

HC asks govt

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The HC vacation bench of Justice ABM Khairul Haque on December 21 stayed the ban until resumption of the court after winter vacation following a petition filed by six civil society groups and a member of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat, Bangladesh (AMJB).

The petitioners are AK Rezaul Karim, an AMJB member and former deputy general manager of Bangladesh Bank, Odi Kar, Sammito Samajik Andolon, Ain O Salish Kendra, Karmojibi Nari, Jatijo Ainjibi Parishad and Nijera Kori.

In his submission yesterday morning, counsel for the petitioners Dr Kamal Hossain said the Ahmadiyyas are living in the country for about a century and carrying out publication, sale and distribution of their publications for many years in Bangladesh without any disturbance and in full knowledge of the government.

No-one ever made any objection that the publications hurt religious sentiment of any community until certain vested interest groups led by Khatme Nabuwat started deliberately creating a climate of vilification against the Ahmadiyyas and got the order issued to fulfil their political gain, he said.

Invested quarter is involved in it, not all Muslims of the country, Dr Kamal said.

"Since the ban, Khatme Nabuwat and its affiliated bodies including Amra Dhakabashi have been carrying out attacks on the Ahmadiyya community in the name of implementation of the impugned order."

The ban is an infringement on the fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution, the counsel maintained.

The government has to mention the words and sentences (of the

Ahmadiyya publications) that resulted in the banning of the publications, Dr Kamal said, adding that the government did not even publish a gazette notification on the order.

He also mentioned that the government placed a report before the UN General Assembly on September 16, 2004 stating that the rights of the followers of all religions including the Ahmadiyya sect are well protected in Bangladesh.

During the hearing, ABM Nurul Islam, an advocate of the Supreme Court, urged the court again to appoint him the amicus curiae, but the court did not respond.

As he told the court that the government had already published gazette notification on the ban, the court, adjourning the hearing until noon, asked the attorney general's office to inform the court about the matter.

When the hearing resumed at noon, Additional Attorney General Fida M Kamal told the court that he had received no instructions from the government on the matter.

The court later passed the stay order and issued the rule.

Advocate Salahuddin Ahmad, Barrister Sara Hossain and Barrister Tanjib-ul Alam assisted Dr Kamal Hossain while Assistant Attorney General Razik Al Jalil assisted Fida Kamal.

Abdul Hannan Al Hadi, a leader of the anti-Ahmadiyya group Hizazate Khatme Nabuwat Andolon, told The Daily Star after yesterday's order, "We're shocked at the court order. We'll form a movement against it."

"Islamist organisations will file two separate petitions against today's order," he said.

The government, on January 8, banned Ahmadiyya publications amid agitation by anti-Ahmadiyya zealots spearheaded by some leaders of Islamic Oikya Jote, a constituent of the ruling BNP-led alliance.

ACC move

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drawing the fuel allocated for the cars.

The ACC has given four days time for the ministries to reply to its query and has formed a four-member investigation committee, which is to submit its report within 15 days.

"We have received the letter and assigned an official to obtain information about 14 cars under three completed projects of the information ministry. We will send the facts gathered to the ACC in due time," Information Secretary A M M Nasiruddin, who was transferred to the Privatisation Commission yesterday, tells The Daily Star.

One of the secretaries says the misuse of project cars arises mainly out of a fear of red-tapism. When a project is over, the ministry concerned applies to the establishment ministry to get the project vehicles allotted for its use. The establishment ministry forwards the application to the finance ministry, who may then seek clarification. The applicant ministry formally gets the vehicles only after the finance ministry okays the transfer.

But, he says, this process can take quite a while, two to three years even. That is why the ministries tend to bypass the process of getting permission and starts using the cars directly violating the rules.

Another secretary describes what typically happens to 'project vehicles'. As soon as a project ends, the ministry concerned allots the project vehicles to its officials without observing the proper procedures. The ministries have a high demand for cars and this is how that demand is met. However, some officials, who are not entitled to cars, also use such project vehicles by dint of their 'connections'.

Meanwhile, ACC Commissioner M Maniruzzaman Miah has become aggrieved at the commission for not informing or consulting him before taking the step about the project cars. "I came to know about it from newspaper reports," Miah tells The Daily Star.

The ACC staff and officials also have discussed Miah's grievance. An ACC official says three members run the commission together, so there is no justification for taking such a decision without informing Miah. This may dampen the commission's team spirit, he fears.

But the other commissioner, Maniruddin, explains, "Maniruzzaman Miah is looking after administrative issues and I am looking after investigation. Therefore, I took the chairman's permission and sent the letter."

ACC MEETS PRESIDENT

The three-member ACC yesterday met President Iajuddin Ahmed and sought his support in discharging its duties.

ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan and commissioners Maniruddin Ahmed and Maniruzzaman Miah apprised the president about the structure and activities of the commission.

Though the commission was formed on November 21, it is yet to formulate its rules and regulations to function effectively.

A Banghabhaban statement termed the meeting a 'courtesy call', during which the president welcomed the commission and wished its success in building a society based on justice. He expressed the hope that the commission members would be able to ensure justice in all cases and thus fulfil the people's expectations.

The exact toll, however, will likely never be known, with the United Nations saying the number of people killed may be around 150,000.

DISASTER RELIEF SUMMIT

US Secretary of State Colin Powell is due to head to the region to take part in the Jakarta disaster relief summit which will also include Annan, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Australian Prime Minister John Howard.

The government incurs a loss of Tk 4 crore to Tk 5 crore if imports and exports remain suspended for a single day, C&F Agents Association sources said.

The five trade unions enforced the indefinite strike on January 1 protesting the increase of godown tariff by five times at one go.

UNB adds from Benapole: Five striking associations in a meeting this afternoon threatened to go for tougher action if the previous tariff rates are not restored.

Speakers at the meeting presided over by Nazimuddin said they were not opposed to a tolerable increase in godown tariff. They also demanded development of infrastructure in the port for quick loading and unloading and stopping pilferage of goods from godowns and sheds.

Meanwhile, export and import through the Sathkira Bhomra land port also remained closed since Thursday following a conflict between the traders and the BSF at Ghodzadanga port on the Indian side.

The test for 'Ga' group will be held tomorrow. Schools under 'Kha' group are Motihheel Boys High School, Narinda Govt High School, Government Muslim High School, Government Girls' High School, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Govt Boys' High School, Government Boys' School under Teajgon Science College, Dhanmandi Govt Girls' High School and Dhanmandi Kamrunnesa Govt Girls' High School.

The test for 'Ga' group will be held on December 6. Schools under 'Ga' group are Dhanmandi Govt. Boys' High School, Armanitola Govt. High School, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Govt. Girls' School, Tikatuli Government Kamrunnesa Girls High School, Teajgon Govt. Girls' School, Dhaka Collegiate School, Gano Bhaban Government School, Teajgon High School.

Government schools are still most preferred educational institutions due to low tuition fees and opportunity for education upto Secondary School Certificate (SSC) in the same institution.

"We have also halted operations at the factory to allow the workers to rest and return to their homes," Salam added.

70 RMG workers

Talking to The Daily Star MA Salam said, "Immediately we sent the sick workers to hospital and clinics, from where they were released after receiving first aid. The trouble resulted from a sudden leak in a boiler pipe. But we have taken measures to repair it."

"We have also halted operations at the factory to allow the workers to rest and return to their homes," Salam added.

Jahangir was alone on duty on the night of the gruesome murders.

Aid operation

FROM PAGE 12

The US said it would deploy up to 1,500 marines for tsunami relief in Sri Lanka after sending 17 Navy helicopters to Aceh, some of which were swarmed by hungry survivors.

Ahead of a crisis summit in the Indonesian capital Jakarta on Thursday, countries rushed to outledge each other with Japan offering 500 million dollars to tsunami victims and Taiwan raising its contribution to 50 million, bringing the total above two billion dollars.

But the massive scale of the human tragedy remains daunting and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said it could take five to 10 years to reconstruct from the titanic wall of water that tore apart the Indian Ocean coastlines.

In Aceh, which was closest to the epicentre of the December 26 deep-sea tremor which registered 9.0 on the Richter scale, volunteers desperately tried to bury thousands of corpses rotting in tropical temperatures in hopes of curbing the spread of disease.

Agos Kooshartoro, who leads about 100 Red Crescent volunteers in Aceh, said many others were also suffering disease, particularly of the lungs, after the tsunami swept away the sanitation infrastructure. "Many people have died because of this."

POSSIBLE OUTBREAKS OF DISEASES

The World Health Organisation said it was also seeing growing reports of potentially deadly diarrhoea outbreaks in displacement camps in Sri Lanka and India.

"It needs a few more days before we can state that we are confident that we've been able to avoid major outbreaks of disease," David Nabarro, the top WHO official dealing with humanitarian crises, told reporters in Geneva.

RESCUERS READY TO CALL OFF SEARCH

AP from Banda Aceh reports: With many thousands still missing, rescuers in the part of Southeast Asia that suffered most from last weekend's earthquake and tsunami stood ready to call off their search for survivors.

Hungry Indonesians welcomed a dozen American Seahawk helicopters as they delivered biscuits, energy drinks and instant noodles to devastated villages on the west coast of Sumatra.

More than 80,000 were killed on the island, and officials say that number could climb past 100,000. No survivor has been found for three days.

"There is very little chance of finding survivors after seven days," Lamsar Sipahutar, the head of Indonesia's search team. "We are about to stop the search-and-rescue operations. If you survived the earthquake, you probably were killed by tsunami."

DEATH COUNTS

AFP reports: Sri Lanka said it had confirmed 29,729 dead from the tidal waves, while more than 16,000 people were injured.

In Thailand the death toll was Sunday revised down slightly to 4,798 as several bodies had been double counted. Some 2,402 foreigners were listed among those who died, official data showed.

The exact toll, however, will likely never be known, with the United Nations saying the number of people killed may be around 150,000.

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HC stays hearing on rule on editors for 2 weeks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday adjourned for two weeks the hearing on the rule on the editors, publishers and reporters of four national dailies, issued last month for publishing reports and a feature on a judge's alleged wayside urination.

Dr Kamal Hossain, counsel for some of the 10 respondents, sought time as the HC bench comprising Justice MA Matin and Justice AFM Abdur Rahman sat yesterday after winter vacation. The bench granted them two weeks' time.

On December 12, the court had fixed January 2 for hearing on the rule and exempted the respondents from appearing before court in person.

The respondents are The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam and Managing Editor Syed Fahim Munaim, the Bhorer Kagoj Editor Abed Khan and Publisher Saber Hossain Chowdhury, its Chittagong Correspondent Shamaresh Baidya, New Age Editor and Publisher Enayetullah Khan, its Reporter Shahiduzzaman, Prothom Alo Editor Motiur Rahman, its Chittagong University Correspondent Masud Milad and Feature Writer Anisul Haq.

The court issued the suo moto rule on them on December 5 after the New Age, Bhorer Kagoj and The Daily Star carried reports on the incident on October 31 while the Prothom Alo published a feature on the same issue on November 2.

Islamist militant chief remanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Sayed Kawsar Hussain Siddiki Raja, the self-styled chief of Islamist militant group Shahadat-e Al Hiqma, was remanded for the third time yesterday.

Rajshahi Metropolitan Magistrate AMA Rahman placed him on a five-day remand. Detective Branch of Police, however, petitioned for a seven-day remand on December 4.

DB Inspector Ronobir Chakma told the court yesterday that Kawsar had been involved in seditious activities. "Police need to interrogate him further to know about his accomplices and the source of money and support."

Kawsar had been remanded for seven days twice in November last year and quizzed in the joint interrogation cell in Dhaka. He along with five others was arrested under section 54 of the CrPC for storming the Boalia Police Station on November 6.

Police arrested him for the first time on April 23 in 2002 for alleged anti-state activities. But he was freed on July 30, 2002. He was once again held on September 24, 2002 but was granted bail on December 21, the same year.

Following the press conference of February 8, 2003 where Kawsar announced his group's aim to turn Bangladesh into an Islamic state through an armed struggle, the government banned his party on February 9, 2003. Later on March 20, 2003, police brought seditious charge against him and eight of his associates. But he was yet again released on bail on April 14, 2003.

Outlaw dies in 'crossfire' at Naogaon

UNB, Naogaon

A leader of an outlawed party was killed allegedly in crossfire between his accomplices and police in Bhatkoi village in Raninagar upazila yesterday.

Police sources said locals of Amirpur village caught Sweet alias Tiger Killer, 26, a fugitive criminal wanted in a number of cases, and handed him over to police Saturday.

Sweet during interrogation admitted his involvement in a number of murders and also gave information about illegal firearms, the sources added.

Police took him to Burir Pukur in Dakkhin Hindupara to seize the firearms and came under attack by his accomplices, the sources said.

They said Sweet died on the spot during a 'shootout', as police returned fire. Police seized six bullets and other weapons from the spot.

Khaleda

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marks for stipend introduced by her government.

She asked the teachers to arrange special tuition for those students to make the objectives of the government's stipend programme success.

Khaleda asked the teachers to the country's legendary teachers, who had spread the light of education with dedication and perseverance to build up a talent and knowledge-based society.

Education Minister Dr M Osman Faruk, PM's Adviser for Primary and Mass Education Prof Jahana Begum, State Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul Huq Milon, Education Secretary Faruk Ahmed Siddiqui, Secretary in charge of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education Rafiqul Islam and Chairman of Bangladesh Textbook Board Prof Dilara Hafiz also spoke on the occasion.

Ministers, lawmakers, PM's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury and a large number of academics were present.

The prime minister said her government has taken steps to ensure quality education for students and create congenial academic atmosphere at schools.

She expressed her satisfaction for being able to reach the books to students in time.

"We assured that the guardians would not have to bear the blame for not being able to provide their children with books at the beginning of the year," Khaleda said. She asked all to maintain the success at any cost.

She also advised students to enlighten themselves with the light of education to take part in building society in future.

She thanked everyone concerned, including the printers and binders, for ensuring timely distribution of textbooks as planned by the government.

The prime minister later handed textbooks over to a few students from Dhaka, Kishoreganj and Chandpur to mark the inauguration.

Car bomb kills 21

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with explosives outside a US military base north of Baghdad in the Sunni heartland, where loyalty to deposed dictator Saddam Hussein still runs strong.

The blast near Balad, 60 km (36 miles) north of the capital, was the latest of many attacks on Iraq's fledgling security forces in a bloody campaign to scare voters away from the polls.

Twenty-one National Guards and one Iraqi civilian were killed and half a dozen people wounded, Iraqi police said.

US and Iraqi officials ushered in the New Year with warnings of an expected spike in pre-election assaults by insurgents trying to drive out US-led forces and topple Iraq's American-backed government.

"Those responsible for this attack ... are trying to prevent democracy in Iraq," said Major Neal O'Brien, a military spokesman in Tikrit. "They will not be successful."

On Saturday, the al-Qaeda Organisation of Holy War in Iraq led by Jordanian al-Qaeda ally Abu Musab al-Zarqawi released a video of five Iraqi security men being shot dead in the street.

A statement posted on an Islamist Web site along with the video vowed that the group would "slaughter" other Iraqis it brands collaborators with foreign occupiers.

Yesterday's attack was the deadliest suicide bombing against Iraqi security services since mid-September, when at least 47 people were killed outside a Baghdad police station.

Guerrillas have killed hundreds of security force members since the US-led invasion in 2003. Many Iraqis wonder how police and National Guards will be able to protect voters when they can barely protect themselves.

Insurgents assassinated two local government officials for Diyala province, northeast of Baghdad, and an Iraqi police major outside his home in Baghdad on Saturday, signalling they would persist with their campaign in the new year.

Zarqawi's group claimed responsibility for one of the deaths, that of Nawfal Abdul-Husseini al-Shimari, head of Diyala's governing council.

GUARDS SHOT DEAD

In the al-Qaeda-linked group's video, masked militants lined up five captive National Guardsmen, their hands bound behind their

HC stays govt

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stayed Reza's appointment until return of the regular bench of the HC from winter vacation yesterday, following a writ petition filed by Supreme Court advocate Bashir Uddin Zindigir the same day.

Appearing for the petitioner yesterday, Barrister Rafiqul Islam Miah said the government violated the independence of the commission by appointing a secretary on its own.

"According to the ACC Act, it is the commission that has the power to appoint its secretary. The government appointment is an interference," he said.

Additional Attorney General Fida M Kamal appeared for the state.

After his appointment on December 22, Reza submitted his joining letter but the ACC did not accept it.

ACC Director General Maj Gen (Retd) MA Matin, who served as Director General of now defunct bureau of anti-corruption, is serving as acting secretary to the commission.

Nurses demand Sweepers halt

FROM PAGE 1

Noakhali-bound Upakul from Dhaka and Sylhet-bound Paharika from Chittagong could not reach the station in time due to the demonstration.

"We will go on a strike from tomorrow if Laxman was not released today," sweeper-leader Naresh told reporters.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) during a clash with smugglers nabbed Laxman and passenger Harun-ur-Rashid on December 26 last year. The smugglers were transporting phensidyl and liquor on a Chittagong-bound train, police and railway sources said.

Anti-poverty

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Planning Commission, said, "As the growth in production took place mainly in the non-farm sectors, it naturally widened the social inequity. That is why the PRSP tilts towards creating safety net programmes and to ensure that the poor get the benefits of the growth."

"We intend to improve their skills and provide them with capital," Ahmed added.

Kamal Siddiqui defined the PRSP as "a three-year policy matrix for implementing poverty alleviation strategies in various sectors." He said the paper gives specific target for every sector and outlines the national priorities.

According to the paper, the GDP growth will involve higher private investment in all sectors and increased inflow of foreign direct investments, increased efficiency and technological progress across the economy, expanded growth in crop production and expansion of the export sector, among others.

backs, and shot them from behind. Some passers-by were seen stopping to watch.

"To the families of civil defence forces, the National Guard and the police we tell you to say your final goodbyes to your sons before you send them to us. Our reward to your sons is slaughter," a masked militant said in a statement.

Five men in civilian clothes were found shot dead in Ramadi, capital of restive Anbar province, earlier this week. A note said they were security men killed by guerrilla fighters.

On the video, one of the captured men who identified himself as Lieutenant Bashar Latif Jasem said his duty was to fight "terrorists entering Iraq."

When the shooting begins, the men fall to the ground but gunmen keep pumping bullets into them.

Zarqawi's group has claimed most of the bloodiest suicide attacks in Iraq since the fall of Saddam and has beheaded several foreign hostages and led a campaign of assassinations, bombings and ambushes against Iraq's new security forces.

Iraqi interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi told Iraqis in a New Year's eve broadcast on state television his government would do all it could to ensure voters' safety, backed up by US-led troops and the new Iraqi security services.

Osama bin Laden and Islamist groups have pledged to wreck the vote as part of a holy war in Iraq.

Workers' families

FROM PAGE 12

The families of five expatriate Bangladeshis killed last year by a member of the Saudi royal family were also compensated yesterday, each receiving Tk 22.43 lakh.

The minister noted during the ceremony that since taking power three years ago the four party alliance government has distributed a total of Tk 39 crore among the relatives of workers killed abroad.

He said the government also makes every effort to return home expatriate Bangladeshis who become stranded anywhere in the world due to visa problems. He also informed the family members of the victims in the Saudi tragedy that the individual responsible for the criminal act was taken into custody by the Saudi authorities and put on trial.

Secretary in charge of the expatriate welfare ministry Dalil Uddin Mondal, secretary general of Bangladesh Association of International recruiting agencies (BAIRA) Ali Haider Chowdhury and director general of BMET, S M Wahiduzzaman also spoke on the occasion.

Killings in 'crossfire'

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He termed the authorities "deaf and blind" for their inaction in the face of pervasive lawlessness.

"The entire nation must unite in bringing about a change through democratic process when the people in power have gone deaf and blind," he observed.

Mentioning the violent death of Rajshahi University teacher Mohammad Yunus, journalists Humayun Kabir Bala, Manik Saha and August 21 grenade attack, the noted jurist described 2004 as a year of darkness.

He also expressed frustration at the 'lack of progress' in the investigation into those incidents and trial of the persons responsible.

The former foreign minister urged all political parties to shun narrow party interests and converge on a common platform for movement against violence, corruption and religious extremism.