Toddler falls to death from RMCH balcony

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Rajshahi*

A two-year-old boy died after falling from an unguarded balcony at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital yesterday afternoon.

The deceased, Abu Huraira, was the son of Hridoy Ali, a resident of Kushtia Sadar upazila.

Dr Sk Shamim Ahmed, spokesperson for the hospital, confirmed the death.

Hridoy Ali was receiving treatment for dengue, while his daughter Umme Khadija was admitted with abdominal complications.

The incident occurred at Ward 11 of the hospital.

According to Hridoy, the family had nearly exhausted its savings to cover the treatment costs and was preparing to return home.

At the time of the incident, Hridoy's wife, Selina Begum, had gone to a doctor's chamber to collect necessary documents, while his son Abu Huraira

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Prime Minister Tarique Rahman at a bilateral meeting with China's Vice-President Han Zheng in Türkiye's Antalya yesterday. The meeting was held at the conference venue at 4:30pm local time on the sidelines of the 31st UN Climate Change Conference (COP31). PHOTO: PMO

Bangladesh joins global rooftop solar pact

Sets target to generate 5,500MW by 2030

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has endorsed the Global Rooftop Solar Declaration at the UN climate summit COP31 in Türkiye, reaffirming its target of generating 5,500 megawatts of rooftop solar power by 2030.

Achieving the target will require installing solar panels on around 8.7 lakh rooftops, Power Division Secretary Mirana Mahrukh said on Tuesday, according to a press release issued by the Global Solar Council, Solar Citizens, and Climate Parliament, the organisations backing the declaration.

Under a proposed financing split, about 80 percent of the funding would need to come from international sources, she said.

"We invite our global partners to join Bangladesh in mobilising affordable financing, advanced technologies, and investment," she added.

Kenya, Nigeria, and Vanuatu also endorsed the declaration, joining Australia, the first signatory, the release said. Thirty-four lawmakers from 21 countries and Indonesia's state-run power company PLN have also backed the initiative.

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Children exposed to abuse amid lack of safeguards

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gave him a mobile phone to watch cartoons at night before sexually assaulting him for three consecutive nights. The teacher allegedly covered the CCTV camera at the dormitory with clothes.

"He did something bad," Sufian's mother quoted her son as saying.

The boy also told his mother that the teacher had threatened to kill him if he disclosed the abuse to anyone.

When his parents confronted the madrasa founder, known as "Boro Hujur", they found out that at least four other boys had allegedly been assaulted over several months. The Hujur told them that the CCTV cameras were switched off at night and requested them to remain silent to protect the institution's reputation.

Later, he allegedly helped the accused teacher flee.

Following pressure from the victims' families, police arrested "Boro Hujur" and the accused teacher.

The investigation officer, Sub-Inspector Mizanur Rahman of Gacha Police Station, said that during interrogation, the accused teacher admitted to sexually abusing at least two children at the madrasa.

Sufian's case raises a fundamental question about how children are protected in institutions where effective child protection mechanisms are absent and teacher recruitment remains largely informal.

Administrators and teachers of some of these madrasas acknowledged that their institutions lacked formal policies governing teacher recruitment and safeguarding students from sexual abuse.

Another recent case underscores the consequences of this gap. A 12-year-old student of a Qawmi madrasa gave birth after being repeatedly raped by Aman Ullah Mahmudi, a teacher at the madrasa in Netrokona. DNA tests confirmed a 99.99 percent match between the teacher and the child. Yesterday, a tribunal sentenced Mahmudi to death for raping the girl.

According to reports by The Daily Star, six madrasa teachers were arrested in several districts last month over alleged sexual assault on students.

In Tongi, a madrasa teacher was arrested over the alleged sexual abuse of a seven-year-old student, while others were arrested in Savar, Kushtia and Pabna on charges of sexual offences amid public outrage.

The Manobadhikar Sanskriti Foundation (MSF), a human rights organisation, recorded 29 incidents of violence against women and children in madrasas in October alone.

Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO), a UNDP-funded research facility, recorded 108 rape cases involving young boys between 2012 and 2025, with several incidents occurring inside madrasa dormitories.

Awaz.bd, an archive of anonymous childhood sexual-abuse accounts, received at least 45 submissions involving Qawmi madrasas over the last two months.

Testimonies submitted to the online platform describe recurring patterns of exploitation in residential and non-residential facilities, where madrasa teachers and senior students allegedly used gifts, money and intimidation to abuse victims.

Many of the victims remained silent because of social stigma, fear and the absence of confidential reporting channels.

A SYSTEM LACKING SAFEGUARDS

Unlike the mainstream education sector, where teacher recruitment is governed by regulatory frameworks, Qawmi madrasas largely rely on decentralised hiring.

Teachers of government primary schools are recruited through the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), while non-government schools and colleges follow the rules set by the Non-Government Teachers' Registration and Certification Authority (NTRCA). These systems impose formal qualification requirements, structured examinations and police verification.

By contrast, recruitment at Qawmi madrasas is largely controlled by their founders, administrators or managing committees. Teachers are commonly selected through personal connections, local recommendations and verbal interviews, according to administrators and teachers of several madrasas.

Verification often amounts to the collection of a curriculum vitae, a National Identity (NID) card and, occasionally, a character certificate from a Union Parishad chairman, they said.

There is no consistently enforced, sector-wide mechanism to examine previous employment records of applicants or find out whether they have a criminal past or whether they are suitable to handle children.

The problem extends beyond recruitment.

Safeguard policies, mandatory reporting procedures and independent complaint mechanisms are largely absent in these institutions.

Qawmi madrasas remain outside direct state oversight, while mainstream educational institutions are subject to the Children Act 2013 and the National Child Policy 2011. They are also required to adhere to the landmark High Court verdict issued on May 14, 2009, which made it mandatory for all public and private workplaces and educational institutions to adopt guidelines for preventing sexual harassment and form complaint committees.

Later in January 2011, the HC declared all forms of corporal and mental punishment in educational institutions to be completely unconstitutional and illegal.

However, awareness and implementation of these requirements at Qawmi madrasas appear to be extremely limited as revealed by field visits and interviews with dozens of madrasa teachers and staffers. Allegations are handled internally, with institutional interests taking precedence over children's safety.

Field visits to several Qawmi madrasas between October 21 and November 8 revealed an institutional void: none of them had any written safeguards or child-protection policies.

This correspondent interviewed administrators and teachers from eight Qawmi madrasas in Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur, Bhola, Netrokona, Kishoreganj and Dinajpur.

Administrators were largely unfamiliar with the 2009 HC directive on sexual-harassment complaint committees. Some referred to general management committees which lacked standardised investigation procedures, independent oversight and clearly defined abuse-prevention mechanisms.

Mufti Zakir Hossain, director of a Gazipur madrasa housing 70 male students, said, "We do not have any CCTV cameras in our institution. We advise our students to keep lights switched on while sleeping."

Recruitment procedures remain informal. Noman Ahmed, administrator of Kashem Ul Ulum Qawmi Madrasa in Kishoreganj, said, "When teachers are needed, we apply to our local board, and they help arrange candidates through interviews.

"However, we do not have an independent mechanism to cross-check a teacher's prior employment history or legal background across different districts," he said.

Laila Khondkar, a child-protection expert and convener of Shishurai Shob, said residential institutions have responsibilities extending beyond education and basic care.

"They must provide children with safe, confidential and independent reporting channels."

She noted that every institution needs to have clear safeguard policies, proper recruitment practices, trained staff, independent monitoring and effective accountability mechanisms.

"Prevention must come before incidents, not after them," she added.

Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, argued that internal self-regulation alone is not sufficient.

"A nation cannot operate with one set of laws for general institutions while leaving others completely unregulated. The government must take strong, decisive action to bring Qawmi madrasas under a unified legal and oversight framework."

Calling for independent monitoring to protect young children who may be unable to report abuse, she said, "The government can appoint trusted men and women from the community to visit madrasas. Officials from the Department of Social Services and child welfare boards at the upazila and union levels can also play this role."

She urged the government to take concrete action through regular madrasa inspections, stronger oversight and the appointment of dedicated officials to monitor the institutions.

WHAT AUTHORITIES SAY

On July 14, Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon told parliament that Bangladesh has 25,000 Qawmi madrasas operating under six independent examination boards.

However, they have no unified administrative oversight.

The statutory coordinating body, Al-Haiatul Ulya Lil-Jamiatil Qawmia Bangladesh, established in 2017, banned corporal punishment in September and mandated the formation of student Surokkha Committees, warning that non-compliant institutions could face suspension of affiliation.

Musleh Uddin Raju, vice-president of the largest Qawmi board, Befaqul Madarisil Arabia Bangladesh, acknowledged that the boards are yet to have a unified digital database for teacher vetting but work is underway to develop registration software.

Regarding the HC directives, Raju, also a member of Al-Haiatul Ulya, said the coordinating body had adapted the framework in the form of Surokkha committees to make it easier for institutions to adopt.

Rahat Mannan, deputy secretary of the Technical and Madrasa Education Division, said representatives of Qawmi madrasas frequently remain absent from ministry meetings aimed at teacher training, registration and mainstream integration.

Regarding accountability and reform of madrasas, he said, "Since they have no direct institutional links with us, what can we do?... It is up to the policymakers to decide how to reform them."

Referring to the recent incidents, Religious Affairs Minister Kazi Shah Mofazzal Hossain Kaikobad described the incidents as "extremely distressing and shameful", pledging preventive measures under the prime minister's directives.

"We'll do whatever is necessary in this regard...," he told journalists on October 24 without further elaboration.

Education Minister Ehsanul Hoque Milon, State Minister for Primary and Mass Education Bobby Hajjaj and the religious affairs minister did not respond to our emails, calls, and text messages.

Lured to Teknaf

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However, only five of the 56 rescued victims were Rohingya, according to Mohammad Kawsar Shikdar, commanding officer of 16 Armed Police Battalion.

Police records show the rescued victims came from different areas, including Teknaf, Ukhiya, Chattogram, Bandarban, and Faridpur.

Kawsar said his force monitors suspects inside the refugee camps, while incidents outside fall mainly to local police.

Md Saiful Islam, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, claimed trafficking had declined as police continued operations along Marine Drive.

Rakib Hossain, a mason from Rajakhali in Pekua, said he and fellow worker Babul accepted a better-paid job offer in Teknaf from a man he believed was named Ataullah. Rakib and Babul were earning Tk 700 each per day in Cox's Bazar.

They travelled to Teknaf five days before the joint forces operation. The pair tried to escape after realising they were being taken into the hills, armed men beat them, Rakib said. The captors demanded Tk 2 lakh for their release, claiming that they had been sold for Tk 1 lakh.

The detainees were beaten and given small portions of rice and lentils twice daily. Rakib saw 30-40 people there, with more brought in later.

HOW THE CHAIN WORKS

Two sources from Rohingya camps and one from Teknaf's host community described recruiters as "influencers" who persuade camp residents to leave for Malaysia with promises of jobs or family reunification.

The recruiters reportedly receive Tk 10,000-Tk 20,000 for each person they enlist, the sources said. Intermediaries then arrange transport and accommodation for the recruits after they leave the camps.

Women living in the camps also play a significant role in the recruitment network, persuading unmarried girls to make the journey with promises of marriage in Malaysia.

Some autorickshaw drivers receive about Tk 20,000 per trip for taking victims to isolated locations where armed accomplices take custody, the sources said.

The rescued worker said abducted people were held separately from those seeking passage voluntarily. He claimed the latter fled during the raid, leaving 56 people brought against their will. He estimated around 103 people had been held there.

The sources said Rohingya and local Bangladeshi intermediaries played different roles, with local handlers arranging transport, collecting money, and maintaining armed hideouts.

The sources also described several hideouts in the Teknaf hills where people were kept before being moved towards the coast.

Of the 56 rescued, only five were Rohingya, according to the commanding officer of 16 Armed Police Battalion.

Police records show the victims came from different areas, including Teknaf, Ukhiya, Chattogram, Bandarban and Faridpur.

Sajid Ahmed, president of the Kayukkhali Trawler Owners' Association, said traffickers use sampans to ferry people from coastal points such as Shamlapur to larger vessels offshore.

Large trawlers from Chattogram and Cox's Bazar take them onward, with transfers around 2:00am or 3:00am. Passengers are kept in houses or hills until boats are ready, he said.

The Rohingya sources described routes through Myanmar's Rakhine State, including Sittwe, and direct sea journeys towards Thailand. They alleged that armed groups, including the Arakan Army, take part in some transfers inside Myanmar, a claim The Daily Star could not independently verify.

From Sittwe, people are reportedly moved towards the Thai border by land or sea. The sea journey takes three to four days, while the overland route can take around two weeks, the sources said.

People seeking passage are charged Tk 3 lakh to Tk 4 lakh each, with around Tk 1 lakh collected before they leave Teknaf and the rest demanded near the Thailand-Malaysia border.

Families are allegedly asked to send money through intermediaries, including mobile financial services, before relatives are handed over. For abducted workers, the routes become a means of extortion. Some face fresh demands even after earlier payments.

RESPONSE

Police data show that 462 human trafficking cases were filed in Cox's Bazar district between 2012 and August 2025.

According to case documents, the November 5 raid followed intelligence reports that around 100 people were being held captive in the hills. Officers recovered cooking utensils, phones, passports and identity documents.

Three cases involving murder, arms and trafficking were filed on November 9.

The murder case names 27 people and another 16-17 unidentified suspects. It alleges that Khairul Amin alias Sana Ullah or Sanaiya fired the shot that killed Titas.

The trafficking case names 41 people and 20-25 unidentified suspects.

Six suspects had been arrested by November 10, including Md Hossain alias Bokkainya, 20, in connection with the case, according to the SRB-15.

On October 8, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed announced a decision to establish two army camps at Rangikhali and Noakhali Pahar in Cox's Bazar, acknowledging that abductions were regularly taking place in the areas.

BGB Teknaf Battalion (2 BGB) Commander Lt Col Mohammad Tajul Islam Chowdhury said his personnel handled border offences.

On November 7, BGB rescued nine more people at South Lombori Ghat.

PERSISTING VULNERABILITY

Khin Maung, president of the United Council of Rohingya, said uncertainty over repatriation and lack of jobs made camp residents vulnerable to traffickers.

He said some unemployed young Rohingya had joined criminal networks for money. He called for better protection, livelihood opportunities and a clear repatriation roadmap.

According to UNHCR, more than 6,500 Rohingya attempted sea crossings in 2025, with nearly 900 dying or going missing in the Bay and Andaman Sea.

The Anti-Trafficking Working Group, co-chaired by UNHCR and IOM, identified 407 trafficking incidents involving Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh in 2025, up from 316 in 2024.

Host-community members recruited victims in 30 percent of cases, while 40 percent were recruited by people they knew, including neighbours, acquaintances and family members.

PM, Chinese VP

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(COP31), focused on various issues of mutual interest, particularly Chinese investment and cooperation to address the impacts of climate change.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Humaiun Kobir was present at the meeting.

Earlier, Tarique held a bilateral meeting with Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the conference venue, discussing ways to strengthen relations between Bangladesh and Uzbekistan, address climate change impacts and expand cooperation.

The meeting began at 2:45pm local time and lasted around half an hour, said PM's Deputy Press Secretary Hasan Shiplu.

Foreign Minister Dr Khalilur Rahman and Humaiun Kobir attended the meeting.

Later, at 4:50pm, the prime minister visited the Bangladesh Pavilion at COP31, where he toured an exhibition of environment-friendly jute products and displays showcasing Bangladesh's environmental initiatives.

Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Abdul Awal Mintoo, State Minister Shaikh Faridul Islam and Prime Minister's Special Assistant for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Dr Saimum Parvez welcomed him.

Tarique viewed displays on tree plantation, environmental conservation and measures to address climate change. He also spoke with officials and staff about the pavilion's activities, exhibits and efforts to present Bangladesh's climate initiatives to the international community.

Earlier in the day, the prime minister joined the World Leaders' Summit at the Antalya Exhibition Centre.

He arrived at the conference venue at 10:10am local time and was welcomed by the organisers, said Shiplu.

Accompanied by his wife, Dr Zubaida Rahman, Tarique exchanged greetings and held brief informal conversations with heads of state and government and senior representatives of international organisations at the Leaders' Lounge before the opening ceremony.

Among them were Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Secretary-General Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, London Mayor Sadiq Khan, Moldovan Prime Minister Vasile Tofan, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani and Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

He also exchanged greetings with members of the Indonesian delegation.

The prime minister, who arrived in Antalya on Tuesday on a three-day visit, is leading a high-level Bangladesh delegation to COP31.

3rd terminal deal

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the latest plan envisages actual flight operations from December 16.

The proposed agreement had earlier faced disagreements over four contractual provisions concerning ground-handling responsibilities, revenue sharing, legal protections and liability for construction defects.

Another contentious provision was a proposed 15-year restriction on competing civilian airports commencing commercial operations within a 100-kilometre radius of the airport. The restriction concerns commercial operations, not construction.

However, Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister M Rashiduzzaman Millat said on November 4 that the restriction would not prevent the government from planning or constructing another airport within the specified area.

He clarified that building a new airport could itself take around 10 years and that the government had no immediate plans for one within 100 kilometres of Dhaka.

The precise conditions governing the launch of operations at a future competing airport will depend on the final agreement.

The third terminal, built at a cost of around Tk 22,213 crore, is expected to substantially increase passenger-handling capacity at the country's busiest airport once fully operational.

CAAB is also seeking to make greater use of existing international airports outside Dhaka, particularly Shah Amanat International Airport in Chattogram and Osmani International Airport in Sylhet.

Efforts are also under way to develop international operations at Cox's Bazar airport as part of a broader push to strengthen regional aviation connectivity.

Madrasa teacher

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after examining witness testimonies, DNA test reports and other scientific evidence.

The court also fined the convict Tk 1 lakh and directed that the child born as a result of the rape be recognised as Sagor's child and registered accordingly, said Nurul Kabir Rubel, public prosecutor of the tribunal.

It also observed that the state would bear all expenses related to the child's upbringing and welfare, with the government entitled to recover the expenses from the convict.

The girl was a student at the female Qawmi madrasa that Sagor founded and taught, according to the court and the case statement.

After her parents separated, the girl lived with her maternal grandfather and attended the madrasa, situated in the Panchhar Borobari area of Kaitail union in Madan upazila.

Her mother worked as a domestic help in Sylhet to support the family.

Sagor repeatedly raped the girl, and at one stage, she became pregnant.

The incident came to light on April 18, when the girl underwent a medical examination at a clinic in Madan municipality. A doctor informed her family that she was seven months pregnant.

On April 23, the girl's mother filed a case against Sagor and his brother Maimun with Madan Police Station under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act.

After the case was filed, the prime accused went into hiding. Members of Rapid Action Battalion-14 later arrested Sagor in Mymensingh's Gauripur upazila on May 6. Police subsequently handed him over to Madan Police Station.

On May 10, the investigating officer sought the court's permission to conduct a DNA test on the prime accused. The court approved the application.

Meanwhile, following an application by the girl's mother, the court on May 12 ordered that she be moved to a safe shelter in Sylhet run by the Department of Social Services, citing concerns for her safety and protection.

As per the court's order, Sagor was taken to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) headquarters in Dhaka on May 16. His DNA sample was collected the following day.

While staying at the safe shelter in Sylhet, the victim gave birth to a girl at a local hospital on July 2.

To establish the newborn's paternity, the investigation officer filed an application with the court on July 9 seeking a DNA test.

CID officials collected the newborn's DNA sample on July 28 and compared it with the sample previously collected from Sagor.

The CID test found a 99.99 percent match between the DNA samples of Sagor and the newborn.

After receiving the DNA test report, investigation officer Md Akhtaruzzaman of Madan Police Station submitted the charge sheet to the court on August 27, naming both Sagor and his brother as accused.

During the trial, the court recorded the testimonies of 10 witnesses.