

16 AL leaders get bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday granted a three-month anticipatory bail to 16 top leaders of the Awami League (AL) including General Secretary Abdul Jalil in 11 defamation cases filed with courts in different districts.

A Division Bench of the HC comprising Justice Joydul Abedin and Justice AKM Fazlur Rahman heard bail petitions of the AL leaders and granted them anticipatory bail.

The AL leaders appeared in court. The HC also asked the government to show cause why the petitioners should not be granted permanent bail in the cases, filed by leaders of the ruling alliance.

The other AL leaders, who got bail, are Abdus Samad Azad, Sayeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Saranjit Sengupta, Motia Chowdhury, SAMS Kibria, ASHK Sadek, Obaidul Quader, Mukul Bose, Abdul Mannan, Abdur Rahman, Faruk Khan, ABM Mozammel Haque, Shafi Ahmed, Abdus Shahid and Abdul Mannan Chowdhury.

The cases were filed after the AL announced a list of 102 leaders of the ruling coalition branding them as godfathers.

A court in Natore on Wednesday issued warrant of arrest against 14 top

leaders of the AL in a defamation case lodged by Deputy Minister for Land Ruhul Quddus Talukdar Dulu.

Chief Whip Khondker Delwar Hossain filed a defamation case with the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka. The other cases were filed by Nazimuddin Alam in Bhola, Shahjahan Chowdhury and Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin in Chittagong, Gholam Sarwar in Khulna, Syed Abdullah Abu Taher in Comilla, Shahidul Haque Jamal in Pirojpur, Hannan Shah in Gazipur. Moreover two leaders of the BNP's youth front Jubo Dal filed two cases in Comilla and Tangail.

The alliance leaders alleged the AL had put them on its list of 'godfathers' for political gains by tarnishing their image.

The lawyers for the AL leaders told the HC the accused are prominent leaders of the main opposition party and the cases were filed to harass them politically.

Barrister M Amir-Ul-Islam and Advocate Abdul Baset Majumder moved the bail petitions. President of the Supreme Court Bar Association Rokanuddin Mahmud and Advocate Sudhansu Sekhar Halder were present in the court.

Deputy Attorney General Advocate Golam Kibria represented the state.

Doc postings

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their assignment although it is a generally accepted practice that one has to serve at least three years in their respective positions in non-training posts.

"The BMA leaders are targeting us for revenge. We are simply victims of political vendetta," said one of the victims.

His colleague, now serving in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, said, "Many of my colleagues have chosen to take up post-graduation in the capital to escape such harassment."

In less than a year of his service Prof Nikanto Bhattacharya, who had been serving as the Head of the Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Department at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), was transferred to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

In another case, Dr Chinmoi Kanti Das, serving as a medical officer at Rajshahi, was transferred to a remote place in Kurigram.

Dr Ranjan Kumar Saha, former BMA secretary general at Netrakona, was transferred to Gopalganj. Regarding Dr Saha's transfer, BMA Secretary General Dr Zahid Hossain said, "Dr Saha is still serving at Netrakona."

Dr Tuzammel Hossain was transferred to Bandarban from Khulna Medical College Hospital while Dr Biswajit Datta, serving at Chittagong Medical college Hospital, was transferred three times in less than six months.

Dr Abu Yusuf Fakir, resident surgeon, ENT Department at the DMCH, was transferred twice in less than two months, first to Laxmipur and then to Brahmanbaria. Tired of repeated transfers, he applied for master's degree course in surgery at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU). On Dr Fakir's transfer, Dr Zahid said, "Dr Fakir himself requested for his posting in Brahmanbaria as his wife is also serving in Brahmanbaria. The BMA has nothing to do with his postings."

Dr Jashimuddin, who had been serving as medical officer at Patuakhali, was transferred to Sirajganj. About Dr Jashimuddin, Dr Zahid alleged that once Dr Jashim submitted a false report on an autopsy he had carried out.

Dr Sirajul Haq, serving as an associate professor at the Dermatology

Rly building

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misses in the afternoon.

Huda thanked the GrameenPhone authorities for restoring the station built in 1896 and contributing to the preservation of the landmark architectural heritage.

He hoped that GrameenPhone would also help set up the railway museum in Chittagong.

Addressing the event GrameenPhone Managing Director Ola Ree expressed satisfaction over his company's association with the renovations to the station, adding it would further strengthen the ties between his company and the railway.

Communications Secretary Syed Rezaul Hayat and Bangladesh Railway Director General AKM Rezaul Karim also addressed the ceremony, among others.

The speakers observed although the project involved a little more than Tk 1 crore, it did an invaluable job by preserving the heritage.

They said GrameenPhone set up an example of corporate responsibility what would inspire others.

Bangladesh Railway (East) General Manager Mokhleser Rahman gave the vote of thanks.

Robbers loot Tk 50,000 from school

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Robbers looted reportedly about Tk 50,000 from office of Barisal Sadar Government Girls' School in the city in the early hours of yesterday.

Police and school sources said a gang entered the school and tied up Jafar and Sumon, son and nephew of night guard Burjig, who were substituting the latter.

The robbers burgled the room of the headmistress and took away Tk 49,900 -- collected as fees of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations and also for the yearly Milad -- from the steel almirah.

The gang also tied up Burjig when he came to check the on-duty substitutes and left the school after two hours at around 3:30am.

Another son of Burjig came to the school with food for Sehri and rescued them at around 4:00am.

School officials said the money was kept in the school due to early closure of banks on Thursday.

The school authorities filed a case with Kotwali Police Station.

3 children die

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hospitals and clinics in the district, sources said.

Meanwhile, 55 more children were admitted to five government hospitals in the district yesterday. Of them, 33 were admitted to Sadar hospital, eight at Ukhia upazila hospital, six at Moheshkhali hospital, three at Chokoria hospital, three at Ramu hospital and two others at Kutubdia hospital.

District administration sent seven mobile medical teams to check the disease.

Biman

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and Airbus.

"The authorities are now reviewing offers from both the companies as well as the balance amount that has to be paid," the spokesman said.

He blamed Biman's financial woes on high overhead costs and said its flights were on average 70 percent full.

"Overhead costs like maintenance and operating cost of old and leased aircraft has denied Biman seeing profit," Civil Aviation Minister Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin said separately.

The airline currently has six Airbus and two Boeing jets, along with four McDonnell Douglas DC 10-30 planes, three Fokker F-28s and two British ATP short-haul aircraft.

Biman is the only Bangladeshi airline to fly overseas with 26 international routes.

The government has allowed private airlines to operate within Bangladesh for the past decade and in September said they would be permitted to fly on select international routes.

Privately run GMG Airlines, which was founded in 1998, has said it is ready to start international routes immediately once the government gives it the green light.

GMG would begin with flights to nearby Calcutta and Kathmandu connecting on to New Delhi and Colombo to ensure passenger turn-out, airline spokesman Vijay Alreja said.

Three other airlines -- Air Bangladesh, Air Parbat and Bismillah Airlines -- have also expressed interest in flying beyond domestic routes but are considered further away in meeting license requirements.

Hasina

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ists allegedly by BNP men, Hasina said, "They (the BNP men) are desperate to eliminate Awami League."

She said "the businessmen turned ministers" targeted Ramadan to make a brisk business. "How will prices come down if the ruling party men are involved in business," she said.

Abdul Jalil Bhuiyan and Omar Faruk, president and general secretary of the DUJ, were present at the programme that was also attended by senior AL leaders, editors of different dailies, diplomats, university teachers and journalists.

FTA talks

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tries are now opting for FTA on bilateral basis to give a boost to the intra-region trade, which is the lowest among all other regional economic blocs.

The FTA proposal first came from India, then from Pakistan, but Bangladesh so far seemed skeptical about the benefit of such deals with two uneven partners -- one enjoying a huge trade surplus.

Finally, Bangladesh agreed to initiate the talks, starting with India.

Trade officials here said FTA talks with Islamabad would be less intricate as Dhaka-Islamabad trade is not so complicated as with New Delhi.

Earlier, Pakistan gave duty-free access of Bangladesh's jute and tea (up to a certain limit) to its market.

Bangladesh's imports from Pakistan amounted to US\$ 67.32 million against her exports of \$28.60 million in FY2001-02.

BNP 'dissidents'

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former speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali, Oli Ahmed, MP, and some other party leaders including ministers and deputies who are close to Badruddoza, sources at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and home ministry said.

They said personnel of the intelligence agencies, including the NSI and DGFI, were posted to the leaders' houses and their telephones bugged.

"We are fully convinced of a conspiracy. But everything is under the control of the government which is capable of smashing any plot," an influential party minister told The Daily Star yesterday on condition of anonymity.

"We are now closely watching the movements of the defectors. Necessary actions will be taken to keep them from any wrong that might go against the government," an important cabinet minister said.

The intelligence agencies have been asked to report to their contacts at the PMO and the home ministry about the movements of the suspects and the intelligence reports are being sent to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

Before leaving for Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah, the premier called more than three ministers separately in a bid to wean off their links with the former president, sources said.

They said an intelligence agency recently reported to the premier of a meeting between some top BNP leaders and Badruddoza.

Witnesses said intelligence agents did not obstruct any visitor to enter the house of Razzak Ali and meet him, but inquired about their names and addresses.

"They have been asked not to disturb any of the leaders and their visitors, but to scan their activities and come up with complete reports," a source said.

Badruddoza, who was forced to resign on June 21 last year, came public last week and his press interview appeared in most dailies yesterday where he remarked that the nation was heading for a crisis and he would stand by people if need be. The full text of Badruddoza's interview was faxed to the premier on Friday night.

Sources said the intelligence agents also kept an eye on the movement of Mahi B Chowdhury, son of the former president and a BNP legislator, and the family of Razzak.

Razzak, who was appointed high

commissioner to the United Kingdom by the alliance government, returned home from London in a discord with the government that he says reneged on the promise of giving him ministerial status.

The government replaced Razzak with former civil servant Mofazzal Karim in a huff.

The Bangladesh mission in Saudi Arabia was monitoring the movement of BNP front bencher Oli, now in Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah.

JS session

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Opposition Sheikh Hasina.

Khaleda is now in Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah.

Chief Whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain and a good number of ruling party lawmakers are also abroad.

Against this backdrop, it is apprehended the 10th session might witness a quorum crisis. To avert this, the other whips are busy contacting the ruling alliance lawmakers to attend the session in due time, sources said.

Meanwhile, the AL parliamentary party will meet after Hasina's return from a four-day visit to the monga-hit northern region from today.

The speaker told reporters at his Sangsad Bhaban office yesterday, "The main opposition has created a mess of the overall situation."

But Deputy Leader of the Opposition and former speaker Abdul Hamid told The Daily Star yesterday, "The speaker and deputy speaker are responsible for the prevailing situation as they permitted the ruling alliance lawmakers to utter unparliamentary words in the House."

The AL started to boycott parliament session from June 25 protesting a state minister's 'derogatory remarks' against the leader of the opposition.

About the AL allegations, the speaker said, "I cannot do anything beyond the constitution and the rules of procedure. I don't see any reason behind the main opposition's allegation against me."

Jamir Uddin Sircar also said he is still willing to take initiative to bring the AL back to parliament. But he stressed the party must stop making the allegation it continues to do since June 25.

Meter reader

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lion's share is being used by the city's slum dwellers. But 100 percent of those connections are illegal."

"Mafia groups are controlling the slums. Slum dwellers are forced to pay Tk 8 a unit to those mafia members but the government is not getting Tk 2 for each unit from consumers at these shanties," he added.

Meter readers hardly visit houses to read meters, do their jobs at their will and the clients sometimes have to suffer for them, which is damaging the image of the power sector, Iqbal said.

The state minister felt the overall situation in the power sector has deteriorated to such an extent that it would not change overnight.

Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury said it is very unfortunate that meter reading system could not be upgraded over the last 20 years although the information technology improved a lot during this period.

Introduction of a pre-paid billing system would reduce some hassles of the clients, observed Prof. Jamilur, adding that it is also necessary to keep an eye on the 1,200 clients who are using 'high tension' and bulk portion of electricity.

AKM Mosharraf Hossain claimed the systems loss in the gas sector has declined by 50 percent. Parliament has already enacted a law for an independent energy regulatory commission, but chairman and members of the watchdog will not be picked before December this year, he mentioned.

Opposition Awami League leader Abul Hassan Chowdhury meanwhile asked: "We are talking about the activities of the meter readers but who are patronising these guys?"

Jatuya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu felt that corruption at the top needs to be controlled first before acting against the lower tier.

Creation of Desa, Desco and Power Grid Company failed to reduce the systems loss, said Inu.

Former Buet vice-chancellor Professor Iqbal Mahmud said power sector should have a department to

Cabinet cry

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honesty.

A senior minister noted previous cabinet secretaries were also given extension of service.

Two others were aspirants for the post of cabinet secretary. They are Land Secretary Azad Ruhul Amin and Planning Commission Member Badiur Rahman. Azad is due to go on LPR on July 14 and Badur on October 31 next year, sources mentioned.

Six Hazari cadres get life term

UNB, Feni

A court here yesterday sentenced six cadres of former Awami League lawmaker Joynal Hazari to life imprisonment for killing a college student.

The convicts are Nazmul Karim Sohel, Russell, Peyar, Manik, Sohel and Chhoto Russel.

Judge M Shahjahan Majumder of the Court of Additional District and Sessions Judge gave the verdict in a crowded court room. He also fined the convicts Tk 2,000 each, in default, they will have to suffer six more months in jail.

The court acquitted seven as charges brought against them were not proved. They are Mister, Ashrafud-Doula Somun, Babul, Badal, Chowdhury and former municipal commissioners Shiblu and Shahid.

Names of four others -- Azharul Huq Arzu, Shakhwat Hossain, Jahangir Mohammad Adel and Ramim Hossain -- were earlier dropped from the charge sheet filed by police on November 23, 1999.

According to the prosecution, the convicts picked up Rezaul Karim Tuhin, a first year student of Chiora College, from Islampur on February 10, 1999. They took Rezaul to Sonapur boarding and beat him mercilessly. He succumbed to his injuries at a hospital in Dhaka on February 17.

Tuhin, son of Kabir Ahmed of Islampur village in Fulgazi Upazila, was the younger brother of Feni JCD leader Kafiluddin Mamun and Joint General Secretary of district Jubo Dal Saifuddin Iran.

The victim's mother filed a case with Feni Police Station on November 18 the same year, accusing 17 people.

Bhuiyan

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Islam, State Minister for Home Lutfulazzaman Babor and BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman were present.

Ridiculing the former president's reported criticism of the alliance rule, Bhuiyan said, "There may be varying reasons behind criticism -- some criticise for the sake of criticism, some do it out of deprivation and some do it after losing what he had gained."

The minister made his observations about Badruddoza who has been critical of BNP's 'failure' in meeting its pre-election pledges in curbing terrorism and corruption in recent interviews.

The BNP doesn't have any hesitation to welcome constructive criticism because opinion or observation had always been for or against BNP since the times of President Ziaur Rahman, Bhuiyan said.

In response to Badruddoza's claim that many BNP leaders contacted him, he said, "I don't think our men will go beyond BNP's decision. If some go, they will be isolated from people."

Asked about speculations about a 'third force' and Dr Kamal Hossain's meeting with Badruddoza, a smiling Bhuiyan said that he was hearing about it, adding: "But what is the third force? Dr Kamal himself could not make his party effective."

He said BNP remained committed to fulfilling its election pledges, including improving law and order in the last two years, many pledges were fulfilled and the remaining would be met within next three years."

Crime may not be fully controlled, but it has been tackled to a large extent ... What we can claim that there is no state-sponsored crimes as seen during the Awami League rule," he told the meet.

The BNP leader said his government set up speedy trial courts to ensure justice for all and punishing criminals irrespective of their political identities.

In an oblique reference to the Awami League, Bhuiyan again invited the main opposition to return to parliament and discuss any problem. "It would be good if they turn up -- parliament will be more effective, and we're ready to discuss any issues," he said.

B Chy

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into the media focus with his latest comment that people are living in a state of panic and that the country is heading for a crisis.

When repression and crimes increase, people find no other option but to come out on the streets for a way out, Badruddoza said.

He however ruled out the possibility of a mass upsurge at this moment. "Such things happen when the country reaches a crucial juncture. I don't see any such deepening of crisis right now."

"The government still has time to correct itself," he added.

In an oblique reference to the Hawa Bhaban, the so-called power centre of the government, he said when the power centre, which should be at the top of the power structure, changes informally, it is bound to create problems.

"The country lacks an efficient workforce and political persona to guide it," he added. "I have conceptualised a new political theory to scale this situation."

This way, he said, good people will come to parliament.

Asked why he does not want to implement his own political concept, he said, "The idea itself is a tough job that I want to contribute to the society. These are the outcome of my thoughts for a long time. It is said that the BNP reacted in the way it did, using its low-ranking leaders most of whom I recruited to politics."

Dhaka, Manila agree to review accords, explore new areas of cooperation

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh and the Philippines agreed to review all agreements between the two countries and explore new avenues of cooperation.

The agreement was reached in a meeting between visiting Bangladesh Foreign Minister M Moshed Khan and his Filipino counterpart Blas F Ople in Manila on Friday, according to a message received in Dhaka yesterday.

They proposed for covering a senior official level meeting soon.

The foreign ministers also agreed that some of the agreements were not yielding the desired results. The quantum of trade between the two countries stands at around US\$ 1 million only.

They strongly felt that considering excellent bilateral relations, volume of trade between the two countries should be enhanced to expected level.

Both sides stressed the need for shipping and maritime cooperation between the two countries.

They felt that labour and manpower ministers of all manpower-exporting countries could coordinate and take common approach on various issues related to overseas jobs.

The Filipino minister proposed that such meeting might be arranged in Manila or Dhaka or any other capital after consultation with all parties concerned.

They also discussed the ongoing political developments in South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Middle East and underscored the need for intensifying cooperation between Asean and Saarc

and other sub-regional groupings to foster economic development, peace, security and stability.

Mentioning visa restrictions imposed by the Philippines, Bangladesh foreign minister said such measures "impeded the trade relations between the two countries as well as the people-to-people contact".

Ople assured Moshed that the issue would "immediately" be looked into so as to facilitate issuance of visa.

The foreign minister, who arrived in Manila on November 13 from Singapore, met former President Corazon Aquino, speaker of the House of Representatives and Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

11 die

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Emergency services said the death toll could rise.

The Queen Mary 2 is the largest passenger ship ever built, with a length of 345 metres and as tall as a 23-storey building.

It is under construction at the Chantiers de l'Atlantique shipyard, owned by French heavy engineering firm Alstom.

Construction on the world's most expensive liner began in 2002, and it will become the flagship of British shipping line Cunard.

The £550m, 2,620-passenger Cunard flagship is due to sail to Southampton, where the Queen is expected to officially name the vessel in a ceremony on 8 January, 2004.

The ship is due to begin its maiden passenger voyage to Florida four days later.

From next April, the new ship will take over Cunard's Southampton-New York run from the QE2 which will be sailing on other routes.

Istanbul car bombs

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to help secure neighboring Iraq, though it later abandoned the plan due to strong opposition from Iraq's U.S.-appointed Governing Council.

Turkey also has warm diplomatic and military relations with Israel. The Jewish state swiftly condemned the "criminal terror attacks" in Istanbul.

A senior Israeli security source told Reuters in Jerusalem the blasts seemed to be the work of an al Qaeda affiliate, possibly seeking to target both arch-foe Israel and the moderate Muslim Turkish government, a NATO ally of the United States.

Jewish sites have been targeted in recent attacks blamed on militants linked to al Qaeda -- notably in Casablanca in May, a Tunisian synagogue bombed in April 2002 and

Al-Qaeda

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the recent discovery of several canisters of unidentified chemicals and possible residues of a "tetanus virus-carrying chemical" and a bio-terror manual in a police raid on a Jemaah Islamiyah hideout in the southern Philippines.

"The risk of al-Qaeda acquiring and using weapons of mass destruction also continues to grow," the report said.

In the report, the expert group said the al-Qaeda ideology is spreading worldwide and has found "fertile ground" in Iraq, raising the specter of new terrorist attacks.