

Raushan's counsel refutes abetment charge

Sharfuddin Khan Mukul, defence counsel of Begum Raushan Ershad, yesterday stated before the Special Judge's Court that his client is not guilty of the charges brought against her, reports BSS.

"The prosecution has failed to prove beyond all shadow of doubt" that the former First Lady had abetted her husband former President H M Ershad and others in any illegal action or criminal activities, the counsel claimed in the court of the Second Additional Sessions Judge and Special Judge Anwaruddin Sikder yesterday.

Deposed president Ershad, his wife and 18 others are accused in this case involving the Janata Tower. The hearing began early last year.

After lengthy depositions by 35 witnesses, the arguments began on May 11. Yesterday was the fifth day of arguments which remained incomplete when the court rose for the day to meet today.

Counsel Mukul told the court that his client, by her own merit and activities, was a 'separate entity'. He said it would not be fair to make her responsible for alleged excesses done by Ershad just because she is his wife. Begum Raushan Ershad did enjoy certain privileges as the wife of the President, which was certainly no fault of hers, the counsel noted.

Counsel Mukul said not a single word was said by scores of prosecution witnesses in support of the prosecution's charge of abetment against his client. Instead, the counsel argued, the witnesses had established the JPL as a valid company which was duly registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies, contrary to the prosecution's accusation that it (JPL) was a company having no legal basis.

The defence counsel said it has been proved in the court that the contract for construction of the Janata Tower was awarded to Nirman International Limited by JPL under an

agreement which stipulated the mode of payment and other conditions. As for payment of Taka 10 crore, alleged by the prosecution, Mukul said his client stood by the payment of Taka 3.5 crore paid through cheques on behalf of the company (JPL) having nothing to do with Begum Raushan Ershad. The Janata Tower does not belong to any individual but to the JPL, the counsel said.

Mukul read out a Supreme Court observation in a quashment petition. The abetment would be proved only after criminal activities of the principal accused were established," the SC had observed. He said criminal activities of the principal accused are yet to be established, so the question of his client's offence does not arise at this stage.

Mukul said his client entered the scene only after Plot 49, KCA was sold and a prayer for mutation made. He said neither the allotment of plots to Sukkur Pradhan and others nor the transfer of Plot 49, KCA were questioned by Rajuk. None said those acts were illegal, he added.

As for the charge of abetment, Mukul said there was no valid proof to that end. He said no witness had made such remarks, nor was there any document to support the prosecution's contention. He said even the investigating officer, in his deposition before the court, did not bring an abetment charge against Begum Raushan Ershad.

About the allegation of concealment of her name by his client, the counsel said had she used her formal name, it would have been claimed that it was done to unduly influence the authorities. He said there is no proof that his client had benefited by using a different name.

Khan Saifur Rahman, counsel for M A Sattar and four other accused persons, had just stood up to begin the argument when the judge announced the adjournment.



City hotel and restaurant employees organised a rally at the Gulistan Square yesterday, the first day of their 72-hour strike demanding, among other things, withdrawal of VAT. —Star photo

Restaurants remain closed

By Staff Correspondent

Restaurants and tea-stalls of the country remained closed yesterday in response to a 72-hour strike call by the Hotel Restaurant Owners' Association.

The association called for the strike demanding realisation of its five-point demands including withdrawal of VAT (Value Added Tax) from hotels and restaurants.

The Hotel Restaurant Workers' Association, at a rally at the Gulistan Square Monday afternoon, expressed their full support for the demands of the owners saying that imposition of VAT on hotels and restaurants would only affect the public.

The Workers' Association called upon the government to fulfil the 'legitimate' demands of the Owners' Association immediately and said that delay in fulfilling the demands would increase the sufferings of the people who depend on hotels and restaurants for their daily sustenance.

The strike would also affect the employees since they did not get any assurance of their wages for the duration of the strike. Speakers at the rally urged the hotel and restaurant owners to pay their wages for the three days.

With the exception of some tea stalls no hotels and restaurants of the city were open yesterday.

A large number of snack bars were also found closed yesterday at the New Market and Stadium Market and Motijheel areas with many shopkeepers and office-goers having to do without lunch.

BAF base guard found dead in Chittagong

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, May 17: An armed guard of Air Base here reportedly committed suicide last night while on duty at a sentry-post.

Police said Shamsul Alam, 33, shot himself with his rifle at about 11:15 pm.

When contacted, Bangladesh Air Force officials here said a probe body was formed to ascertain the cause of the death of the base guard.

Meanwhile, a UD case has been filed with Chittagong Port PS.

22 pushed back to India

DINAJPUR, May 17: Indian Border Security Force (BSF) pushed some 22 Indian Muslims into Bangladesh through Tetulia border of Panchagarh district on May 13, according to a delayed report received here today, reports UNB.

The victims, most of them could not even speak Bangla, were picked up from Bombay, brought to Shilliguri in West Bengal and later pushed into Bangladesh territory.

But the BDR pushed them back into Indian territory on the same night.

The victims reportedly said that they had seen more people waiting in various camps in Shilliguri district for being pushed into Bangladesh.

544 more Rohingyas go home

COX'S BAZAR, May 17: Another batch of 544 Rohingya refugees comprising 130 families were repatriated to Myanmar today (Monday), officials said, reports UNB.

This was the 45th batch of refugees repatriated so far, bringing the total to 24,649. Nearly 2.50 lakh refugees are still living in 20 makeshift camps along the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf highway.

Today's (Monday's) repatriation took place through transit camps at Rangkhali, Jhumpara and Nayapura in presence of UNHCR and local relief officials.

Entrepreneurs accuse NBR of double standards

By Inam Ahmed

Entrepreneurs of the country are accusing the National Board of Revenue (NBR) of maintaining double standards in providing bonded warehouse facilities to the deemed exporters.

It is alleged that although in December, 1992 the NBR had decided to stop issuing bonded warehouse facilities to deemed exporters and cancelled all such previous facilities, it had violated its own decision by allowing the facility to some deemed exporters recently.

Last month the NBR allowed the facilities to two packaging companies. On the other hand, two thread manufacturing companies — Tootal Thread Bangladesh Ltd and ETA Fill Ltd — both deemed exporters, are still enjoying the facility of bonded warehouse.

In view of the recent NBR decision the country's sewing thread manufacturing companies are now also demanding the facility.

Seven thread companies of the country are capable of producing 64.80 lakh cones of thread while the country's demand for the export-oriented garments industries is 2.01 crore cones.

The thread manufacturers now feel that given the bonded warehouse facility, they could supply thread at a cheaper rate to the garments industries and save up to Taka 80 crore a year in foreign exchange.

Moreover, since two manufacturers are already enjoying the facility, other units were facing uneven competition, sources claimed.

Meanwhile, NBR sources said that the two packaging industries had been given the warehouse facilities because these two projects were designed keeping in view the fact that they would enjoy the facility.

"If they were not given the facility, they would have become unviable," NBR sources said.

The NBR had stopped the bonded warehouse facility after many deemed exporters had abused the privilege and evaded a huge sums of duties.

As many as 198 such exporters still owe Taka 228 crore in duties to the NBR. The NBR had taken actions against them and the companies are now paying their dues in 60 instalments.

Farakka : Build barrage

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the financial assistance from the 14 donor countries and agencies.

The FAP looks forward for a comprehensive water management policy for the country seeking long term solutions to the flood, erosion and other natural disasters.

The plan is composed of 33 separate components, of which 16 are main components or their derivatives, 14 are supporting studies while the rest three non-numbered FAP components.

Of the total, 24 components are regional studies.

Opening the conference Monday, the Agriculture Minister assured that the government had no intention of walling up, or erecting structures on all the rivers of the country.

Pointing out that the FAP studies were still under thorough analysis, he said that its implementation largely depended on consideration of all the aspects.

"The democratically elected government has taken up such a giant step forward for the first time in Bangladesh which would last many years."

Dispelling the fears vented by the FAP critics, Huq said, "We believe in transparency and openness... we go by reasons and only by what is beneficial to the people."

Refuting the anti-FAP allegations point by point, the Minister asked the skeptics to raise their voices against the on-going desertification process in the country's southwest region and intrusion of salinity because of the withdrawal of water which resulted in epidemic of diarrhoea and cholera.

On the accusation of peoples' rejection of the FAP, he said that the studies have been consulted with the people at the local government level as well as with the MPs.

On the allegation of consultants taking away chunk of the funds, Majid-ul-Huq assured that so long the present government remained in power "not a single penny will be spent unnecessarily."

"We are quite conscious that the Ershad era has gone and it is a new era," he added.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman in his speech called for putting "Real action" into the Flood Action Plan, but said, "I am not sure about what benefit this embankment business will bring."

Saifur Rahman suggested talks with the neighbours to address flood problems as "the

action is taking place beyond the territory of Bangladesh."

"Conventional wisdom should be brought in the FAP studies and peoples' participation must be ensured," he suggested.

The Planning Minister commented that the subsequent floods of 1988 and 1989 had led to the necessity of a long-term flood control plan.

Mosharrif Hossain Shahjahan said that a Ganges barrage inside Bangladesh would be able to partially counteract the adversities created by the Farakka Barrage.

"Due to the unilateral withdrawal of the Ganges flows by Farakka in India, the dry season flow into Bangladesh has been reducing very fast threatening the survival of the Ganges tributaries."

"The south-west region is heading towards desertification and we must take measures to eliminate it at least, to mitigate the environmental degradation," Shahjahan said.

World Bank Resident Chief Willoughby in his speech pointed out that the FAP was intended for a greater degree of consensus.

It was not intended to be end forced, he said and suggested dialogues with the neighboring countries for more information on flood forecasting.

He also emphasised the need for proper strategies for the re-settlements and compatible institutional arrangements.

The Irrigation Secretary said that the fears of the adverse effects caused by the FAP "were preemptive, if not imaginative."

"It is unthinkable that the democratically elected government will allow a planning outlook that will jeopardise the interest of the people," he commented on the criticism against the Flood Action Plan.

The Ambassador of the Netherlands spoke on behalf of the 12 bilateral donor countries.

Ganajaan hoped that the FAP would constitute a platform for the discussion and all parties be consulted and involved in planning as well as in the implementation of the programme.

However, he regretted that the third FAP conference overlooked the need for a specific session on the environmental implication of the studies.

Promotions in BCS econ cadre being delayed

Star report

Scrutiny of the annual confidential reports (ACRs) of the BCS Economic Cadre officials could not be completed even after six sittings of the departmental promotion committee, sources said.

The slow procedural process has already caused a backlog of promotions in the cadre. About 54 posts of deputy chiefs of the cadre remain vacant.

Disgruntled officials said that they would stage a sit-in on May 25 when Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia comes to preside over the National Economic Council (NEC) meeting unless authorities complete the promotion procedures by then.

Sources said a meeting presided by the Planning Minister in December last year set the criteria for promotion of the economic cadre officials.

Following this, 26 deputy chiefs were promoted to the post of joint chief. As a result, 54 posts became vacant.

Meanwhile, those officials who passed the senior scale promotion examination as far back as 1989 could not yet be promoted to the posts of assistant chiefs due to administrative bottlenecks, sources said.

One arrested for forging Minister's signature

Police yesterday arrested a man from the Secretariat for forging signature of Works Minister Barrister Rafiqul Islam Mia, reports UNB.

Police said Md Mokter Ali Sardar, Secretary of Natun Bangla Cooperative Society, Mohammadpur, was caught red-handed by the staffs of the Ministry of Works while he was making an attempt to get allotment of 23 water bodies (Jal mahal) forging the signature of the minister.

With the forged signature of the Minister Mokhter Ali prepared documents which permits him to set up some fisheries and poultry farms for the said cooperative society.

A case was registered with the Ramna thana in this connection.

JU students end hunger strike

By JU Correspondent

Some fifty activists of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) broke their 36-hour fast yesterday evening after the Vice Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University rescinded an order expelling two of their comrades.

VC Kazi Saleh Ahmed used his special powers to cancel the punitive measures taken by the JU Syndicate last November against JCD local unit organising secretary Moazzem Hossain and SM Abu Yousuf for their alleged misconduct with a hall provost.

The hunger strike by the JCD members was ended following nearly two hours of talks between the university authorities including the VC, deans, the provosts and the proctor and the leaders of the JU Central Students Union (JUCSU). Information Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda was also present during the negotiations.

The end of the hunger strike should bring back normally to the campus where the situation had become highly charged following the start of the agitation by the ruling party's students win demanding the cancellation of the punitive actions against Moazzem and Abu Yousuf.

Earlier Monday things took a dramatic turn following the en masse resignations by the member of the JUCSU and hall students unions in support of the hunger strikers' demands.

Four of the fasting students — Yousuf, Alamgir, Siraj and Zakir had to be hospitalised Monday afternoon following deterioration of their conditions. Many others were given IV saline.

An earlier attempt at peacemaking on the day by the VC had gone in vain since the students refused to accept his assurances of a reconsideration of their demands.

The fasting students had taken position in front of the university's administrative building.

Protest against Peres in Delhi

NEW DELHI, May 17: Some 200 Palestinian and Indian students staged a demonstration in the city centre today to protest the visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, witnesses said, reports AFP.

"Peres go back," chanted the protestors, who waved anti-Israeli placards as they set out from an underground shopping centre intending to march on the Israeli embassy.

Police stopped the students from reaching the mission in the central commercial district of Connaught Place, cordoning off an approach road.

The Midnight File

US rejects Russian call for UN meet on Bosnia

WASHINGTON, May 17: The United States has rejected Russia's call for a UN ministerial meeting on Bosnia Friday to discuss peacekeeping operations in the event of a peace settlement, the State Department announced today. "We don't think that meeting should be this week," said spokesman Richard Boucher. "We fully support a properly prepared ministerial meeting on peacekeeping, one that can build on the agenda for peace that the (UN) Secretary General has come out with," he said, reports AFP.

Mazari's appeal to Arab militants

ISLAMABAD, May 17: Prime Minister Balikh Sher Mazari pleaded Monday with Arab militants, who use Pakistan as a base for their Islamic holy wars, to "please leave us in peace." The Algerian Embassy charged Sunday that the outlawed Salvation Front was publishing material in Pakistan urging its followers to wage a jihad, or holy war, against the Algerian government. Mazari said Pakistan has cracked down by giving all Arabs except students, diplomats and humanitarian aid workers with residency permits until May 31 to leave, reports AP.

Movement of security forces in Khagrachhari relaxed

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, May 17: Authorities have relaxed movement of security forces in the frontier areas of Khagrachhari district, five days ahead of the 3rd round talks with the Shantibahini.

The relaxation of security movement, due to take effect from tonight, was a precondition laid by the Shantibahini to hold peace talks on May 25.

The talks will be held at the Khagrachhari Circuit House.

Officials said, authorities have ordered to withdraw eight camps of security forces and turn five others inoperative at the bordering villages of Panchhari thana.

All military operations will remain suspended during the talks, the officials added.

Hasina's call to unite against 'BNP-backed terrorism'

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged all the conscientious people to stand unitedly against terrorist activities "backed by the BNP government," reports UNB.

In a statement, Hasina expressed her grave concern at the killing of Chhatra League leader Rashedul Islam Ranju, allegedly by pro-BNP elements, in Pabna yesterday (Sunday).

Although this government speaks of democracy, in practice it patronises identified goons for petty party interest, Hasina alleged.

"The situation has reached such an alarming state that none is safe. The whole nation has been held hostage in the hands of terrorists," the Opposition leader said.

Referring to Sunday's incident in Pabna, Hasina alleged that armed activists of Chhatra Dal knifed Ranju to death and injured 15 others. The JCD workers had also snatched from police one of their associates who was arrested with a pistol.

Does the government want to rule the country by hoodlums? Hasina questioned. She observed that "wicked policy" of the ruling party is pushing the nation towards a serious crisis. The people will no longer tolerate this situation, Hasina warned.

AL-led opposition

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bined agitation to be more effective; we feel the inclusion of other popular issues would strengthen our on-going agitation."

Another AL Presidium member Amir Hossain Amu, commenting on the matter, said "Fresh issues will strengthen the fragile unity of the pro-Independence political forces and make the current agitation more dynamic."

PDF leader and CPB General Secretary Nurul Islam Nahid, explaining the reason for this revived opposition unity, said the government's activities "against the spirit of the Liberation War and democratic norms and its breach of commitments made during the anti-autocratic movement" had compelled the parties to unite.

"We will fight unitedly until the government abandons such practices," Nahid remarked, agreeing that the 14 parties also needed to focus on other major problems of the country.

A Five-party leader and convenor of the BSD, Khalequzzaman, talking to The Daily Star, badly felt the need for taking up all the pro-people issues for a combined agitation aimed at forcing the government to resolve those.

In this context, he said, a greater and effective anti-government agitation was impossible ignoring the industrial workers' just demands which, according to Zaman, must get the top priority.

Pabna AL calls 48-hour hartal from today

PABNA, May 17: Awami League at a public meeting today called a 48-hour hartal in the town beginning at 6 am tomorrow (Tuesday) to protest the killing of a Chhatra League leader on Sunday, reports UNB.

Rashedul Islam Ranju (25), a BCL (M-I) leader of Edward College, was hit by a bullet during a clash with Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal activists in the town and succumbed to his injuries on way to the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital Sunday evening.

Addressing the meeting, Awami League leaders accused the government of letting loose violence across the country and warned that it would be forced to step down if the growing trend of terrorism continued.

The body of Ranju was kept in the meeting to substantiate their allegation. Meeting over, Ranju was buried at Areefpur graveyard.

They also demanded immediate arrest and punishment of those responsible for the killing.

Another report adds: Police today arrested five students from Edward College in connection with the stabbing of a police sub-inspector during a gunfight.

Hafiz MP

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joined the ruling party in a public meeting in the presence of the Prime Minister.

He added that crossing the floor is 'absolutely' barred under the Constitution.

Upon a demand of justice notice served on the secretary, Jatiya Sangsad, the secretary replied that the Parliament secretariat does not have any information regarding floor-changing by the said member.

PM: Samaranch

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that despite resource constraints her government had laid emphasis on the improvement of games and sports in the country.

She said that Bangladesh would host the forthcoming sixth South Asian Federation (SAF) Games in December this year.

She also sought cooperation of the IOC in the promotion of sports in Bangladesh.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Sadek Hossain and Bangladesh Olympic Association President Gias Kamal Chowdhury were, among others, present.

Pak Senate

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dollars in market capitalisation in the past ten months.

Habib attributed the loss to "continuing political uncertainty," and said investors were awaiting the Supreme Court verdict.

There is no clear precedent, though twice in the recent past the judges have had to rule on the validity of a dissolution order.

In the first case in 1988, with the sacking of Premier Muhammad Khan Junejo, the court ruled the dissolution unconstitutional, but refused to stop elections.

In the second in 1990, when Benazir Bhutto was ousted, it judged the decision legal.

"This time it is fifty-fifty," said a diplomat.

Sharif's lawyer has argued that by his dissolution order, Ishaq Khan dangerously exceeded the "discretionary" powers accorded him under the Constitution, and calls the decision immoral, illegal and anti-Islamic.

\$120m Unicef plan

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stress on providing access to universal drinking water and increase sanitation coverage to 35 per cent, increase the gross primary school enrolment rate to 85 per cent and the completion rate to 45 per cent.

Emphasis will also be given on female literacy and bridging gender disparity.

The cooperation programme will be implemented by social sector ministries and their affiliated agencies. Other NGOs will also contribute to the programme, he said.

Of the 120 million dollar fund, 33 per cent will be spent for health and nutrition programmes, 25 per cent for education, 20 per cent in the water and environmental sector and the rest for integrated basic services, communication and programme development.

Talking on the US Harkins Bill banning export of goods produced with child labour, Carriere said that the Unicef had discussed the issue with the US embassy officials here.

"We argued that we need some more time and a phased reduction of child labour" he said.

He stated that a sudden ban of child labour would be damaging for the children as their families are in a very precarious condition.

"The Harkins Bill should exempt countries like Bangladesh, keeping in mind the best intentions of children," the Unicef executive said.

"A fund could be set up by collecting revenues from ex-

porters and importers of garments which can be made available for services for children," Carriere said. "Thus the Harkins Bill may have a humane face. Otherwise, it will do more harm than good," he stated.



Unicef chief Rolf C. Carriere.

Planning Commission member Mokammel Huq, who was also present at the briefing, said the human development is one of the main thrusts of the government's development programme. "It centres around children, and the mothers," he said.

He also stressed the need for community co-operation to achieve the goals of the government.

He said the government had already formed a slum development cell for supplying basic services to slum dwellers.

MCCI: Killing

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money of a pharmaceutical company in an armed attack on its jeep in the city on Sunday.

The