

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 Mashur 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 closely

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 nor 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.

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 on cell phone, commissioners Habibur Rahman Tipu, Mir Zahedul 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.

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



PHOTO: STAR

Boatmen have innovated a technique to dredge the Kalasons 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 Kalasons 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 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.

and Narayanganj also came to a halt due to emergence of a large shoal at Kalasons 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 lessers of different ghats joined hands and decided to remove the silt from Kalasons. 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 through 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 Kalasons 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 League (held by the joint forces and now in jail), AL leader Syed Ahmed Hossain, BNP leader Abdul Quayum Jalali Ponki, Santanu Dutta Shontu, Abdul

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 Lalmohon upazila in Bhola district.

On contact, Baufal police confirmed the report.

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 lessor failed to clear the dues in time", he added.



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



PHOTO: STAR

Orange growers still face two major problems

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.

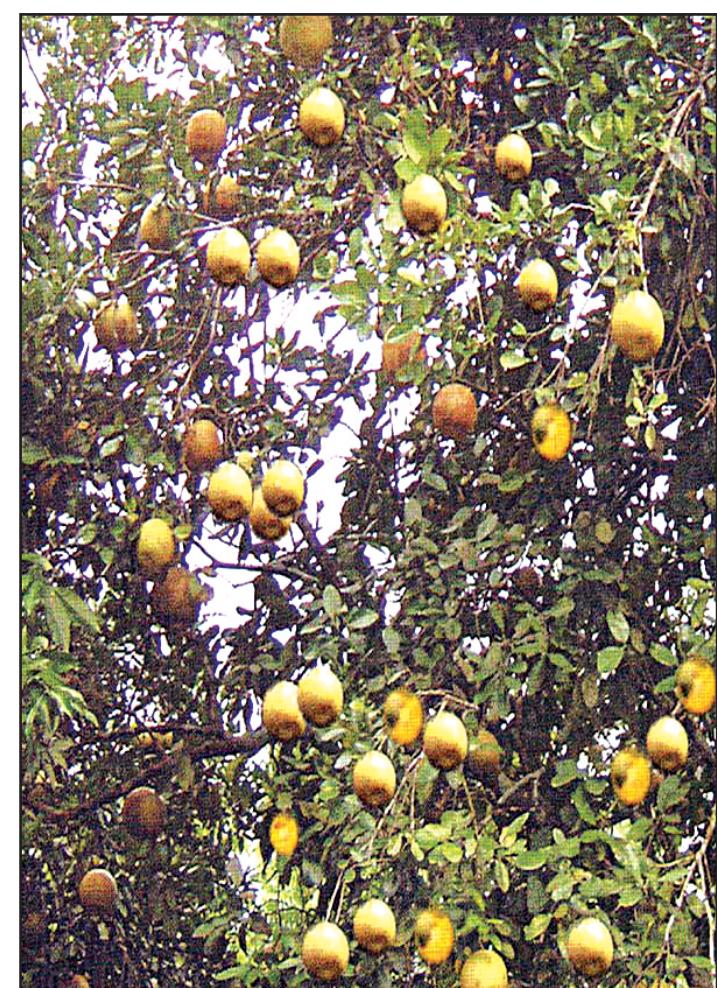
According to official estimate, about 1500 tonnes of orange were produced in Moulvibazar district this year. Each tonne comprise about 8000 pieces of orange, growers said. The fruit is sold at around Tk 60 a dozen at wholesale markets.

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



involved in orange cultivation and they are optimistic about their gardens and business. Earlier, many growers were arrested on false charge of smuggling orange as the orange growing areas are close to the border.

Sanau Hoque and Sirajul Islam of Lathi Tila village in Juri upazila, close to the border, described how he learnt improved methods of gardening.

"I was arrested six times earlier while marketing orange grown in my garden", recalled Abdul Jalil of Hawachhera village in Juri upazila. Now there is no problem, he said.

Orange is now grown in many villages in Juri and Baralekhla upazilas.

Almost every family has an orange garden, having 5 to 5000 plants. Each plant yields at least 500 oranges if the weather is favorable, they said.

Anwar Hossain said the OPDP project envisages raising 75 new

gardens in Baralekhla, Juri and Srimongal upazilas in the coming rainy season. Each garden will have 275 plants.

There are also a few gardens in Gainghat, Beanibazar and Jaintapur upazilas in Sylhet district; Sunamganj Sadar, Chhatak and Duwarabazar upazilas in Sunamganj and Bahubal, Chunorughat and Madhabpur upazilas of Hobiganj district under the OPDP project, officials said.

Providing irrigation facilities in hilly areas and developing feeder roads involve a huge expenditure, which the local people can not afford. Anwar Hossain said, as sources of surface water is not easily available in hills, deep tubewell irrigation is the only alternative. Five pumps were distributed among growers under the OPDP, he said. Growers have to carry orange manually to distant markets from gardens in the hills, adds to the cost.

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 Makhbul Hossain Mintoo, the discussion meeting was addressed by, among others, press club secretary Mohammad Shahab 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 hailing 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.