9:00am. Several factories in Narsinghpur declared holidays around 8:30am, while police used tear gas as protesters tried to block roads.

By 11:20am, at least 70 factories in Ashulia had declared holidays, while workers at others stopped work. Tension persisted in Narsinghpur, Nischintapur and Unique areas.

Mohammad Mominul Islam Bhuiyan, superintendent of Industrial Police-1, alleged that outsiders were encouraging workers to leave factories and throw stones. Security measures had been taken to help factories continue production, he added.

In Gazipur, workers of Panacea Ltd walked out around 9:30am and blocked the highway near Naojor flyover, halting traffic in both directions. Workers in Konabari, Mouchak and Telichala also staged protests.

Around 11:00am, demonstrators set fire to something on the Gazipur-Sylhet highway. Police and BGB personnel rushed to the spot, and police fired sound grenades. Traffic was suspended for at least an hour.

Amjad Hossain, superintendent of Gazipur Industrial Police, said 30 to 40 workers also tried to block the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway near Bhogra bypass.

He said 150 factories had remained closed on Monday, while another 15 declared holidays yesterday.

Tk 822cr profit, unpaid bills Tk 7,000cr

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Passenger transportation accounted for the largest share of Biman's revenue, followed by ground handling, cargo and mail services, excess baggage charges and other income, according to its operational presentation.

It carried 3.26 million passengers last fiscal year, down 3.6 percent year-on-year.

Round-trip flights declined 10.1 percent to 9,690, although the passenger load factor rose to 84 percent from 82 percent in fiscal 2024-25.

The airline, however, has claims amounting to more than Tk 7,000 crore from the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) and Padma Oil in unpaid airport charges and fuel bills.

As of August, CAAB claimed around Tk 5,842.91 crore in outstanding aeronautical and non-aeronautical charges, including surcharges.

CAAB had repeatedly written to Biman seeking payment of outstanding charges, officials said.

Padma Oil reported Tk 1,232.71 crore in outstanding jet fuel bills, bringing the combined claims to around Tk 7,075.62 crore.

The figure changes every time Biman makes any payment while refuelling jet fuel, but the outstanding amount remains no less than Tk 1,200 crore, Kanchan Chandra Shom, general manager (accounts & finance) of Padma Oil, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Mohammad Nazmul Hoque, member (finance) of CAAB, said they have the highest dues from Biman, including aeronautical and non-aeronautical charges.

The figures represent accumulated dues rather than expenses incurred in a single financial year.

"Biman always says it has made a profit, but it does not explain how the profit was made or which sectors generated it," said Kazi Wahidul Islam, an aviation expert.

Questions remain over how unpaid aviation and fuel charges are treated in the airline's financial calculations, he said, while calling for making Biman's financial statements publicly available to ensure greater transparency and accountability.

The national flag carrier's financial position has come under renewed focus following two parliamentary committee meetings on Sunday and Monday, where lawmakers scrutinised its earnings, operations, aircraft purchases, ticketing problems and audit objections.

At Sunday's parliamentary standing committee meeting, members questioned whether feasibility studies had been conducted before the purchase agreements for 35 aircraft were signed with Boeing and Airbus.

They sought details of the proposed routes, passenger demand, operational capacity and transparency of the procurement process.

Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister M Rashiduzzaman Millat told the committee that the purchases were necessary to prevent an aircraft shortage in the coming years.

According to a ministry press release, he said newly purchased aircraft could take around 10 years to join the fleet, by which time existing aircraft would gradually be grounded.

The government would not directly finance the purchases; Biman would make payments in phases from its own earnings, while the government would act as guarantor, he said, adding that the delivery process could continue until 2040 and that financing would be arranged through soft loans.

The committee sought a report on the procurement process, including whether necessary assessments were conducted before signing the agreements.

Meanwhile, at a separate meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on public undertakings on Monday, members raised questions over unusually high international airfares and Biman's online ticketing system.

The committee wanted to know why tickets on the Dhaka-Kuala Lumpur route were several times more expensive than those on the Kuala Lumpur-Manila route despite the distances being nearly the same, The Daily Star has learnt from people with knowledge of the discussions.

Members sought an explanation of the fare disparity and whether any policy existed to regulate international airfares.

The committee suggested examining whether a fare-setting policy could be introduced.

Questions were also raised over Biman's online ticketing system.

One committee member complained that tickets were often unavailable online, although many seats were found vacant after passengers boarded aircraft.

Regarding this, the aviation expert Wahidul said the problem had persisted for years, largely because of a lack of accountability in ticket sales and seat management.

Airlines around the world increasingly relied on automated systems to manage seat inventories, reducing opportunities for manual interference.

Although Biman had introduced measures to penalise travel agencies for holding seats without confirmation, the problem continued, he said.

"If an aircraft has 300 seats and only 200 are filled, someone must explain why the remaining 100 seats went empty."

The district and country managers should be held accountable for unsold seats, particularly when flights depart with unusually low passenger loads, he said.

The parliamentary standing committee on public undertakings also questioned Biman over Tk 736 crore in reported irregularities involving chartered cargo operations on the Dhaka-Guangzhou-Dhaka route and revenue collection.