

Lawyers concerned over mass arrest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sammito Ainjibi Samanny Parishad yesterday expressed deep concern over the mass arrest of the opposition leaders, activists and NGO officials ahead of the grand rally of 14-party opposition combine which is scheduled to be held in the city today.

At a press conference at the auditorium of Supreme Court Bar Association, the parishad leaders demanded release of the opposition leaders and activists arrested on the basis of false cases and the NGO officials who were shown arrested for alleged theft and old cases.

Advocate Abdul Baset Majumder, former president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, said the government is violating a High Court order against the mass arrests.

He said the parishad will extend its support to the grand rally.

In a written speech parishad's Joint Convenor Barrister Shafiq Ahmed said it is a matter of deep concern that the BNP-Jamaat alliance is using law enforcers to foil the peaceful programme of the opposition parties and harassing women activists.

Demanding punishment to police officers and those who directed attacks on the opposition rallies, he said the alliance government has put the law enforcers against the countrymen by appointing them on political considerations.

The parishad leaders said police attacks on the opposition leaders and activists during the rallies are against humanity that requires proper investigation and punishment.

They said Justice KM Hasan, the probable chief of the next caretaker government, has once again proved that he is a man of BNP.

His visit to several shrines in Comilla on Saturday along with Prof SMA Faiz, vice-chancellor of Dhaka University, and Jahangir Ahmed, Comilla district general secretary of BNP, indicates that he is still a BNP supporter and will be so in future, said Barrister Shafiq.

Kawsar-uz-Zaman Bappi, known for his Hawa Bhaban connections, was also seen offering feteiha at one of the shrines when Justice Hasan was present there, he added.

Asked on the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) remarks that previous involvement of KM Hasan with BNP will not have any impact on his next course of

action during the caretaker government, Barrister Shafiq said NDI only knew his past, not his present.

However, the NDI also raised questions over the extension of the ages of the High Court judges "which has always been a concern for the lawyers' community, as appointment on political considerations runs the risks of politicising the judiciary," he added.

Barrister Shafiq also alleged that the Election Commission is still 'helpless and dependent' on the executive.

The lawyers' body demanded appointment of the chief of the caretaker government and its other advisers on the basis of consensus among all the political parties.

It also demanded appointment of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and other election commissioners in the same way.

In this context, the parishad demanded resignation of the present CEC and other election commissioners from their posts.

Advocate Ozaer Faruk, Advocate Subrata Chowdhury and former law minister Abdul Matin Khasru were present at the press conference.

BANK ROBBERY Six held in Ctg

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in a four-hour drive on Saturday arrested six robbers involved in the robbery at the Artillery Centre Branch of Agrani Bank at Halishahar Housing Estate in the port city on Wednesday.

The arrestees were Md Kutub Uddin, 28, Abdur Razzak, 38, Md Nurul Absar, 45, Nur Islam, 35, Md Nuruzzaman, 40, and Md Selim, 35.

Acting on a tip off, a team of Rab-7 raided the Olonkar Intersection area at 5:30pm on Saturday and arrested Selim. The team then arrested Razzak Khan from his residence at Pathanpara area under Pahartali Police Station at 7:30pm and Afsar and Nurul from Sagarika area at around 8:45pm. According to their information, Rab members raided Sagarika Community Centre and held Kutub and Nuruzzaman at around 9:15 pm.

During primary interrogation, the arrestees confessed their involvement in the robbery where a group of armed robbers looted Tk eight lakh, injuring two cashiers.

They also admitted that after the robbery they all had a meeting at Pahartali Pukurpar area where the booty was distributed.

Rab-7 official Mizanur Rahman said the arrestees informed they had around Tk three lakh with them and Safi and Karim Khan, other members of the gang, have the rest of the sum. However, Safi and Karim are yet to be arrested. Kutub, Razzak and Nuruzzaman were the gang leaders, Mizanur added.

The three gang leaders, however, told journalists that Safi, a service holder of Imam Garments at city's Olonkar area, was the mastermind of the robbery.

Earlier, Pahartali PS arrested six suspects in connection with the robbery.

Three killed in road accidents

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkhira

Three people were killed and eight others injured in separate road accidents in Sathkhira yesterday.

The victims were identified as Magfur Rahman, 30, son of Hakim Sardar of village Baladanga, Nimai Chandra Nag, 60, son of Balai Chandra Nag of village Agardari and Nurul Amin, 60, son of Korban Ali of village Baichana under Sadar upazila.

Quoting local people police said Magfur Rahman and Nimai Chandra Nag were killed on the spot when a Sathkhira-bound bus knocked an auto-rickshaw at Bathia intersection at Sadar upazila on Sathkhira-Jessore highway yesterday afternoon. Five people were injured in the accident who were admitted to Sathkhira Sadar Hospital.

Meanwhile, one Nurul Amin died when a Sathkhira-bound bus knocked the motor bike he was riding on at Alipur football ground area on Sathkhira- Kaligonj road yesterday morning. His fellow rider Abul Hossain was injured.

In another incident, two people were injured when they were knocked by a private car while crossing the road at Jagannathpur on Sathkhira-Assassuri road at about 11:00am yesterday.

The injured were admitted to Sathkhira Sadar Hospital.

Obituary

BSS, Narail

Motiuur Rahman Badsha, a valiant freedom fighter and former headmaster of Lahuria High School, died after prolonged illness at his residence here yesterday at the age of 70.

He was buried with state honour after a namaz-e-janaza held on the premises of the district Shilpakala Academy.

Officials of the district administration, members of the district Muktiyoddha Command Council and elite of the town attended the janaza.

Death anniversary



The 35th death anniversary of Shaheed Engineer Nazrul Islam, a freedom fighter, will be observed today, says a press release.

During the Liberation War, he conducted an operation to blow up five power stations in Dhaka. He was also an adviser to the Bangladesh government in 1971.

The government renamed Hatkhola Road as Shaheed Engineer Nazrul Islam Road in 1972 and a girls' school was established at his home district Shariatpur in his memory.

On the occasion of his death anniversary, Qurankhwani and a milad mahfil will be held at ACE at 204A, Tejaqon Industrial Area.



Awami League President Sheikh Hasina speaks at the AL Central Working Committee meeting at its Dhanmondi office in the city yesterday.

ROUNDTABLE ON CLIMATE CHANGE 'Raise adaptive capacity in agri production'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh needs to increase adaptive capacity in agricultural production, revise water management policy and invent appropriate technology in order to attain development goals in the face of rapid climate change, said speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

Protection of the country from the negative effects of climate change requires strong political commitment, huge investment in agricultural research and human resources, and spread of appropriate technology to the remote areas, they observed.

The roundtable titled 'Climate Change and Bangladesh: Serious Crisis Looms' organised by Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP) was held at National Press Club in the city.

Speaking on the magnitude of climate change and its effects on the country, Executive Director of BUP Ahsan Uddin Ahmed said

average temperature of Bangladesh may increase by 1 to 1.4 degree Celsius by 2030 and 2050.

Average rainfall during the rainy season may increase by five to ten per cent and it will decrease by 2 to 5 per cent during the dry season by 2030 and 2050, he added citing some studies.

Level of seawater in the coastal areas is likely to increase by 14 to 32 centimetres by the same period that will cause inundation of the coastal districts, he said.

If the current trend of climate change continues, frequency of heavy floods will increase, north-western region will face draughts, salinity in the coastal areas will increase and rate of river erosion will multiply, he added.

All these factors will have negative effects on our agriculture and entire population and eventually the whole nation will suffer from food insecurity, he added.

Speaking at the programme, Dr

Zahurul Karim of Krishi O Khaddo Nirapotta Parishad said if temperature increases by one degree, corresponding decrease in country's total cereal production will be 46 per cent.

He also warned that due to climate change new diseases in human and animal bodies may spread.

Prof K B Sajjadur Rashid of Dhaka University said despite Bangladesh's reputation for its disaster management capacity, it will not be able to face disasters that affect livelihoods gradually over the decades.

Emphasising the need for in-depth study on the effects of climate change, Chairman of BUP Dr Qazi Khaliquzzaman said Bangladesh does not have enough data and in-depth study on the possible effects of climate change on its economy.

Land grabber chokes historic twin temples

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The department concerned only put up some signboards in April this year proclaiming the temples as a property of the Archaeological Department.

Meanwhile, Ismail Hossain, a businessman who claimed himself a "supporter" of ruling BNP, and two other families grabbed a piece of land on the site through forged documents and have been residing there since 1995.

They recently felled a number of trees on the premises and sold them, sources said.

Rowshan Ara Akhtar, assistant keeper of Mymensingh Museum, admitted to The Daily Star that Ismail and the two families are residing on the archaeological site illegally. However, no notice has been served yet against them, she said.

Ismail Hossain claimed that he bought 107 decimal land with a large pond in front of the temples from one Maya Rani, wife of Madhusudan Chakraborti, in 1995 after verifying all papers as valid.

The twin temples were founded by the mother of Shashikanta Acharya Chowdhury, a zamindar of Muktagachha, in 1820. After the partition in 1947, the Hindus of

Muktagachha formed a committee to take care of the temples.

However, after buying the area, Ismail started fish farming in the pond. Hindus alleged that they were barred from using the pond for bathing or immersing idols, which created a tense situation in the area in 2000.

Following the incident, Muktagachha police filed a case and a court ordered to return the land to the temple authority.

However, upon Ismail's prayer for withdrawing the order, a Mymensingh court withdrew the order on August 10 and ordered to hand over the land to him.

The temple authority filed an appeal with the District Judge Court on August 24. The court accepted the appeal and fixed September 5 for hearing.

The court fixed November 6 for the next hearing, said Abani Kumar Saha, secretary of the temple, who has been holding the post for about 30 years.

Sources alleged that after the Receiver Order went vacant on August 10, Ismail sold out some century-old trees worth about Tk 3 lakh within a week.

Abani Saha told The Daily Star

that they had challenged in the court Maya Rani's claim of ownership over the temple property 20 years ago as she could not have inherited the property of Taraknath Chakraborti, her uncle and a former shebak (caretaker) of the temple.

A shebak cannot hand over the land to his niece, explained Amarendra Kumar Mondal, a local businessman. Moreover, the land property of a religious institution cannot be sold, he argued.

Sources also alleged that the leasing time for the land lapsed two years ago but Ismail and his family have still been residing there without valid papers.

Temple authorities said the local Archaeological Department office assured them of taking necessary steps. "If our demand is not met before this year's Durga puja, we will go for tougher programmes to regain the temple's land," they warned.

Talking to The Daily Star, Ismail denied all the allegations brought against him. He said he took lease of the land from the local Land Office with permission from the local municipality.



Photojournalists of print and electronic media stage a sit-in in front of Barisal Aswani Kumar Hall protesting misbehaviour of the security forces during the prime minister's visit to Barisal.

479 test tube babies born in country

BSS, Dhaka

The number of test tube babies is on the rise in the country with specialists estimating the figure to stand at 2500 by 2015.

Sources of the concerned infertility treatment centres said at least 479 test tube babies were so far born in the country since 1999 through artificial fertilisation and sperm injection process.

Among the born babies, the sources said, 446 were born at three private infertility treatment centres and 33 at various clinics in the capital.

The privately owned centres that provide treatment for infertility in the capital are Infertility Care and Research Centre (ICRC), Harvest Infertility Care Limited (HICL) and Centre for Assisted Reproduction (CARE).

Talking to BSS about the test-tube baby system specialists said the fertilisation treatment technically called as In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) is initiated by collecting egg from female partner and sperm from ejaculated semen or testicular biopsy of male partner.



Temperature may fall

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at a few places over Khulna, Barisal, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions and at one or two places over Rajshahi and Dhaka divisions in the next 12 hours as of 6:00pm today.

Day temperature may fall slightly over the country, Met Office said in a forecast.

Yesterday's highest temperature of 34.6 degree Celsius was recorded at Chittagong and Jessore and the lowest of 23.6 degrees at Rangamati.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:59pm and rises at 5:46am tomorrow.

The highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

Table with 4 columns: City/Town, Temperature in Celsius (Max, Min), Humidity in percentage (Morning, Evening). Rows include Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet, Cox's Bazar.

ACC lacks transparency completely

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but also took all the measures to keep it under control and make it ineffective, said the speakers at the roundtable on 'The ACC: How it can be made effective'.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and Reporters Against Corruption (RAC) jointly organised the roundtable at the Jatiya Press Club in the capital, where TIB's Executive Director Iftekhazuraman read the keynote paper.

Iftekhazuraman in his paper identified lack of political commitment, visionary leadership, accountability mechanism and focus and priority, and government's control of its operational independence and non-cooperation of its commissioners as the reasons for its ineffectiveness.

To make the commission effective and credible, he recommended a degree of overall independence of the commission, its control over its financial resources, authority in key operational and management decisions, leadership capacity of the commissioners, creating public trust in the commission, and making it accountable.

Brushing aside several allega-

tions brought by speakers against the government for making the ACC ineffective, Maniruzzaman said, "The problem is within the commission."

Many things had happened in violation of the rules and have been happening without knowledge of one or more commissioners, the ACC commissioner said.

On another commissioner's claim that the ACC had sent the rules to the Cabinet Division for its nod, he said, "The draft of the rules is still lying with the Commission."

He also criticised the government for illegally sending the former Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) officials on deputation to the Commission without the knowledge of the commissioners.

The government wanted to show its zeal for curbing corruption by formulating the law, but it has enacted the law in such a way that the commission cannot work on its own, former Supreme Court Justice Gholam Rabbani said.

TIB trustee and former bureaucrat Hafiz Uddin, who moderated the discussion, said the Commission would not be effective without political commitment. He criticised the ACC for not having any systematic pursuing of

accountability and suggested transparency.

Describing the laws formed for ACC as against the spirit of the commission, former law minister Abdul Matin Khasru said, "The government has tied the hands of the commission by forming contradictory and faulty laws to keep it under control."

Replying to a question, Prof Miah admitted that around 75 to 80 cases that ACC has filed remain pending with the court due to the lack of a rule.

Activities pursued so far concerning the cases are equivalent to corruption itself as money has been spent for their inquiries, but those are becoming worthless due to the lack of rules.

The laws and the activities of the commission indicate it is functioning more like the other government offices instead of being an independent one, Prof Abu Ahmed said. Firoz Ahmed, a representative of Asian Development Bank that advocated for the Commission, also expressed concern about the ineffectiveness of the ACC.

He criticised the screening process of the former Bureau of Anti-Corruption officials and deputising them back to ACC.

BSC afloat officers threaten to resign en masse

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

All the afloat officers of Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC) yesterday threatened to resign en masse, suspending operation of BSC ships in different routes on September 22.

The afloat officers, on voyages in BSC ships, will observe indefinite work abstention and resign en masse if their demand for 55 per cent rise in their salaries is not implemented by September 21.

Bangladesh Merchant Marine Officers' Association in a letter to the BSC General Manager (shipping personnel) yesterday reiterated the afloat officers' demand and expressed rigidity on the pre-scheduled agitation programme.

The Association sources said though the 30 per cent rise in salaries of the BSC shore officials came into effect from July 1, the promised 55 per cent rise in the salaries of the afloat officials has not become effective yet.

They said the regulations and type of jobs of afloat officials were completely different from those of the shore officials.

Moreover, the salary of BSC marine officers was at best one fourth of those serving in foreign vessels.

It also forced BSC to give contractual appointment to old and inefficient officials on higher salaries. As such responding to the demands of afloat officials, BSC in a meeting of board of directors early this year decided to provide them with 55 per cent rise in salaries, which was also approved in another meeting of the same board of directors on August 2.

But, the decision has not been implemented due to lack of sincerity and dilly-dally by the concerned authority of BSC, alleged the Marine Officers' Association leaders.

Hasina

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with the help of a loyal caretaker government. No party activist can be the chief of a caretaker government as per the constitution," she said.

She was addressing the opening session of the 30th national conference of Bangladesh Railway Sramik League at Kamlapur Railway Station.

Referring to the prime minister's remark that Awami League wants to violate the constitution, Hasina urged Khaleda to properly go through the constitution and then make comments on it.

"Read the constitution properly and then make comments. The constitution has clearly said no party activist can be the chief of a caretaker government. The PM should know one thing that people won't accept KM Hasan as caretaker chief," she said.

The opposition leader urged the World Bank to take account of its money this BNP-Jamaat coalition government has so far spent on projects taken in the name of poverty alleviation.

"The World Bank should ask the government to give account of all the money spent on poverty alleviation projects. Has this alliance government been able to reduce poverty despite spending crores of taka? They (alliance leaders) know one thing better - looting public money," Hasina said.

Hasina alleged that the BNP-Jamaat government has destroyed all the sectors, including railway, through corruption.

"Bangladesh Railway has been ruined like all other sectors. A good number of its routes have been closed during the last five years of this government as ministers, MPs and BNP leaders have grabbed huge railway property. And now they have got unnerved as the election inches closer," she said.

Sensing a debacle in the next general election, the Khaleda-Nizam government is out to stage another election of vote rigging through the appointment of a loyal caretaker government chief, Hasina alleged.

Ershad gets fourth acquittal in a month

FROM PAGE 1

The court in its verdict also blasted the investigation officer of the case for irregularities in filing and investigating the case filed against Ershad in connection with allotment of plots to 49 people including five erstwhile ministers, while he was in power.

"An inquiry should have been launched before the filing of the case, Ershad was nobody to the state when the case was filed, but the section of the anti-corruption law which was used to file the case only allows filing of cases against officials of the government," the court said adding, "The investigation officer did not even take permission from the Prime Minister's Office for bringing the charges against Ershad."

The case was filed on April 22, 1991, during the previous BNP government, accusing Ershad of violating government and Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) provisions by directing the authorities to allot plots in Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara and Uttara residential areas during 1988-1990.

The court framed charges against him on March 9, 1992 and recorded statements of only four prosecution witness since the beginning of the trial on April 23,

1998, but could not complete hearing of the case as the prosecution and defence lawyers sought time on 34 occasions on different excuses since August 2, 2002.

The court however completed the hearing of the case on August 13 this year as none of the lawyers sought any more time.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Additional Public Prosecutor Golam Mostafa Khan said on receiving the certified copy of the verdict and after consultation with the public prosecutor he will decide whether he will appeal against it.

Ershad's counsel Sheikh Mohammad Sirajul Islam said the case had no merit and the government lawyers also completely failed to prove the merit.

Ershad, who had been in jail for five years during the tenure of the previous BNP government, was released on bail in cases one after another based on a political understanding with the Awami League (AL) government in exchange for his support to AL in forming a government in 1996. But he could not contest in the parliamentary election in 2001 as he had been convicted in a graft case.

In the politics of expanding electoral alliances, Ershad-led JP, the second largest opposition in the parliament, has become a vital

component and BNP's desperate move to bring JP on its side triggered a storm of criticisms at home and abroad.

The cases pending against Ershad picked up speed since BNP's Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman and State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar in a surprise move on July 27 had met Ershad in his residence and requested him to join the ruling alliance.

As a condition for joining the BNP-led alliance, Ershad demanded that the pending cases against him be dropped.

Ershad was acquitted of charges in an income tax case on August 17 and following the verdict many political analysts observed that the verdict paved the way for Ershad joining the ruling alliance.

After a week on August 24, the court acquitted Ershad of charges in two other graft cases in connection with illegally awarding a contract to Scimitar Oils for drilling and exploring the Haripur oil field in 1987, and for purchasing two ships from Pakistan during 1988-1991.

But it decided to frame charges today and on next Wednesday against five other accused in the two cases, including former ministers Anwar Hossain Manju and Sheikh Shahidul Islam.

Meanwhile, hearing of a case against Ershad in connection with gold smuggling will be held on September 20 and hearing of two other graft cases against him will be held on September 27.

GRAFT CHARGES Mohammad Sajjad Hossain, an official of the now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac), filed the case against Ershad with Mottijheel police station on April 22, 1991. The investigation officer (IO) of the case pressed charges against Ershad and Rahamat Ullah on December 9 the same year.

The prosecution claimed that former president Ershad directed the authorities concerned to allot plots in Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara and Uttara residential areas to 49 people during 1988-1990, violating government and Rajuk provisions.

Former ministers also JP leaders Kazi Zafar Ahmed, ABM Ruhul Amin Hawlader and Major General (retd) Golam Dastagir were among the 49 people who were allotted plots.

The court framed charges against Ershad and acquitted erstwhile Rajuk chairman Rahamat Ullah on March 9, 1992 as no conclusive evidence was found against him.