

RIFT IN GONOFORUM  
No problems within party now: Dr Kamal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gonoforum president Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday claimed that the party has settled its internal disputes and there is no problems within the party at the moment.

“There is no misunderstanding and division in Gonoforum. Leaders and workers of Gonoforum will conduct party activities together,” he told a press conference at his residence in the capital.

Asked about the split of Gonoforum, Dr Kamal, one of the architects of the country’s constitution, said nothing like that happened in the party.

He said top leaders of Gonoforum will sit in a meeting on January 9 where the date of the party’s next council will be decided.

“At present there is an uneasy political situation in the country. We will work taking people with us against bribery and corruption,” he added.

Mostafa Mohsin Montu, a member of the convening committee of Gonoforum, read out a written statement on behalf of Dr Kamal.

In response to a question whether the party will see new leadership, Dr Kamal

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PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

A big pile of rods has remained on a road at Chankharpul for 20-25 days, as Dhaka South City Corporation is constructing M Aziz Complex there. Authorities frequently auction off construction materials kept on roads by businesses. Now the question is, will they do so for their own materials? The photo was taken yesterday.

‘Remain alert, to protect sculptures’

DMP commissioner directs officers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Against the backdrop of two sculptures being vandalised in Kushtia recently, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner (DMP) Shafiqul Islam yesterday asked field-level police personnel to remain alert to foil any attempt to damage sculptures in the city.

He ordered deployment of plainclothes police members at all sculpture sites and bringing the areas under CCTV camera surveillance, if necessary.

Shafiqul was speaking at a monthly crime conference at Rajarbagh Police lines auditorium, where officers of different ranks participated.

“The commissioner told us the situation may take a serious turn in at district level if we cannot protect the city’s sculptures. So, we are on high alert,” said an officer who was present in the conference.

Mamunur Rashid, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, said, “We increased our surveillance with mobile patrol teams and have taken other steps to ensure security for the sculptures in our jurisdiction.”

Dhaka University, where there are many sculptures, falls under the station’s jurisdiction area.

On Thursday, unidentified miscreants vandalised a statue of British revolutionary Bagha Jatin on Kaya College premises in Kushtia’s Kumarkhali.

On December 5, an under-construction sculpture of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was vandalised in the district town. The attacks came at a time when Awami League and several Islamist groups are at loggerheads over setting up sculptures.

At the conference, the DMP commissioner also urged personnel to perform duties with caution and maintain safety rules.

CUMILLA TOWN HALL’S HERITAGE SITE STATUS

Public hearing or political gathering?

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

The public hearing over the acquisition of century-old Birchandra Ganapathagar and Nagar Milonayton (the town hall) in Cumilla as a heritage property was scheduled to start at 11:30am yesterday.

For the last couple of months, activists and residents have been protesting a move to demolish the historic town hall to construct a “new and modern establishment” there. And yesterday, people of the town were supposed to gather there and express their opinions regarding the matter.

However, since 9am, supporters of Cumilla-6 lawmaker AKM Bahauddin Bahar started to throng the town hall premises in droves in support of the lawmaker and demolition of the historic establishment.

Bahar is an adviser to the town hall committee and one of the initiators of the move to construct a “new and modern” town hall that includes auditorium, multi-storey building, VIP lounge, car parking and other facilities.

By the time it was 11am, supporters of the lawmaker, holding banners and shouting slogans, had pretty much occupied the premises, leaving little to no room for others, alleged locals.

The roads to Kandirpaar area, where this centre for educational, cultural, intellectual and socio-political activities in Cumilla city stands tall on a sprawling 3.4 acres of land, were either blocked by law enforcers or supporters of the lawmaker.

The hearing lasted for about two hours. Amid the commotion, the lawmaker took the stage to give the concluding speech.

“The construction of town hall building started in 1933 and completed in 1935. It was constructed with the donation of Cumilla’s people. So, the development of the town hall will also be decided by the people of Cumilla,” he said.

He then spoke in favour of demolishing the town hall and constructing a “modern” one. “Those who do not want a new town hall are against development,” he added.

Needless to say, the audience hailed his decision.

The hearing was presided over by Md Abdul Mannan Ilyus, additional secretary to the cultural affairs ministry. Hannan Mia, director general of the archaeology department, Abul Fazal Mir, deputy commissioner of Cumilla, and other government officials were also present at the event.

The lawmaker could not be contacted for comments despite repeated attempts.

‘NEW, MODERN TOWN HALL’  
The decision to demolish the town hall

to make way for a “new and modern” one was taken following the request of the Cumilla-6 lawmaker, according to officials of the district administration.

Mentionable, there is also a four-storey market on the property, which is owned by him.

The Public Works Department (PWD) has already drafted a design proposal for the new establishment. PWD sent the proposal to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs for approval. As the place has cultural and historical significance, it needs approval from the ministry in this regard, said officials concerned.

The lawmaker earlier sent a letter to the ministry and in response, the ministry asked PWD to draft a design proposal for the new establishment.

On September 2, Bahar held a views-exchange meeting at the DC’s office on design proposal and demolishing the structure, confirmed DC Abul Fazal Mir.

**PROTEST CONTINUES**

This plan to “modernise” the town hall meanwhile has been met with staunch criticism from cultural activists, civil society members and locals.

Dr Ataur Rahman, regional director of Chattogram and Sylhet divisions of the Department of Archeology, said Cumilla Town Hall is a heritage site and must be protected.

Reserved seat lawmaker Anjum Sultana Sima, a resident of Cumilla, alleged that the lawmaker is trying to demolish the town hall for business purposes.

“It should be renovated not demolished. Why do we need a public hearing for acquisition of the town hall as a heritage property? It was just for a show,” she added.

This correspondent also spoke to city planners and archaeologists who said the structure must be preserved and maintained properly instead of being demolished.

Freedom fighter and eminent cultural personality Nasiruddin Yousuff echoed the same. “Only the followers of the lawmakers spoke at the hearing. We also wrote to the additional secretary of the cultural ministry to cancel it,” he added.

Asked, Hannan Mia, director general of the archeology department, said, “The cultural affairs ministry will take the decision about Cumilla Town Hall keeping in mind the public interest.”

Meanwhile, Tarikur Rahman Jewel, general secretary of Cumilla Sadar upazila unit of Awami league, said, “We demand a modern and beautiful town hall building and our MP (Bahar) is going to accomplish that.”

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Bangladesh improves in tobacco tax index

Progga says cigarette prices still far below international standards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has significantly improved its score on cigarette taxation policy, from 0.87 in 2014 to 2.38 in 2018, according to a new global index.

However, improvements are needed in the tax structure and prices of cigarettes, the country’s anti-tobacco group Knowledge for Progress (Progga) said in a release yesterday.

Bangladesh got an overall score of 2.38 out of 5 possible points, which is slightly higher than the global average (2.07), says the first edition of “Cigarette Tax Scorecard”, released by Tobacconomics, a US-based research initiative.

Australia and New Zealand were jointly top in the index, with a score of 4.63.

The index assessed the performance of cigarette tax policies in over 170 countries based on international best practices using data from World Health Organization from 2014-2018.

Nearly half the countries scored less than two. There has been little improvement between 2014 and 2018; the global average score rose only slightly, from 1.85 in 2014 to 2.07 in 2018.

The current cigarette prices and tax structure in Bangladesh are far below the standard of international best practices, Progga said.

“The complex tiered cigarette tax structure in Bangladesh

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Another bomb found at site of Dhaka airport’s third terminal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another 250kg bomb was found buried at the construction site of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport’s 3rd terminal in the capital yesterday.

According to Inter Services Public Relations, Bangladesh Air Force recovered the bomb around 10:50am. The bomb disposal unit of Bangabandhu Base defused it on the spot, the ISPR said in a press release.

Later, it was taken for dismantling in a safe place with necessary precautions.

Bomb experts believe it was dropped sometime during the Liberation War in 1971, it said.

Earlier on December 9 and 14, workers found two bombs about three metres deep, when they were excavating for construction work of the third terminal.



A long queue of patient visitors in front of the Bangladesh National Museum in the capital’s Shahbagh on Friday afternoon shows it is not easy to keep Dhaka residents at home on a weekend afternoon, pandemic or not. Encouragingly, though, most are wearing masks.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



As winter sets in even in urban areas, cold-related illnesses are also on the rise. The queue of patients at Bangladesh Shishu Hospital bears reminded that children are one of the most vulnerable groups to these ailments. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Child found dead in Dhaka; four held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A seven-year-old boy was found dead at a 14-storey building in the capital’s Mirpur-10 yesterday, two days after he went missing from Mirpur-6 area from near his residence.

Mother of the boy – Shamnur Hossain – filed a murder case with Mirpur Model Police Station, accusing five persons, said Sub-inspector Tamim Rahman of the police station.

Meanwhile, law enforcers in separate drives arrested four accused in connection with the abduction and murder. They are – Nur Alam Proloy, Yusuf Newaz, Khairul Islam and Mahfuzur Rahman.

Shamnur had been missing since Thursday evening while he was playing near his house, said the SI, adding, on that very night his mother Roksana got a call from an unknown person who demanded Tk 5 lakh as ransom for his release.

Roksana gave Tk 60,000 to the miscreants through a mobile money transfer service in several phases, the SI said.

Acting on a tip-off, police recovered the body from a staircase of the building and sent it to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College for autopsy.

GETTING SHOW-CAUSE NOTICE FROM BNP  
I felt insulted: Hafiz

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Vice Chairman Maj (ret’d) Hafizuddin Ahmed yesterday said he felt insulted as the party’s senior joint secretary general issued a show cause notice to him in an “attacking language” violating courtesy and protocol.

He claimed that the allegations mentioned in the notice were false.

Hafiz, a noted freedom fighter, told a press conference at his Banani residence that he became so aggrieved that he decided to quit the party, but refrained from doing so upon request from party leaders and activists.

Before the press conference, Hafiz submitted a five-page reply to the notice to BNP’s Nayapaltna central office. He demanded that his reply be presented at the party standing committee meeting.

“As a war-wounded and gallantry award recipient freedom fighter, I am shocked and saddened to receive a show-cause notice with untrue allegations in a disrespectful language on Martyred Intellectuals Day in the month of victory,” he said, adding, “If I am found guilty, I am ready to accept any punishment as I always respect the party leadership.”

He said Rizvi presented some wrong information and spelt his name wrong in the notice. The BNP leader also questioned justification of such a notice to a party vice chairman, who has been holding the post for 22 years, from a senior joint secretary general.

On December 14, BNP sent the show cause notice, signed by Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, to Hafizuddin Ahmed for allegedly violating party discipline.

The same day, the party also served a show-cause letter on its vice chairman and journalist leader Shawkat Mahmud for violating party discipline by staging a sudden demonstration in Dhaka.

Hafiz said, “I want to see if my explanation is satisfactory to them [leaders], and then I will take the next decision.” He said 11 allegations were brought against him and he defended each one.