

Rajuk comes under anti-graft hatchet

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for probable measures to check corruption and irregularities in Rajuk."

Four task force teams comprising officials from defence and different government organisations including the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) set up a camp in the Rajuk building on June 1, and are examining and scrutinising all official documents related to different projects including those of different real estate companies and other official files.

The issues being looked into by the task forces are irregularities in allocating plots, sales of government houses, nepotism, bribery, partisanship in Rajuk, and irregularities in the process of inviting tenders.

Besides looking into the issues, the task forces are also working to bring effective reforms to Rajuk so that corruptionists cannot get easy access to the government agency in the future.

Members of the four task forces have been investigating corruption of high profile suspects since February, but in addition to that they are now especially assigned to investigate institutionalised corruption in Rajuk.

Task force sources said before they initiated the investigation in February, around 16 thousand building construction plans had been pending for years for Rajuk's

approval. Rajuk had been allegedly keeping the plans pending or unapproved just to harass people for bribes.

After the task forces had fixed a deadline for immediate disposal of all the pending cases by May 30, Rajuk deferred 2,300 construction plans while the rest were given approvals within the deadline. The agency also showed proper reasons for the deferment of cases in accordance with the directives given by the task forces.

The task force teams working to bring reforms to Rajuk pointed out to higher authorities that corruption in Rajuk could be checked if appointments to Rajuk were made transferable. As the appointments to Rajuk are non-transferable, corruption is widespread at almost all levels of the government institution. The task forces recommended bringing changes to the present circular in this regard.

According to the present provisions of Rajuk, its officials cannot be transferred anywhere. If Rajuk wants to transfer any official, consent of that official is required, the current provisions say.

A task force member said a proposal regarding bringing reforms to Rajuk has already been prepared. The proposal will be sent to the chief adviser for his approval through the ministries concerned, he added.

Structural reforms will also be

brought to Rajuk and the task force teams are working to prepare a proposal in this regard.

The task forces have put special emphasis on unearthing how corruption has become institutionalised in Rajuk. They will also look into different forms of corruption that were being carried out in Rajuk at different levels including at the level of forwarding files and necessary documents to different departments like planning, estates, finance, building, inspection, and engineering.

"As far as we have investigated, every department under Rajuk has been found to be infested with systemic corruption. A list of about 50 corrupt Rajuk officials has already been prepared based on a survey," said a task force official.

"The list is expected to grow longer gradually," he added.

Established in 1987 Rajuk now has over 1,000 staff. The task force members observed that almost all the staff are somehow involved in corruption to one degree or another, and it would be an exception if any staff is found without any involvement in graft.

In the last five years Rajuk experienced the worst of corruption when almost every official was busy accumulating money by any possible means. So the period of the last five years has been given the highest priority for investigation. The investigators are being compelled to

scrutinise files and documents of Rajuk dating back to 1989 to understand the workings and magnitude of corruption that has been plaguing the important government organisation.

The immediate past BNP-led alliance government prior to handing over power appointed 72 officials in different grades. The written and viva-voce examinations for the appointments were held on the same day on October 18 last year while the question paper was also the same for different grades, said a task force official.

The official also said the appointments were made flouting the rules only to get partisan persons appointed.

Corruption in Rajuk regarding sales of 18 government houses, allotments of 897 residential plots in Uttara under the third phase of allotments there, allotments of 48 industrial plots in Tongi, 50 plots in Banani, 50 more plots in Uttara, and the allotments for Media Palli in Tejgaon will also be looked into.

The task forces are also examining possible corruption in approving a plan for Bashundhara Group for creating housing plots on 1,249 acres of wetland in upscale Baridhara of the capital.



PHOTO: AL

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina talks to ailing Mobarak Hossain, brother of former lawmaker Mosarraf Hossain of Netrakona, as he arrives in front of Sudha Sadan in an ambulance to meet her before going to hospital yesterday.

Verdict in Manju's liquor case today

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raided Manju's Dhanmondi residence and seized 21 bottles of contraband liquor.

The prosecution prayed to the court for giving the accused highest punishment in accordance with the Narcotics Control Act.

Earlier, the court had recorded statements of seven prosecution witnesses including the complainant and the investigation officer (IO) of the case.

On June 3, the same court framed charges against Manju in his absence and issued arrest warrant against him.

Before the order, the court had asked Manju to appear before the court to defend himself but he failed to oblige the court order. So, the court had cancelled his bail.

On May 14, Dhanmondi police pressed charges against Manju in the case.

Sub-Inspector Amirul Islam, also

the IO of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate showing 12 people as prosecution witnesses.

HUDA CASE

A special court adjourned the hearing of a graft case against former minister Huda and his wife Sigma Huda yesterday following a time petition by the defence lawyers.

Judge AK Roy of the Second Special Judge set up at shere-e-Bangla Nagar MP Hostel fixed Sunday for hearing on charge framing against them as the defence counsel prayed time for adjournment of the hearing.

In the petition, the lawyers mentioned that Sigma Huda could not appear before the court due to her illness.

After hearing both the sides, the court adjourned the hearing and asked the defence lawyers to bring Sigma on Sunday.

MAMUN CASE

One more prosecution witness of an arms case against Mamun yesterday gave statement at a Dhaka court. Earlier, 23 prosecution witnesses had given their statements.

Judge Mohammad Abul Bashar of the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court recorded the statement and fixed Thursday for next hearing.

LOBI CASE

A Dhaka court yesterday fixed Sunday for return of the arrest warrant issued earlier against Khushnud Asgar, wife of detained former BNP lawmaker Ali Asgar Lobi, in connection with a graft case filed against Lobi in March.

Judge Azizul Haq of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court passed the order as the arrest warrant against Khushnud was not served on her and not returned.

Another Judge M Firoz Alam of the First Special Court, turning down the

petition for time extension, fixed today for hearing on charge framing of a graft case against Sweekhaseb League General Secretary Pankaj Kumar Devnath and his wife Monika Devnath.

Meanwhile, hearing of a graft case against Firoz Mian, a dismissed CBA leader of T&T, along with his wife Rawshan Ara Begum was deferred by a week following a petition by his counsel as he did not get the certified copies in connection with the case for preparation.

Castro charges Bush ordered him killed before he took office

AFP, HAVANA

Cuba's communist leader Fidel Castro accused US President George W Bush of ordering him killed even before moving into the White House, in an article published in the newspaper Gramma yesterday.

"The issue of the accusation related to his plan to kill me comes from before he used fraud to steal the victory from another candidate," the convalescing Castro, 80, said of Bush.

Castro, who claims to hold a sort of world record in evading assassination plots, at some 650 in his count, recalled in an opinion piece in the Cuban Communist Party newspaper that he reported the alleged plot publicly on August 5, 2000 in a speech in Pinardel Rio.

Of all the US presidents since 1959, Castro said Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) ordered no hit, and that he had no knowledge of former president Bill Clinton (1993-2001) ever having given a green light for a Castro assassination bid.

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The Sri Lankan pacemen, mainly Dilhara Fernando, made the initial damage before the champion off-spinner finished the job against his happy-hunting side by taking five wickets for 15 runs in 7.3 overs as Bangladesh were bundled out in 32.3 overs for their lowest ever score in first innings, after forty minutes play in the second session.

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third wicket before Mahela Jayawardene, who became the ball to wicketkeeper Prasanna Jayawardene.

The home team lost another wicket when left-arm spinner Abdur Razzaq had Chamara Silva (1) caught by Mashrafe Bin Mortaza at first slip.

Sri Lanka however already managed a 138-run lead after finishing the day on 227-3 in 51 overs. Vandort was batting on 87 while Tilakaratne Dilshan accompanied him with quickfire 27.

Bangladesh had promised to

play sensible cricket this time to improve their performance against the island nation but another irresponsible batting display brought back the old memories.

Shahriar Nafees and Javed Omar made a confident start but the plague started once unorthodox pacer Lasith Malinga removed out-of-form Nafees (15), who was dismissed in similar fashion to the

last series against India; by flicking him with his 58th five-for.

The pacers set the stage for Murali, who started the series 35 wickets away from eclipsing the Shane Warne world record mark of 708, to wrap up the innings by taking his 58th five-for.

Two top order batsmen Rajin

Saleh (3) and Shakib Al Hasan (16) and the tail enders found no clues against the devastating off-spinner, who improved his tally to 55 in eight matches against Bangladesh.

Militant killed in Pakistan school attack

AFP, PESHAWAR

A security guard shot dead a Taliban militant when rebels tried to attack the foreign principal of a school in northwest Pakistan, police said yesterday.

Four masked men tried to scale the wall of the private school in the town of Bannu on Sunday and the guard opened fire to stop them, local police chief Dar Ali Khattak told AFP.

One was killed by the guard and the other three fled. The guard was injured but was in stable condition in hospital.

Khattak identified the principal as a New Zealand national, saying that he had been living in Bannu since 1995. Other officials were not able to confirm this.

In March, Taliban militants briefly abducted the principal of a school in the northwestern town of Tank after a militant recruiter and a policeman died in a clash.

10,000 Rohingyas to be shifted

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Kerontoli in Teknaf, but is yet to find the right one, he noted.

The number of the Rohingyas living in the makeshift camps in poor conditions was nearly 10,000, the official told The Daily Star yesterday.

The government took the decision following repeated requests from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and European Commission (EC), as they have been living in the low-lying areas that go under water during rain or high tide forcing the residents to take shelter on the streets.

"The situation has to be dealt with on a very urgent basis before there is any humanitarian disaster. The health of the children and women is very crucial at this camp.

They have to be moved urgently to safer places," said Esko Kentschynsky, the then ambassador and head of the delegation of the EC to Bangladesh on his visit to the makeshift camp in July 2005.

During the same visit, UNHCR's former representative to Bangladesh Christopher Beng Cha Lee had said, "The situation is really very bad. The area might be washed away any time and a large number of people will die."

The ministry official said that most of the illegal Rohingyas in the shanties do fishing, collect wood illegally from the nearby forests and are involved in petty crimes, smuggling and snatching or so for a living.

To escape repression by the Myanmar military junta, nearly 2.5 lakh Rohingyas had entered

Bangladesh since 1991. About 2,36,490 were repatriated, according to official statistics.

Local authorities, however, claim that many of the Rohingyas who were sent home entered the Bangladeshi territory again and had integrated with the local people.

These 10,000 Rohingyas are a group identified as 'illegal Rohingyas,' but are not registered as refugees. The Myanmar government also does not want to take them back, the official noted.

Asked if these Rohingyas will be granted refugee status in future, the official said that no decision has been taken in this regard.

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Echinacea 'halves risk of catching cold'

AFP, Paris

the incidence of a cold by 86 percent.

The analysis was led by University of Connecticut pharmacist Craig Coleman.

Echinacea is a term for nine related daisy-like plant species that are native to North America and feature in the traditional medicine of the Sioux and other Plains Indians as remedies for infection, snake-bites and rabies.

Other names for the plant are black sampson, Kansas snakeroot and purple coneflower.

Coleman's team said they had counted more than 800 products containing echinacea, which come in the form of tablets, extracts, fresh juice, tincture and tea.

Three of the nine species are

commonly used (Echinacea purpurea, E. angustifolia and E. pallida), and different parts of the plant are used for different products.

The authors say it is still unclear how echinacea appears to stimulate the immune system against the cold virus.

Its three major ingredients are alkamides, chicoric acid and polysaccharides, but it is unclear

whether these work by acting separately or together, or with the help of other constituents.

And the authors sound a word of caution, saying more work needs to be done on the plant's safety before doctors can recommend echinacea as a standard option for preventing or treating the common cold.

