

Writ petition filed against use of Jamaat's poll symbol

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A writ petition has been filed challenging the validity of using scales as an election symbol as they are the facsimile of the Supreme Court (SC) emblem that stands for justice.

After hearing the petition yesterday, a division bench of the High Court (HC) fixed today for ruling on the matter.

Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh uses scales as its election symbol.

The petitioners challenged the operation of rule 9 (1) of the Conduct of Election Rules 1972 by which the Election Commission (EC) had included scales as one of the election symbols.

Five lawyers of the SC-- Moksadul Islam, SM Fazlul Hoque, Asaduzzaman Siddique, Shamsul Alam and Mustafa Zaman Islam-- filed the petition as public interest litigation (PIL).

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CHITTAGONG AIRPORT MANAGEMENT HANDOVER

Thai Airways issues ultimatum

JASIM UDDIN KHAN

Thai Airways International issued an ultimatum to the Bangladesh government for clearing the impediments delaying the takeover of management of Shah Amanat International Airport by the company by June or to face legal action.

Thai Airways Acting President Somchainuk Engtrakul sent a letter to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab) last week venting the company's frustration after the authorities postponed the most recent date for the airport takeover, said a senior official of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism.

After a series of failed promises, Caab told Thai Airways that the company could start managing the airport under a 10-year contract from April 1, already two months behind the original schedule. But it failed again.

Thai Airways now feels that it has been too lenient in dealing with the issue and that it is time to pursue legal proceedings against Caab for breach of contract.

Somchainuk in his letter called on Caab to abide by the contract and said Thai Airways would like to start running the airport in the next few months.

The handover of management of Shah Amanat has been delayed by protests from Biman Bangladesh Airlines staff fearing loss of jobs.

Chittagong City Mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury, who is a vociferous opponent of the deal, alleged that there was a conspiracy behind the move to hand over the control to a foreign company.

He suggested that the airport would become a safe haven for drugs and arms smuggling once it was under Thai Airways management.

Accusing the government of signing a problematic contract he said its implementation could threaten national security.

Given the nature of politics in Bangladesh, Thai Airways executives doubted that the airport management could be handed over in June. They said January would be a more realistic expectation.

Running Shah Amanat Airport, under the deal signed on Dec 1 last

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4 killed in city on Monday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four people, including a four-year-old boy, were killed at Shyampur and Badda in the capital on Monday.

In Shyampur, unidentified criminals chopped and shot dead rice wholesaler Abdur Rob Mazlu, 48, also the vice president of Shyampur Bazar Baboshaye Samity and treasurer of Nama Shyampur Bazar Committee.

Physically impaired, Rob used to go to his shops in a particular rickshaw, his family members said.

While Rob was going to his shop like other days, four gunmen waylaid him at Palpara at around 10:00am.

"As the gunmen encircled the rickshaw, I ran for cover and after going a few yards, turned back and saw the criminals hacking Rob," Rob's brother Abdur Rahman quoted the rickshaw puller as saying.

"You have become a prominent arbitrator", the assailants shouted to Rob when they were chopping

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Residents of Dholaipar Bazar in the capital demonstrate with upturned empty pitchers on head protesting an acute lack of water supply in the area for a long time now, as all their complaints, appeals and lobbying went unheeded.



Urchins splash around in the fountain water at the city's Bijoy Sarani intersection yesterday, trying to get relief from the sweltering heat.

Huda demands probe into Beximco's loan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Minister for Communications Nazmul Huda yesterday demanded investigation into the scandal of Beximco group of companies' default on Tk 2,600 crore of loans.

The minister, in a statement, also demanded publication of the paper about the allegation of its taking loans violating rules and procedures of 20 different banks and financial organisations.

Demanding legal action and punishment by the Bangladesh Bank (BB), the minister said Beximco plundered the people's money and the BB should protect their interest.

The banks and financial institutions also failed to realise Tk 425 crore loans from the company, he added.

On the other hand, Tk 59 crore loans of the 26 companies of the group have been waived which left the banking sector vulnerable. He said the country's banking sector has become hostage to this company.

He also alleged the owner of the group Salman F Rahman started distributing black money in his constituency to gain popularity for the next elections.

ELECTORAL REFORMS

PM blasts AL for 'blocking' talks

UNB, Gopalpur, Tangail

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday blasted Awami League (AL) for blocking road to discussion on electoral reforms through raising the issue of Jamaat and trying to "disrupt" the next general election.

"Today they don't like Jamaat. But in 1996 Awami League and Jamaat unitedly waged movement against BNP government for caretaker government and embraced each other," she told a public meeting at Gopalpur Suti MV High School ground.

Besides, Khaleda pointed out that during the anti-autocracy movement, Awami League had betrayed with the movement and participated in the elections under the autocratic regime of Ershad along with Jamaat.

The prime minister termed Awami League's objection to Jamaat a sheer pretext for backtracking from the proposed dialogue, which itself she said was only a ploy on their part. She observed having failed to wage anti-government movement, the opposition has now raised the demand for reform of caretaker government that successfully conducted two general elections.

"If reforms are needed, why they did not do it while in power for five years," she questioned about the motives of her arch political rival. "The reform proposals are nothing but a pretext for creating unrest and disrupting the elections."

The prime minister said Awami League has understood well that they will not be able to win the elections. "So they are conspiring to destroy democracy and obstruct current pace of development and progress."

She alleged a deep-rooted conspiracy is on to push back the country socially and economically--and Awami League is "involved in the conspiracy".

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Govt killing time to rig polls: Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina has said the BNP-Jamaat coalition government is killing time over the issue of reforms in the caretaker government and the Election Commission (EC) with the motive of rigging the next general elections.

"This government is trying to hold elections as per its blueprint, sensing that the people would not vote for them (coalition) for their immense misdeeds," the Awami League president said, urging people to intensify the opposition movement to prevent any elections without electoral reforms.

Hasina was addressing a workers' rally on the May Day at Mirpur Stadium in the capital, organised by AL workers' front Jatiya Sramik League.

The AL chief said all citizens aged 18 or above should include their names in the voter list to ensure their voting right and exercise

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2 foreigners held for 'making fake dollar'

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) has arrested two foreign nationals from a city hotel in Uttara on charges of making fake dollars.

The two -- Igbo Ozbunia Trinisia, 28, of Nigeria and Zonathan Tagoi, 21, of Ghana -- were arrested from Hotel Uttara Inn on Sunday.

Rab also seized 118 bundles of white papers, machines and chemicals used for making dollars from their possession.

Acting on information from businessman Tanvir Ahmed of Chittagong, Rab raided the hotel and arrested them with the materials. Tanvir later filed a case with Uttara Police Station under Special Powers Act.

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1m immigrants skip work for US rally

AP, Los Angeles

More than 1 million mostly Hispanic immigrants and their supporters skipped work and took to the streets Monday, flexing their economic muscle in a nationwide boycott that succeeded in slowing or shutting many farms, factories, markets and restaurants.

From Los Angeles to Chicago, Houston to Miami, the "Day Without Immigrants" attracted widespread participation despite divisions among activists over whether a boycott would send the right message to Washington lawmakers considering sweeping immigration reform.

"We are the backbone of what America is, legal or illegal, it doesn't matter," said Melanie Lugo, who with her husband and their third-grade daughter joined a rally of some 75,000 in Denver. "We butter each other's bread. They need us as much as we need them."

Two major rallies in Los Angeles attracted an estimated 400,000, according to the mayor's office. Police in Chicago estimated 400,000 people marched through the downtown business district.

Tens of thousands more marched in New York, along with about 15,000 in Houston, 50,000 in San Jose and 30,000 more across Florida. Smaller rallies in cities from Pennsylvania and Connecticut to Arizona and South Dakota attracted hundreds not thousands.

In all, police departments in more than two dozens US cities contacted by The Associated Press gave crowd estimates that totalled about 1.1 million marchers.

The mood was jubilant. Marchers standing shoulder-to-shoulder filmed themselves on home video and families sang and chanted and danced in the streets wearing American flags as capes

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Hawa Bhaban allots Tk 2,000cr for polls

11-party alleges at roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hawa Bhaban, the unofficial hub of the ruling alliance, reportedly plans to invest Tk 2,000 crore to ensure a win in the next parliamentary election, alleged the left-leaning 11-party alliance yesterday.

"Under the direct control of this Bhaban, a centre-to-grassroots network of beneficiaries has been created. Through them ADP [Annual Development Programme] funds and special allocations are being doled out," claimed 11-party coordinator Dilip Barua in the introductory paper of a roundtable at Jatiya Press Club.

"This network of corruption is set to drown the upcoming election in an extreme filth of money power," said Dilip, also general secretary of Samyabadi Dal, on behalf of the 11-party alliance, a major component of the Awami League-led 14-party opposition combine.

The game of money is already evident in the huge expenditures for holding grassroots-level delegation meetings, conferences and public rallies, he told the roundtable titled "Politics and Election of Black Money,"

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Malnutrition the silent killer

Unicef report says it causes half the deaths of children

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Half of the total deaths of children every year in Bangladesh is caused by malnutrition, a Unicef report said yesterday.

The Unicef's worldwide report titled "Progress for Children: A report Card on Nutrition" also reveals that about 80 lakh children are underweight in the country.

Dr Harriet Torless, chief of Unicef's Nutrition programme presented the report at James P Grant conference room at Unicef country office at Minto Road in the city.

According to the report, South Asian children are mostly undernourished and they contribute 46 per cent to the global list. However, Bangladesh scored top among the South Asian countries with 48 per cent malnutrition affected children.

The report says some 56 lakh children die of malnutrition every year in the developing countries and 26 per cent children in these countries are underweight.

Showing that between 1990 and

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27 murdered in April, says Odhikar report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-seven people were killed by the law enforcement agencies across the country last month, a report of rights agency Odhikar said yesterday.

Among them, 20 people were killed by police and seven by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab). Of the 27

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35 Hindus slain in Kashmir carnage

India sends more troops to hunt killers

REUTERS, Jammu

India rushed hundreds of extra troops to hunt for Kashmiri militants in the remote mountains of Kashmir yesterday, after 35 Hindus were killed over two days in one of the worst massacres in the region in years.

The troop deployment began as a general strike -- called to protest against the killings -- shut down the predominantly Hindu Jammu region of Indian Kashmir, where some half a million soldiers and policemen are deployed.

Suspected militants shot dead 22 Hindus in two villages in the mountains of Doda district, 170 km north-east of Jammu, Kashmir's winter capital, early on Monday.

On the same day, nine bullet-riddled bodies of Hindus were found in the neighbouring district of Udhampur. Four more bodies had been found in the same area on Sunday.

"We are definitely augmenting troop levels to prevent easier movement of militants in these areas," a senior police officer told Reuters.

An Islamist revolt against Indian rule in the disputed region -- claimed both by India and Pakistan and ruled by them in parts -- has killed more than 45,000 people since 1989.

The attacks came as India and Pakistan launched a fresh round of discussions to boost links between the two parts of Kashmir under their control, including opening of up more crossing points and movement of goods across the heavily-militarised frontier.

Separately, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was due to kick off talks on Wednesday with Kashmir's main political separatist alliance, the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, to find a way to resolve the decades-old conflict in the region.

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Amini asked to appear in court for threatening Proshika chief

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday directed lawmaker Maulana Fazlul Haque Amini, chairman of a faction of Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), to appear before it on June 11 in connection with threatening Proshika President Qazi Faruque Ahmed.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Shafique Anwar also directed the Proshika president, complainant of the case, to appear before it on that day as it will close cross-examination of witnesses.

The court gave the direction as none of them appeared before the court yesterday. Earlier on April 4, the same court directed the two to appear before it.

Faruque's defence lawyers submitted a petition seeking time as their client went abroad for

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