

Most Barisal city fathers on the run after crackdown

Mayor, commissioners' offices wear a deserted look

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Barisal City Corporation (BCC) is virtually paralysed as the mayor and at least 20 out of 30 ward commissioners are not attending office fearing arrest. Many of them have fled to safety since the declaration of emergency, sources said.

The BCC complex wears a deserted look as few people come to the office because regular activities like revenue collection, works relating to healthcare, sanitation and street lighting, collecting of different types of certificates by citizens and land measurement have come to a halt. Same is the situation with ward commissioners' offices.

BCC accounts officer Mashiur Rahman Badal said staff salary for the month of January could not be paid as Mayor Majibur Rahman

Sarwar did not sign cheques and salary sheets.

Routine jobs under eight BCC standing committees are also being hampered as their conveners are not attending office since January 11 after declaration of emergency and army-led raids in different city areas for arrest of "corrupt" political leaders and elected representatives, the sources said.

Mayor Majibur Rahman Sarwar left the city on January 12. His house was searched by joint forces on the same night.

He came to Barisal on January 24 and left on January 26. He again came to Barisal on February 8 to file a defamation case against daily Jugantar, which published a story on February 3 on his alleged corruption. He left the city on February

10.

The mayor could not be contacted for his comment as his whereabouts were not known. Md. Mamun, his private assistant in charge of public relations, told this correspondent over phone that the Mayor was in Dhaka for "official work".

But he could neither give any telephone number or address in Dhaka not say when the mayor would return Barisal.

A good number of ward commissioners, who were closely associated with the immediate past BNP-led four-party government, are accused of extortion, land grabbing, tender scam and other acts of corruption.

Most of the ward commissioners are fleeing homes at night to avert arrest and their offices are virtually closed, the sources said.

Sources in the administration seeking anonymity said least 20 out of 30 BCC ward commissioners were listed by joint forces for alleged corruption and patronising extortionists, criminals and musclemen belonging to different political parties.

So far two ward commissioners-- Md. Firoz Ahmed of ward 24 and Mortuza Abedin of ward 2-- have been arrested. Feroz, arrested earlier, is now in jail and Mortuza Abedin was nabbed Saturday night.

Commissioner Zainul Abedin of ward 10 was 'snatched' from rapid Action Battalion (Rab) by slum dwellers.

Sources said, in last few days, joint forces raided houses of six ward commissioners to nab them. They are KM Shahidullah of ward 12, Ziauddin Sikder of ward 25, Habibur Rahman Tipu of ward 6, Jamal Hossain Noman of ward 9, Zainul Abedin of ward 10 and Mir Zahedul Kabir of ward 18.

Most of the commissioners are also not available on their previous cellphone numbers.

However, talking to this correspondent over cell phone, commissioners Habibur Rahman Tipu, Mir Zahidul Kabir and KM Shahidullah, said they were in Dhaka for medical check up and would return Barisal soon.

A number of civil society leaders claimed that the public representatives who are skipping duties fearing arrest are not honest and so have no right to hold their positions.

This correspondent talked to Nagorik Parishad leader Mintu Bose and Nagorik Samaj leader Dr. Mizanur Rahman, former president of District Bar Association Manabendra Batobayal, Barisal Reporters Unity president Ismail Hossain and some other professionals.

If they are clean men, why don't they face the allegations, the civil society leaders said.



A desolate Barisal City Corporation complex as the city father and commissioners are not attending office.

PHOTO: STAR



PHOTO: STAR

Boatmen have innovated a technique to dredge the Kalasans channel in Jamuna. They are pumping out sand by irrigation pumps mounted on makeshift raft made by joining empty drums.

Boatmen dredging Jamuna as govt turns a blind eye

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Local people are doing a great job when the government idled it away. They are making the silted Kalasona channel in mid-Jamuna navigable again by dredging it in their own way.

The Railway stopped using the channel for ferrying goods wagons and declared it abandoned in November 15 last year as it became unfit for navigation.

After a time, movement of country boats from Balashi Ghat to destinations including Bahadurabad Ghat, Arendabari, Jigabari, Mollar Char, Sharishabari

and Narayanganj also came to a halt due to emergence of a large shoal at Kalasona turning point.

Two passenger trains--Teesta Inter-City Express and North Bengal Mail--are still shuttling between Dinajpur and Balashi Ghat and between Dhaka and Bahadurabad Ghat respectively despite suspension of passenger ferry service between Bahadurabad Ghat and Balashi Ghat since July 14 last year.

After suspension of ferry service, train passengers at Bahadurabad and Balashi and local people used to avail country boats. But the channel became unusable even by country boats as water level fell and silt deposit increased.

Finding no alternative, local people led by boatmen and lessees of different ghats joined hands and decided to remove the silt from Kalasona. They evolved a unique way to do the job.

They installed two shallow pumps with tubewells on makeshift rafts made by joining empty drums and started extracting the silt and sand from the channel. The silt extracted by the pumps are taken to other areas though boats.

"We are working for about four weeks and the silted channel has become somehow fit for plying country boats. We have done it voluntarily", said Asaduzzaman Hasu, a lessee of Balashi Ghat and

one of the initiators.

"We collected money from owners of country boats to meet the fuel cost for operating pumps", Hasu told this correspondent during a visit to the area yesterday.

Even fertiliser dealers in Gaibandha can carry their consignments from Jamalpur Jamuna Fertiliser Factory in country boats instead of traveling a long route via Jamuna Bridge, he added.

Prior to closure of railway ferry service, its marine department proposed to higher authorities to dredge the Kalasona silted channel. Instead of dredging, the authorities closed the ferry service.

I am not hiding: Kamran Sylhet mayor dispels rumour, terms the graft case 'politically motivated'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Sylhet City Corporation Mayor of Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran has contradicted press reports that he is hiding to evade arrest.

"There is no reason for my going into hiding. I am attending office regularly and staying at my house", Kamran told The Daily Star Saturday night. Kamran is also Sylhet city Awami League president.

There were rumours in last two days about his going into hiding as the Anti Corruption Commission on February 7 filed a case with Kotwali police station against 19 people including the mayor, accusing them of graft in 2001. However, all the accused persons, except Executive Engineer of the then Sylhet Pourashava Padma Sen Sinha obtained bail from the High Court.

The other accused include 16 former and incumbent ward commissioners and an employee of the city corporation.

They are ward commissioners Azadur Rahman Azad, also general secretary of city unit of Awami Juba Laegue (held by the joint forces and now in jail), AL leader Syed Ahmed Hossain, BNP leader Abdul Quaiyum Jalali Ponki, Santanu Dutta Shontu, Abdul



Wadud Khaled, Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury, Syed Misbah Uddin, Haji Faruque Ahmed, Sajjadur Rahman, Md. Shahjahan and former commissioners Prodig Kumar Bhattacharya, Azharuddin Jahangir, Oliur Rahman Sohel, Humayun Kabir Shahin, Moksud Bakht and Bidhan Chandra Kapali, executive engineer Padma Sen Sinha and store-keeper Saiful Alam.

The then Bureau of Anti Corruption filed the case against the 19 persons on May 8, 2003.

The case in brief is that the then pourashava committee headed by its chairman Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran leased a prime land allegedly at a nominal rent without any tender to Azadur

Rahman Azad (brother of the then commissioner Sazzadur Rahman) on May 21, 2000.

The land along the main road at Shibganj Bazar was leased for 20 years at a monthly rent of Tk 2800 allegedly without prior approval from the ministry. In the case, the accused persons were charged with misappropriating Tk 23,40,537.

The charge sheet further stated, the lessee did not pay the said amount as rent and the construction charge. Rather, the market's possession was handed over to him on October 28, 2001 while a letter in this regard was issued after 4 days.

Asked about the case, Kamran said, "We are on bail granted by the High Court. We will fight the case in court. It was a politically motivated case".

The then ruling alliance filed the case as its candidate lost in the city corporation polls, Kamran claimed.

The decision to lease the land was taken by the committee, he added.

"I had no personal choice. But later we had to cancel the lease of the kitchen market after the lessee failed to clear the dues in time", he added.

Pirates loot Tk 50,000 fishes in Tatulia river

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Pirates led by two notorious criminals Azahar and Bachchu on Saturday looted fish worth Tk 50,000 from eight fishing trawlers in the Tatulia, local fishermen said.

The pirates also looted oil, food and money from the trawlers, they said.

On Tuesday, the same gang attacked five trawlers carrying merchandise in the same river. They looted Tk one lakh from eight businessmen of the trawlers which were returning from Kalaiya Bazaar. The businessmen sustained serious injuries in the attack. After the robbery, the pirates fled towards Lalmojon upazila in Bhola district.

On contact, Baufal police confirmed the report.

Life of people in 10 shoals of Baufal upazila have become miserable due to menace of pirates. But, police are unable to catch them because of their location outside the district and due to lack of speed boat and other necessary equipment.

The notorious gangs are named after their ring leaders Azahar and Bachhu of Gajaria village under Lalmojon upazila, Bhola.

Most frequently the pirates attack fishermen and traders to loot cash and valuables. They also attack the villagers of different shoals in the river and loot their crops and cattle including cash and valuables. The groups usually loot Aman paddy from fields of the villagers of the bordering shoals during the season of harvest every year, according to local people.

RAJAT KANTI GOSWAMI, Moulvibazar

There has been a steady growth in orange cultivation and yield in Moulvibazar in last three years, thanks to the initiative by the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE).

The area under orange cultivation has increased to 175 hectares from 59 hectares and average yield has risen to 3.75 tonnes from 3.50 tonnes per hectare after the DAE launched a five-year Orange and Pineapple Development Project (OPDP) in greater Sylhet in 2000-2001 financial year. The project period was later extended till 2008.

Farmers in orange growing areas said they have been benefited from training on improved methods of cultivation and other forms of support provided under the project. But their two main problems--irrigating gardens and marketing products--still unresolved. Infrastructures needed to remove these problems need massive government support, they said.

Anwar Hossain, horticulture development officer at Moulvibazar DAE office, who is in charge of the OPDP project in the district, said orange growers now spontaneously join training programmes and their number increased to 1500 from 1100.

He said, there are over one lakh orange plants in the production belt in Moulvibazar. At least one crore pieces of orange are being grown in over 75 small and large gardens in 25 villages.

According to official estimate, about 1500 tonnes of orange were produced in Moulvibazar district this year. Each tonne comprise about 8000 pieces of orange, growers said. The fruit is sold at around Tk 60 a dozen at wholesale markets.

Anwar Hossain said there is great potentials for development of gardens and raising the yield up to five times if proper infrastructures are built and other facilities given.

The number of plants in gardens has increased in recent days as plantation takes place in rows in a planned way, he said.

Farmers are also given orange saplings and identity cards to avoid hassle by law enforcers in marketing the fruit.

Orange growers Abdul Jalil, Abdul Gofur and Md Suleman of Hawachhera village are happy as they can market their products without any harassment by law enforcers. Now, more people are



Punish killers of journo Belal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Khulna Press Club yesterday held a discussion meeting followed by Milad Mehfil on the occasion of the second death anniversary of journalist Shaikh Belaluddin.

Presided over by its president Makbul Hossain Minto, the discussion meeting was addressed by, among others, press club secretary Mohammad Shaheb Ali, Shaikh Didarul Alam, SM Zahid, Abdur Razzak Rana and Quazi Amanullah.

They demanded further investigation into Belal murder case so that real culprits are punished through a fair trial.

Shaikh Belaluddin, Khulna bureau chief of Dainik Sangram, died on February 11, 2005 at Dhaka Combined Military Hospital after he was fatally injured in a bomb attack on the night of February 5 on the press club compound.

757 CONTROVERSIAL COPS 15 threaten to take life in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Fifteen newly recruited sub-inspectors and sergeants hauling from Khulna and Bagerhat districts yesterday threatened to take life by setting them on fire if the caretaker government does not withdraw its decision to cancel their appointment.

They are among 757 cops recruited at the fag end of the four-party government.

The threat was given at a press conference held at Khulna Press Club. It was addressed by Md Saidur Rahman and Shahriar Hasan, selected for appointment as sub-inspector and sergeant respectively.

They said their life will be spoiled if their appointments are cancelled as their age for government service has expired. They said they were waiting for appointment since 2005.

We were recruited properly on the basis of merit, not on political consideration, they claimed.

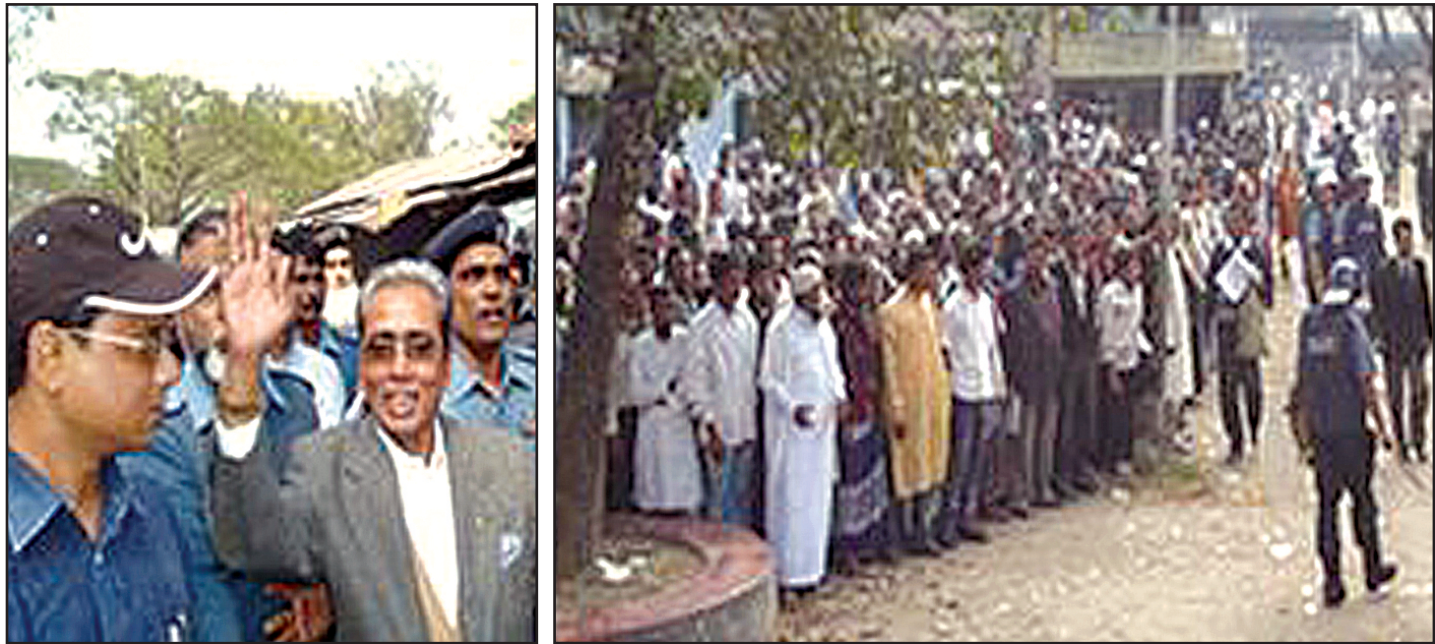


PHOTO: STAR

Former energy minister Mosharraf Hossain being taken to court in Mymensingh (left) yesterday and crowds near the court compound.