

Judicial probe into crimes by law enforcers

Police presence during deposition of witnesses declared illegal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court has declared illegal and void the presence of police representatives during recording of deposition of witnesses in case of judicial inquiry into crimes committed by police.

A Division Bench of the High Court (HC) comprising Justice AKM Badrul Haq and Justice Montaz Uddin passed the landmark order on Tuesday. The HC order followed hearing two Criminal Revisions filed by the Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) challenging the legality of an order of the chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court, Dhaka.

Ramna police had arrested senior reporter of Ajker Kagoj Aminur Rahman Taj on May 29 last year. Advocate Alena Khan, Director of BSEHR (investigation), went to Ramna thana and wanted to know from the officer-in-charge about the arrest of Taj.

ADC of the DMP Iqbal Bahar, who was present there, told her that police could arrest anyone any time without showing any charge. In this regard, Alena later filed a complaint case with the CMM's Court against Iqbal Bahar. After hearing, the CMM's Court ordered a judicial inquiry into the matter

and fixed a date for deposition of the witnesses. When the judicial inquiry started, police personnel appeared before the court.

Alena then filed another petition stating that she would not give her statement in presence of policemen, but the court rejected the petition.

Finally, she filed a Criminal Revision with the HC challenging the legality of the CMM's Court's order.

In another incident, joint convener of Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Mahila Dal Moni Begum was harassed and assaulted by police at Bijoy Nagar crossing in the city during a hartal called by the BNP on May 11, 1999.

The victim filed a complaint case with the CMM's Court against the police personnel concerned. After hearing, the court ordered a judicial inquiry into the matter and fixed a date for deposition of the witnesses. But in this case also, policemen appeared before the court when the judicial inquiry began.

Later, Moni Begum filed another petition, stating her refusal to give any statement in presence of police, but the court rejected the petition.

BSEHR then filed a Criminal Revision with the HC, on behalf of Moni Begum, challenging the legality of the CMM's Court's order.

The HC Bench heard the two cases jointly on Tuesday and gave its order.

Forced retirement of 10 top officials challenged in High Court

BSS, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday issued rule asking the government to show cause why the compulsory retirement of ten government officers should not be declared illegal.

A division bench comprising Justice MA Matin and Justice Mohammad Marzi UH Hoque issued the rule upon hearing the writ petitions filed by the officers.

The petitioners are former joint secretaries Asaduzzaman Bhuiyan, Hatem Ali Khan, Hemayet Uddin Talukder, MA Taher, Mahbubul Alam Khan, Saliendra Nath Majumder, Mohammad Musa and Jerina Akther Khanam, former Deputy Secretary Dr Mojibur Rahman and former Additional IGP Abdur Rahim Khan.

Indian fruits, allied items Commerce Ministry okays transshipment

SHAHRIAR KARIM

The commerce ministry has okayed a proposal for transshipment of Indian fruits and related products through Bangladesh to the north-eastern Indian states.

The products will have to be carried through Bangladesh territory using local transports.

"Bangladeshi traders will import the Indian goods and then re-export them to the north-eastern states," said a highly placed ministry source.

He said this system will be on trial for six months, and later, after reviewing the facility, other products may be allowed under the same scheme.

Meantime, the commerce secretaries of Bangladesh and India will meet in the capital on December 26 to take a fresh look at their bilateral trade relations with Dhaka's demand for zero-tariff access of 25-category products on top of the agenda.

Prior to the talks, Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and his Indian counterpart are

expected to meet in Kolkata on the issue.

However, the initiative will take its final shape in January next year at the joint economic commission meeting, according to highly placed sources.

"There must be a political will to improve the bilateral relation further. If we have that will, then all issues can be worked out in a congenial atmosphere," the commerce minister told The Daily Star last night.

Earlier, India refused Bangladesh zero-tariff access of 25-category items and tagged the demand for transshipment to such concessions.

Ahead of the December meeting, the commerce ministry officials are now busy preparing documents on different bilateral issues that also include renewal of the trade treaty between the two next-door neighbours, border trade and transshipment, according to sources.

The ministry has already submitted a working paper to the commerce minister on transshipment, outlining the government's possible courses on the issue. The

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Shibir foils CU Syndicate meeting

CU CORRESPONDENT

The regular Syndicate meeting of the Chittagong University (CU) was foiled due to resistance by the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) activists on Tuesday.

The Shibir activists surrounded the Vice-Chancellor's office at 9:30 am and put up barricades to prevent teachers' buses from coming to the campus.

The change of the VC was the main agenda in that meeting and the Shibir aligned members were behind the foiling of the meeting, one of the senior Syndicate member seeking anonymity told the correspondent.

One of the Shibir minded teacher who is also an aspirant for the VC post instigated the Shibir activists to foil the Syndicate meeting, he

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Shahriar quizzed about video tapes seized from him

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A joint interrogation cell (JIC) on Tuesday night quizzed writer and columnist Shahriar Kabir, accused in a sedition case, for several hours, but failed to obtain any vital information regarding his alleged involvement in anti-state activities.

Sources said the JIC comprising DGFI, NSI, CID, SB and DB interrogated him at midnight Tuesday to obtain information to press charges against him.

Earlier on Monday, Shahriar Kabir, also the acting president of Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, was placed on a four-day remand for interrogation. Assistant Police Super Munsif Atiqur

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A mob rule in miniature, alarm clock ticking

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Palestine-Israel: Dangerous escalations; and the mystic night of honour



Account holders queued up in banks in the city yesterday to make last-minute transactions ahead of the Eid holidays beginning today.

Rush of clients at city banks pushes up call money rate

MONZUR MAHMUD

The banks yesterday witnessed a mad rush of clients who queued up for hours together to withdraw cash ahead of the long Eid holiday.

Heavy demand for money pushed the call money rate to as high as 20 per cent yesterday. According to central bank sources, the clearing house of the Bangladesh Bank yesterday cleared around 32,000 cheques worth some Tk 600 crore.

Except on Saturday, all banks will remain closed for five days till December 18 from today.

The banks found it difficult to cope with the unusual rush of clients. Normally, around Tk 60 crore to Tk 70 crore is withdrawn every day from the local office of the Sonali Bank. But the amount of withdrawal reached around Tk 110 crore yesterday.

"Apart from withdrawing money, I had some other banking to do. But the queue was too long and it took me more than an hour to withdraw money," said a client of a bank at Dhanmondi yesterday.

To meet the sudden demand, some banks were forced to borrow money from others, which ultimately pushed up the call money rate.

The inter-bank currency market was very active over the past few days.

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Touch of mild cold wave forecast for Eid-ul-Fitr

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Winter, late in coming this season, started to set in from yesterday with the temperature plunging down to a low of 9.7 degree Celsius at Srimangal.

Meteorological department forecasts temperature may remain between 8 to 10 degree C today, signaling a mild cold wave in some parts of the country. The cold wave is likely to last for two to three days, Akram Hossain, Director of the meteorological department said yesterday.

The forecast for the Eid holidays and the Victory Day indicates that fair weather with a touch of mild cold wave is likely to prevail.

"Unlike last year, when the temperature fell to 9.8 degree Celsius, in Dinajpur on December 2, the weather has been errant this season", Hossain said.

Instead of winter setting in late November a thick blanket of fog has hovered over the country during the past few days making it difficult for the cold weather to set in, he said.

This is because the easterly system was late to leave the country

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AL to fight cases in court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) has decided to contest the graft cases filed against its President Sheikh Hasina and other party leaders in the court. The party would also announce a movement programme after the Eid to resist the unabated killings, terrorism and repression on the minority community.

The decisions were taken at an emergency meeting of the AL Central Working Committee (ALCWC) held at the AL election office in the city with acting party President Abdus Samad Azad in the chair.

"We'll take recourse to law to fight the false cases filed against our leaders," Abdus Samad Azad said to The Daily Star. "But we would announce a movement programme after the Eid to protest the unabated repression and the total lawlessness now prevailing in the country."

The ALCWC meeting was how

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BAC move free of govt interference, says Bhuiyan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday said the process of indictment by the Bureau of Anti-Corruption against seven former AL ministers including former PM Sheikh Hasina on corruption charges was absolutely independent of government interference.

"The government has not interfered... even many Cabinet ministers did not know about it until after the cases were filed. The Bureau of Anti-Corruption filed the corruption cases on specific charges after investigation," he said while talking to newsmen at his secretariat office.

Referring to AL's reaction that the indictment is an act of political vendetta, Bhuiyan said the government is not at all vindictive and that BNP's commitment to eliminate corruption from the administration was one of the main agenda in its election manifesto. "BNP is committed to curb corruption at any cost," he said.

Bhuiyan, who is also Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives, said BNP had raised objections during the

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Probe into graft cases begins: 3 ex-ministers get interim bail



Former AL Minister Mohammad Nasim flanked by lawyers coming out of the High Court yesterday. Nasim was granted ad-interim bail by the court in corruption cases.

STAR REPORT

The Anti-Corruption Bureau (BAC) has started investigation into the 12 graft cases filed against former prime minister and Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina, six former AL ministers and nearly 40 bureaucrats.

BAC started its works only a day after filing of the cases to quickly submit charge-sheets or final reports.

Meantime, investigation officials have sent the case documents to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court yesterday.

In another development, three former ministers -- former home minister Mohammad Nasim, minister for public works Mosharrif Hossain and ex-state minister Abul Hasan Chowdhury -- yesterday obtained interim bail from the High Court against the graft cases filed against them.

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Sidelines of SAARC summit Khaleda-Vajpayee talks to be 'significant'

M ANWARUL HAQ

Diplomatic circles are attaching a lot of significance to the forthcoming SAARC Summit where bilateral talks between leaders of seven South Asian countries on the sidelines of the Summit could steal the show.

Leaders from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan are likely to dominate the scene, observers feel.

The eleventh SAARC Summit scheduled for early next month is being seen as very crucial against the backdrop of the events in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's trip to Kathmandu to attend the Summit will provide her the first opportunity to meet leaders of six neighbouring states. It will also enable her to have first hand information about the decision makers of those countries. Her counterparts in those countries will also get an opportunity to know her government's mind.

Khaleda will have extensive bilateral discussions covering issues of mutual interest with her Indian counterpart Atal Behari Vajpayee in Kathmandu. It will be the highest level contact between leaders of the two countries since the takeover by the new government in Dhaka.

Observers view the Khaleda-Vajpayee talks as very significant, where issues of tariff concessions, expansion of trade facilities and outstanding problems including demarcation of border will be raised from the Bangladesh side. The Indian side might seek to know the new government's position on transit, transshipment and pipeline export of gas.

The issue of gas export to India has generated a lot of debates since the Khaleda government took office. The debate was sparked off by Finance Minister Saifur Rahman's statement in this regard. He visited India recently. However, what was been discussed on export of gas between the Indian prime minister and the Bangladesh finance minister has not been stated clearly.

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Jumatul Wida tomorrow

BSS, Dhaka

Jumatul Wida, the last Juma prayers during the holy month of Ramadan will be held on Friday with due religious solemnity across the country.

Imams by reciting from the Khutba at all mosques will formally say "Al Wida, Al Wida, Ya Shahra Ramadan (goodbye, goodbye, the holy month of Ramadan). After the prayers the devout Muslims will raise their hands seeking mercy and blessings of Almighty Allah for

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Laxmipur Jubo League activist hacked to death

UNB, Laxmipur

A Jubo League activist was chopped to death at Mohadevpur village in sadar upazila on Tuesday night.

Police said the assailants picked up Shahjahan Saju from his home at gunpoint and hacked him indiscriminately in front of a grocery shop. He died on the spot.

Local Awami League blamed BNP cadres for the murder. A case was filed.

Pre-Eid 'extortion' of passengers at Gabtoli bus terminal

STAR REPORT

Inter-district transport services are demanding additional fares from passengers at Gabtoli bus terminal without prior announcement or formal endorsement of the transport owners association.

Thousands of passengers heading for home on the eve of the Eid expressed anguish saying they are being forced to pay the extra 'unofficial fares'.

The extra fares being charged at the ticket counters range from at least Tk 20 to Tk 80 per ticket. Passengers, seeking advance tickets, said they are hostages to such organised crime and no action is taken against them despite verbal complaints.

During a visit yesterday to Gabtoli, country's biggest inter-district bus terminal that links at least 36 south-western and north-

western districts by road, all the ticket-counters were found selling advance tickets charging the extra fares.

Over 550 inter-district buses will ply in over 50 routes carrying an estimated 10,000 passengers, twice the usual, daily before the Eid festival.

"I have purchased seven tickets in advance from Sohag Paribahan for Khulna. I had to pay Tk 60 extra for each ticket. In fact, the same tickets would be costlier a day before the Eid," said a passenger.

At Hanif Enterprise a chair coach ticket to Jessore costs Tk 190 but due to Eid festival it is charging Tk 270 per ticket. A ticket for port-city Khulna usually costs Tk 200 but the fare has been raised to Tk 270 by Diganta Paribahan.

A ticket to Satkhira by luxury bus usually costs Tk 220 but now the

rate has been raised to Tk 270. A ticket to Barisal by chair coach usually costs Tk 180 but the fare at Diganta and Sakura has been raised to Tk 270 and Tk 250 respectively.

"The additional fares are nominal and these are being charged mainly to compensate for the return journey of the empty coaches," explained a sales-man at the Diganta Paribahan counter.

But a passenger Shahidul, heading for Chuadanga, said this is not true as passengers travel both ways before the Eid and I have never seen coaches returning without passengers either way.

At Surjamukhi, Subarna, and Bikash Paribahans, a ticket to Faridpur normally costs Tk 70 but now the fare has been raised to Tk 90. Similarly, a ticket to Boalmari usually costs Tk 80 but the fare has

been increased to Tk 100.

At Sakura Paribahan, a ticket to Barisal now costs Tk 230 against its normal price of Tk 170. A ticket to Jhalakathi now costs Tk 300 against its usual price of Tk 190.

Bilal Hossain, the manager at Subarna Paribahan claimed, "We are not forcing every passengers to pay the extra fares. Only those who can afford are requested to pay the extra fares."

Fares have also been raised in Jhenidah, Moheshpur, Chuadanga, Meherpur, Darshana and Kushtia routes. The increase varies from Tk 20 to Tk 60 per ticket.

Passengers travelling north are also facing similar situation. At S R Paribahan a ticket to Rangpur usually costs Tk 140 but now the fare has been raised to Tk 190.

Similarly, fares for Bogra,

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Sehri, Iftar timing

Ramadan	Dec	Sehri	Iftar
27	13		5-17
28	14	5-08	5-17
29	15	5-09	5-17