

European Parliament

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were growing in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

The situation of minorities, especially in the CHT, was precarious, he observed, citing the violent incidents in Mahalchhari on August 26 this year.

He also said death sentences were handed down at disturbingly high level.

Patten observed that there was still little progress on separation of the judiciary from the executive and establishment of independent monitoring institutions - the Anti-corruption Commission, Human Rights Commission and the Ombudsman.

He said the commission expressed deep concern about the situation to the government on several occasions.

Patten also said the commission's delegation in Dhaka maintained a continuous dialogue on governance and human rights issues with senior interlocutors in the government.

In its recently established human rights dialogue, the commission has addressed a wide range of issues including separation of the judiciary from the executive, investigation of custodial deaths, torture, status of the Anti-corruption Commission, Human Rights Commission, the Ombudsman, freedom of the press and the situation of the Rohingya

Robbers loot Tk 12 lakh in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Armed robbers looted cash and valuables worth over Tk 12 lakh from the house of a lawyer on Shaheed Saifuddin Khaled Road in Chittagong Saturday.

The ten-member gang stormed the house of Advocate Moqbel Ahmed, a lawyer of the Supreme Court, at around 7:00pm. Confining family members to a room, they held Ahmed's two-year-old son hostage at gunpoint and left with the booty, police said.

They took away Tk 8.60 lakh in cash, 43 tola gold ornaments and other valuables, Ahmed's wife Setara Ahmed said.

Ahmed was in Dhaka during the robbery.

Kotwali police held Baitiyya Javed for his alleged role in the robbery yesterday evening in connection with a case Setara lodged Saturday.

Kalidas Boral murder case Fresh chargesheet submitted after extended investigation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, KHULNA

An extended investigation into the Advocate Kalidas Boral murder case produced no change in the list of 22 people initially indicted for murder of the Bagerhat Awami League leader.

Motiur Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Khulna Sadar Police Station, submitted the chargesheet to the court on Friday after the additional district and sessions judge of Bagerhat ordered an extended investigation on July 26 following a prosecution demand.

Public Prosecutor Advocate Noor Mohammad asked for the extended investigation after two prosecution witnesses alleged that Sheikh Helaluddin MP elected from the Bagerhat-1 constituency and General Secretary of Chitalmari Thana Awami League Pijush Kanti Roy were involved in Boral's murder on August 20, 2000.

The OC said he found no incriminating evidence against the lawmaker or Chilmari AL leader. Besides, they were not named in either the first information report or the first chargesheet submitted before the extended investigation was ordered, he said.

The court heard five of 74 prosecution witnesses when the trial was stalled after prosecution witness Happy Boral, wife of the slain AL leader, told the judge that she suspected Helal and Pijush to have masterminded the murder.

Rejoinder

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to pay minimum guaranteed payment (take or pay). But the 2nd phase (of the contract) is highly favourable in this respect that there is no provision (of) minimum payment (no electricity, no payment).

These conditions are unique among the IPPs not only in Bangladesh but also in the world.

It added, the PDB is not in any way related to the payment in foreign currency.

"Westmont is committed to [installing] the plant within 6 months. If they fail they will pay Liquidated Damage. (The) BPDB will purchase electricity when it requires and make payment for the electricity taken at a specified flat rate. (The) BPDB is not purchasing the power plant, it is purchasing electricity. Installation of an old plant by Westmont is their risk. If they fail to provide electricity, they will not be paid and their investment will not be recovered."

Westmont Chairman Kazi Tajul Islam Faruque said the Purchase Committee terms and conditions have not been violated.

Our Reply

Although it's an unsolicited proposal that the government discourages, the Purchase Committee gave the go-ahead to the project conditionally quoting the private

refugees from Myanmar, he said.

In his question, Moraes said: "Despite the commission's continual monitoring of political developments in Bangladesh, through its delegation in Dhaka and various other initiatives, it has been brought to my notice that human rights violations continue."

The European lawmaker noted that the previous cases of politically motivated attacks, reported over a year ago, were understood to be the result of a temporary 'power vacuum' before the new government could fully establish itself.

Moraes stressed that such attacks, arrests and torture of human rights activists and opposition politicians persisted.

Expatriate accuses BNP MP of land grab, Lobi's wife denies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Bangladeshi expatriate in London yesterday accused a ruling BNP lawmaker of grabbing a house in Banani in a claim the MP's wife dismissed as false.

At a press conference at Bangladesh Crime Reporters Association, Zakaria Khan Julu, coming back home to Dhaka, alleged that Ali Asghar Lobi drove his relatives out of the house No. 72 on road No. 11 in block D.

"Now he and his gang are threatening me with death," Julu alleged.

The alleged land grab came after Julu's wife Morsheda Sultana registered her inherited land in her husband's name but sold the plot along with her two sisters' to the lawmaker after her divorce.

"In 1993, Luci and Mahbuba (Morsheda's sisters) agreed to sell their parts of land to me and I paid them 43,000 in British pounds in advance. I paid them 98,000 in British pounds again in 1998 on a contract of buying their land," Julu claimed.

"Luci and Mahbuba wrote to me in 2000, saying they would not sell their land. But they again agreed on the sale at two lakh British pounds," Julu said, adding he got divorced the same year.

"Ali Asghar Lobi and his men ousted the caretaker and tenants of the house at gunpoint and captured it on August 14," Julu alleged.

Julu filed a general diary with Gulshan Police Station and a case against Lobi, Morsheda, Luci and Mahbuba with Dhaka Judge's Court after he came back from London.

Julu said Lobi proposed a negotiation to be mediated by the commissioner of ward No. 19 a few days ago, but he did not turn up.

He sought intervention of the prime minister and the home minister in retrieving his house.

Lobi's wife Khushnad Asghar in a faxed message to The Daily Star denied the allegation of land grab, claiming to have valid documents on ownership of the house.

She said she bought the house from Morsheda, Luci and Mahbuba at Tk 65 lakh on June 1.

23 killed as bus skids off Jammu road

AP, Jammu, India

An overcrowded bus skidded off a steep mountain road yesterday in Indian-held Kashmir and plunged 1,500 feet into a gorge, killing 23 passengers and injuring 13 others.

The bus crashed near Magar Kot village in Jammu-Kashmir state, said Subhash Raina, a police superintendent in Jammu, the state's winter capital. The bus was carrying 36 people, nine more than its capacity, he said.

Police and villagers in Magar Kot, about 118 miles north of Jammu, helped pull out some of the injured. Local authorities put up flood lights so rescue efforts could continue as night fell.

The injured were taken to a hospital in the nearby town of Banihal.

Ruling BNP should sit with opposition to end JS impasse, says US envoy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US Ambassador in Dhaka Harry K Thomas yesterday said the ruling BNP should sit with the main opposition party to bring it back to parliament to make the Jatiya Sangsad effective.

"We hope the ruling party will initiate a step soon. The opposition party should also show equal responsibility," he told newsmen after a call on Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar at his Jatiya Sangsad office.

"A meeting between the two parties could bring an end to the parliamentary stalemate," Thomas said.

Both the speaker and the envoy discussed democracy, human rights and parliamentary functioning in both the countries.

Sircar illustrated his role to bring the main opposition Awami League to parliament.

"The speaker likes to see the opposition's return to the House," Thomassaid.

The AL has been boycotting the Jatiya Sangsad since June 26 protesting derogatory remarks of a state minister against Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina.

The AL gave the treasury bench a three-point precondition - categorical expunction of the state minister's remarks, his unreserved apology and the running of the House according to the constitution and the rules of procedure -- for a return to the Jatiya Sangsad.

The speaker told the ambassador that all the opposition demands were met and they should join parliament in the greater interest of the nation.

"Any problem can be resolved in the House through discussions. They get enough time to speak and will get so in future," Sircar told Thomas.

Praising the committee system in US parliament, Sircar said the committees of the Jatiya Sangsad were also functioning effectively to ensure the transparency and accountability of the government.

Mist blankets

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when the mist clears," said Samarendra Karmakar, deputy director of the office.

From the middle of this month, light to moderate or severe fog will prevail in the country until temperature rises, he said.

Heavy mist cloaked Dhaka and other parts of the country last year in a break with moderate cold and mild mist.

The lowest temperature of 12.3 degrees Celsius was recorded at Srimangal and the highest of 29.7 degrees in Chittagong yesterday. In Dhaka, the minimum temperature hit 16 degrees Celsius.

A weather forecast of the meteorological office yesterday said light to moderate fog might occur over river basins and northern to central regions early today.

Night temperature may remain nearly unchanged, it added.

Govt watch

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recently and their numbers went up greatly yesterday," Chowdhury's son and BNP lawmaker Mahi B Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday evening.

There were also a few vehicles of the 'agents' parked in front of the clinic round the clock, he said.

"They are even taking photographs and footage of patients and their companions at the entrance to our clinic."

"When we asked them about their identity they told us that they are from intelligence agencies and taking photographs as per the government instruction," Mahi added.

UP leaders

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elected UP leaders and local government experts who argued that the orders meant further restriction on the heavily-controlled local government bodies.

In the wake of criticism, the local government division issued another circular on November 20 in what the critics say was just a little alternation in texts without any change in meaning.

The circulars also triggered debates between the ruling BNP leaders and the ministry officials.

Sources at the ministry said the first circular was issued by officials without any consultation with Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and State Minister Ziaul Haq Zia.

They said the officials tried to convince the ministers of their action, but the ministers differed with them and directed them to cancel the circulars soon.

Despite the order, the officials took nine weeks to override the circulars.

The withdrawal of the circulars was greeted immediately by elected UP representatives and experts, who termed it as a positive attitude to the local government bodies.

They hoped that the government would amend the law to further empower the local government bodies, giving them greater latitude.

Talking to The Daily Star, Mohammad Ali Khan, chairman of Mannargaon Union Parishad in Sunamganj, expressed satisfaction over cancellation of the 'controversial' circulars.

"The withdrawal of the restriction is the removal of a real milestone around our neck," he said.

Developer swindles

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Earlier, Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) initiated a project to construct a 100-foot wide road which would extend from Tongi Diversion Road to Progoti Sarani, covering 237.64 acres of lowland, of which the state owns 37.64 acres.

The plan by the GULSL to build the lowland into 'Dhaka Satellite City' came after the DTCB declared the road project three months ago.

The authorities believe the GULSL has cashed in on the declaration in their overnight effort to cheat people.

A Daily Star investigation found that the GULSL has been enlisted as a member of REHAB, a platform for developers, three months ago. It has no land phone telephone number; it has a PABX line rented as many months ago.

When this correspondent visited the GULSL office on December 3 as a client at Baridhara that was rented only three months ago, one HM Kaisar claimed himself the managing director of the company. He introduced the company as a 'multi-national joint-venture company' comprising Bangladesh, India and Germany.

MM Sahabuddin, purchase director of the GULSL, said more than 200 of the 500 plots have been already been booked.

"People are eager to purchase any plot in Gulshan because it is a posh area and offers limited space for constructing houses. The GULSL is trying to fulfil people's dreams," Sahabuddin said while coaxing any prospective land buyer.

This correspondent asked for Rajuk's formal approval of the project, which is the client's initial requirement to justify the company's legal standing. The intention was to verify whether the company is cheating unsuspecting clients.

"On receiving the booking money of Tk 50,000 we will provide all required documents to you," Sahabuddin assured, further saying that selling plots is not Rajuk's concern.

After the conversation as a client, this correspondent introduced herself a correspondent of The Daily Star and asked for Rajuk's formal approval as a client's initial requirement to justify the company's legal

status. The intention was to verify whether the company is cheating on unsuspecting clients.

The GULSL officials were shocked to have known the identity and asked for questions in writing for their reply. The written questions were: Do you have Rajuk approval to implement the 'Dhaka Satellite City' project? If you do not have the Rajuk approval, do you think your project is going to deceive the clients? The project you have taken in the Gulshan low-lying area goes against the 'Wetland Protection Act 2000' and Dhaka Master Plan (DMP). What is your opinion on this issue?

But the GULSL did not reply till yesterday evening. Moreover, the correspondent tried several times to get their reply. HM Kaisar, who had introduced himself as Managing Director of the GULSL, said yesterday morning on telephone, "Journalists are nobody to ask these questions."

In fact, all developers including the GULSL are supposed to have their plans approved by Rajuk, a clause mandatory according to the Town Improvement Act.

The project grossly violates the master plan (Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan or DMDD) that has clearly earmarked the area as a flood retention point. It is also in violation of the Wetland Conservation Act, the official said.

The officials in the Public Works Department said this project is 'totally illegal' as they have no authorisation since this area is the one of the few remaining water-bodies of the city.

If the area were filled up, the city would face unprecedented water-logging and all roads and localities in and around Gulshan would be inundated if there is a slight rainfall.

Environmentalists also expressed deep concern over the project and said the area is naturally designed to retain storm sewage water in an area covering 40 square kilometres.

Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas told The Daily Star his ministry would propose drafting a law on private housing projects in January to check the mushrooming malpractice of the developers and the proposal would include up to five years in jail and fines for a violator.

End rivalry

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Despite opposition from one of the feuding presidium members, Hasina ordered the team to quicken its probe and asked it to report back to her for follow-up action.

Although a team headed by another presidium member, Sheikh Fazul Karim Selim, was formed over four months ago to investigate the Azad-Sengupta squabbles, it did not yield any result leading to an amiable solution.

After the meeting, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said presidents and general secretaries of the eight ward committees of its Metrokona Poursabha unit were suspended from the party and would be asked to explain why they filed a case against the central leadership.

The local disgruntled leaders filed the case after the central AL dissolved the ward committees.

The central leadership served show-cause notices on three other AL leaders, including Purbo Dhala thana unit President Abu Siddique, for vandalising the venue for the thana unit AL council on Friday.

To tighten its grip on its local bases, the party will also act tough against other leaders blamed for disturbances during announcement of a new AL committee in Laxmipur.

The stringent action came as the party was dogged by internal feuds over completing long-overdue councils at the grassroots units before embarking upon a broad anti-government movement.

World meet to end

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greater emphasis on local software development.

The government had declared ICT as a thrust sector four years ago and had aimed at software exports to the tune of \$5 billion by the year 2005. However, the annual export earnings from software sale hover around \$50 million. Bangladesh has played a critical role in the preparatory committee on the WSIS, which was held last month in Geneva, to help the world body arrive at a consensus.

The committee faced strong differences of opinion between the developed and the developing nations. Upbeat about the summit, Minister for Science and Information Communication Technology Abdul Moyeen Khan said Bangladesh will also campaign for using ICT as a tool for changing society as the technology is growing at a rapid pace.

Bangladesh believes that the global intellectual property rights (IPR) regime should recognise the needs of the developing countries.

Bangladesh will also advocate for wider use of the ICT in global trade so that developing countries get greater access to world markets.

The WSIS was first proposed in 1998, as the UN sees technology as a must for developing nations to help them educate citizens, make them healthier and escape poverty.

Shantu seeks US support for peace accord implementation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

President of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) Shantu Larma (Jotirindriyo Bodhipriyo) yesterday met the ambassador of the United States to seek support for full implementation of the peace accord.

Ambassador Harry K Thomas and Jotirindriyo, popularly known as Shantu Larma, at the US embassy in Dhaka exchanged views on three points -- present status of the peace accord, situation in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and development issues.

The meeting was part of the initiative to form a support group comprising members of the civil society, political leaders and representatives of the foreign missions for the implementation, said a top PCJSS leader wishing to remain unnamed.

The US ambassador said the peace accord signed 1997 should be implemented soon, sources in the PCJSS said.

PCJSS Vice-president Rupayan Dewan and Secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum Sanjeeb Dronng accompanied Larma.

Earlier, the PCJSS leaders met the representatives of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and British High Commission for their support.

They have also discussed their plan with human rights and social welfare activists and the indigenous people living in the capital and abroad.

The left-leaning 11-party alliance and Gono Forum may extend unqualified support to the PCJSS, the sources said.

Rail link snapped for 9 hrs as trains collide in Khulna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Rail link between Khulna and the northern region was disrupted for nine hours yesterday when two goods trains collided at Boro Bazar Railway Station in Jhenaidah.

An Ishwardi-bound goods train from Khulna rammed a Khulna-bound freight train from Kushtia at around 7:00am.

Four wagons of the Khulna-bound train derailed and the oil tanker of the other train, containing 50,000 litres of diesel reportedly worth Tk 9 lakh, splashed out. Engines of both trains were damaged severely, sources said.

Rail communications between the country's northern and southern region resumed at 4:00pm, the sources added.

"We sent a relief train at 10:00am to restore rail link," said Sirajul Islam, booking clerk of Khulna Railway Station's locomoshed.

Meanwhile, the locomaster and his assistant of the Khulna-bound train were suspended and a four-member committee, headed by the Bangladesh Railway's area operator of Khulna region, was also formed to probe the incident, railway officials at Dhaka said.

CHT braces

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implementation of the 1997 peace treaty, removal of the temporary army camp from the CHT region and appointment of a full indigenous minister in the CHT affairs ministry.

On the other hand, the local chapter of the four-party alliance has vowed to foil today's strike through a counter agitation programme.

The anti-peace treaty UPDF is also opposing the hartal, although it has not announced any counter programme. The UPDF has demanded resignation of PCJSS leader Shantu Larma as chairman of the CHT Regional Council.

Additional police and army have been deployed in the three hill districts of Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Bandarban to prevent any untoward situation.

The PCJSS organised a rally and brought out a procession yesterday in support of today's hartal while the four-party alliance organised an anti-hartal rally where local leaders Shantu Larma's removal from the post of chairman of the CHT regional council. No violence was reported.

District administrator Mahubur Rahman said security has been tightened to maintain law and order during today's strike.

8 robbers

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Super Mesbahannabi.

Police returned the fire and recovered a gun and three mobile phones as the robbers slipped away.

Police laid a siege to the area to capture the robbers till 7:00pm.

Charbata Union Parishad Chairman Jamal Uddin Gazi and locals said the robbers had turned Char Clerk into a safe haven.

Deputy Commissioner of Noakhali Mostafa Haider said the drive is aimed at catching the robbers, not at hurting anybody.

Local MP Mohammad Shahjahan, who was present during the raid, said the villagers have long been hostage to the forest robbers.

5 detained

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official of Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) last night.

"During preliminary investigation, we found the licence of the pistol not in order," said the official seeking anonymity. "We are quizzing them to know the motive behind the incident."

Civil aviation sources said the incident occurred at around 11:20am yesterday when Zahidul carrying the shotgun and accompanied by Sohel and Mohan stormed the domestic concourse, a restricted zone, of the airport.

Nurul Islam murder Verdict deferred till tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Judgement in the sensational Laxmipur BNP leader advocate Nurul Islam murder case has been postponed till tomorrow by the Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal, Chittagong.

The deferral of the verdict, earlier scheduled for today, was due to the court's decision to try Jasim Uddin, another accused in the case arrested from Laxmipur last week.

"Jasim will be produced before the court tomorrow (Monday) for examination under section 342 and then the tribunal judge is likely to announce the verdict the following day (Tuesday)," said Public Prosecutor (PP) Ahmed Kamrul Islam Chowdhury Sajjad yesterday.

Tribunal Judge M Hasan Imam earlier fixed December 8 for delivery of the verdict after arguments of both prosecution and defence lawyers ended on November 29.

A gang of armed men picked up Nurul Islam from his house in Laxmipur in the early hours of September 18, 2000. Later, his mutilated body was recovered from river Meghna.

Laxmipur Bar Council President AKM Tarekuddin Mahmud filed a murder case with Laxmipur Sadar Police Station.

After investigation, police pressed charges against 31 people on July 30 last year and the trial began in the Sessions Judge's Court of Laxmipur. The case was later transferred to the Speedy Trial Tribunal, Chittagong following the home ministry's directive on November 21, 2002.

Laxmipur Awami League leader Abu Taher, the prime suspect, is among 17 of the arrested accused.

US air strike

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the UN Special Representative to Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, said in a statement.

The children were just the latest civilians killed by US-led forces pursuing remnants of the Taliban regime, which was overthrown in late 2001, and allied Islamic militants.

In November, six civilians were killed in an air strike in the southern province of Paktika, and nearly three weeks before that eight members of the same family, including children, died in a similar attack in the province of Nuristan.</