

PRISONERS WITHOUT TRIAL

HC asks govt to free them on bail

Attorney general, principal secretary to PM asked to initiate process on merit of cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday asked the government to free on bail thousands of detainees languishing in jails without trial in violation of their constitutional rights to get quick justice.

It directed the attorney general and the principal secretary to the prime minister to initiate the process in this regard considering merits of the cases.

"It is very unfortunate and shocking as well," the court observed about 7,409 detainees in jails without trial for years.

The verdict came following a public interest litigation filed by Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) on December 24 last year on the basis of a news item 'Behind bars sans trial for years' run by The Daily Star.

In the litigation, BLAST said although on-trial cases in the sessions judges' courts were supposed to be disposed of in 360 days, the practice was different.

Earlier, the government submitted to the court a list of 7,409 detainees who have been behind bars for over 360 days without trial following a show cause on January 5 this year.

The list includes 104 women and 51 children.

The High Court division bench comprising Justice Abdul Matin and Justice Tarig Ul Hakim also asked the government to send juveniles, if any, to correction centres, as they should not be tried with adults.

Apart from the directives, the court also asked the government to submit a report in six months specifying initiatives to implement its earlier 8-point directive regarding juvenile detainees.

The directives include immediate transfer of 1,233 child prisoners from jails to correction centres and withdrawal of cases against under-12 prisoners.

Children against whom cases cannot be withdrawn should be released on bail.

The list of detainees show 16 prisoners have been in jails without trial for over 11 years, 10 for over 10 years, 29 for over nine years, 51 for over eight years, 111 for over seven years, 238 for over six years, 502 for over five years, 917 for over four years, 1,592 for over three years and 3,673 for over two years.

The court in its verdict observed that it is the prisoners' constitutional

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A mother holds her child who has contracted a skin disease in Chapra village of Savar, amid receding floodwaters that have ravaged two-thirds of the country and left about 30 million people suffering from hunger and diseases

Army man killed, another hurt in CHT shootout

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

An army man was reported killed and a warrant officer injured when feuding indigenous groups fired on them in Baghaichhari upazila on Rangamati Monday night.

The shootout between the rival gangs also left an indigenous girl with bullet wounds.

Witnesses said Anwar (his rank unknown), part of an army team that confronted the gunmen in Korongatoli village, died on the spot. Warrant Officer Moshiur Rahman

and 13-year-old Kalindi Chakma were flown to the Combined Military Hospital in Chittagong with bullet wounds, sources said.

The confrontation came after the army team rushed to the outlying village to control two indigenous groups who exchanged fire over an apparent turf war.

Major Hamid of Khagrachhari Army Regional Headquarters yesterday confirmed that the army team traded fire with the gunmen in the Khagrachhari Army Operational Area.

"When the army engaged with the gunmen in Korongatoli, they opened fire on them (army) before fleeing the scene," he said, adding the army returned fire with 15 bullets but did not suffer any casualty.

But intelligence officials in the district headquarters quoting their field staffer (FS) said they heard a soldier was gunned down, but declined to confirm it immediately.

Sources said Kalindi suffered bullet wounds in the shootout between the indigenous factions

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UN meets with donors, NGOs to assess flood damage

BSS, Dhaka

The United Nations (UN) yesterday held an emergency meeting in Dhaka with donors and major NGOs (non-governmental organisations) to assess the deluge-damage as Bangladesh braces for post-flood trauma with massive spread of diarrhoea and setbacks in national economy.

UN officials said health and food issues dominated the meeting of the Disaster Emergency Response Group (DERG), comprising UN systems, international donors and major NGOs, as fear of an epidemic stalked the deluge-hit areas along with acute food shortage at places.

Health Department officials said 7,445 more people contracted waterborne diseases that killed nine people in less than 24 hours, while

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30 million need food aid for five months

NEWS DESK

Up to 30 million people will need food aid for the next five months, Food and Disaster Management Minister Chowdhury Kamal Khan Yousuf said yesterday, as Unicef reported an "exceptionally high" number of flood victims suffering from pneumonia.

Yousuf said between 20 and 30 million people need to be brought under the government's feeding programme until the next paddy harvest due in five months.

"I can assure you that nobody would starve or die from shortage of food. We have enough stocks and we have allocated those accordingly," the minister said, adding more food or funds would be arranged if need

be.

The minister told the Overseas Correspondents Association Bangladesh (Ocab) that he expected a full assessment of the impact of the floods to be ready in two weeks.

The floods, the worst in six years, have killed nearly 600 people in three weeks and at their height swamped two-thirds of Bangladesh, leaving 30 million people marooned or homeless and thousands suffering from water-borne diseases, AFP reports.

Relief workers have reported more than 550 cases of pneumonia and other acute respiratory infections, one of the biggest and fastest killers of Bangladeshi children, in camps in eastern Brahmanbaria district alone, Unicef's communica-

tions chief Naseem Ur Rehman told the news agency.

The UN Children's Fund launched an appeal Monday for 13.4 million dollars to supply emergency relief and medical help to women and children in flood-hit districts where many are also suffering from diarrhoea.

"We do not know about other districts or about those outside the camps in Brahmanbaria but we have to assume the situation is grave and calls for urgent action," Rehman said.

"This (number) is at least four times the number we would expect and a level that literally sends a shudder down the spine of healthcare professionals which is why we have to move fast with this

appeal," he added.

The government, which has appealed for international help to cope with the devastation caused by the floods, has estimated the flooding has caused damage to property and infrastructure in 6.6 billion dollars.

The flooding, now slowly receding in most areas, was the heaviest since Bangladesh's worst-ever floods of 1988 that killed more than 700 and left 21 million homeless.

Experts and aid agencies, however, have warned Bangladesh is still at the start of the monsoon season and more rains could cause a major humanitarian crisis.

BARISAL FLOODS

Floods triggered by the pull of full

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Illegal political party offices razed in Tejturi Bazaar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) yesterday razed the unit offices of BNP, Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) and Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) at Kazipara in Tejturi Bazaar despite a brief agitation by ruling party activists.

Led by a Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) magistrate, a huge contingent of armed policemen and plain-clothes personnel from different law enforcing agencies levelled the unit offices of ruling BNP's unit-4, Tejturi units of the BCL and JP on Garden Road.

According to DCC's estate department officials, the eviction team cleared the area to make room for a way out of the country's largest shopping complex Bashundhara City, which is scheduled to be inaugurated on August 5.

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Dhaka City Corporation yesterday pulls down an office of ruling BNP's student chapter Jatiyatobadi Chhatra Dal, built on encroached land near Purnima Cinema Hall in Karwan Bazar.

WFP plans massive emergency relief

BSS, Dhaka

World Food Programme (WFP) is planning to launch a major emergency operation for the flood-affected people soon apart from its ongoing project to provide food to two million flood victims.

WFP sources said about five million people would come under the emergency programme, which is likely to be launched in the third week of this month.

Since the second wave of flooding in mid-July, which incurred \$7b in damage to Bangladesh, the UN food-aid agency has mobilised its existing in-country food supplies to

India defers JRC meet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

India has deferred the ministerial level meeting of the Joint River Commission (JRC) which was slated to be held in Dhaka on August 17.

Water resources ministry sources said New Delhi in a recent communication to Dhaka argued that it expects a secretarial level JRC meeting before the ministerial one.

India said some issues, such as the formula of water sharing of Teesta River and erection of dam in its part of Muhuri River, have to be settled before the ministerial meet, the sources added.

However, it was India's alleged lack of response that led to cancellation of a meeting of the Joint

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Seven banks under BB performance watch

REJAU KARIM BYRON

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) has put seven banks under an early warning system to keep them from being bracketed as 'problem banks' and would sign a memorandum of understanding with them to improve their performance.

National Bank Limited (NBL), International Finance Investment and Commerce (IFIC) Bank Limited, Shahjalal Bank, Arab Bangladesh (AB) Bank, Bangladesh Commerce Bank (BCB) Limited, One Bank Limited, and Social Investment

Bank Limited (SIBL) have been put under the central bank watch, according to sources.

A BB report placed by its governor before the parliamentary standing committee on finance ministry on Monday said the seven banks have been brought under the early warning system because of their weak key financial indicators and to stop them from being labelled as 'problem banks'.

"Activities of the problem banks are closely monitored by the central bank with special guidance and care," a central bank high official

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Huge plan on to protect Dhaka from floods: PM

BSS, Dhaka

After distributing relief goods at Shaheed Zia Girls School at Uttar Jarabari and a Mannan High School at Konapara under Matua Union, the prime minister took an about three-kilometer ride on a BIWTA boat to see the flood-ravaged people in Dhitpur area.

She landed on the veranda of flood-affected Lal Miah High School where about 1,000 affected people have taken shelter.

She made a brief address before distributing relief goods. Hundreds of people from the nearby inundated areas also thronged the venue.

"I have come here not to deliver any speech, but to see your condition and stand by you," Khaleda said in her brief address.

She said the alliance government and her party, the BNP, would always remain with the people.

Mentioning this year's flood as more devastating than the earlier ones, Khaleda urged the people to face the calamity with patience and courage.

She said her government took immediate measures to mitigate the sufferings of the people since the

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