

VGF card anomalies

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same village, said he did not get the card either.

The list grew longer as Ismail, 55, Latif Jomadar, 50, and Maksuda Begum, 45, all from the neighbouring village of Mostaqpur, also complained that they were yet to receive the VGF card.

All of these affected people alleged that even though the VGF cards are supposed to be for the worst-affected victims of the cyclone, the people having close ties with the local UP members, especially their relatives, have received thecards.

Kamruzzaman, chairman of Nilganj UP, explained why some of the victims are being left out of the special feeding programme. "I need about 7,500 VGF cards for distribution, but the upazila administration gave me only 5,000. And this is why some eligible recipients are being deprived of the VGF programme."

District Relief and Rehabilitation Officer (DRRO) Abdul Malek, however, rebutted the UP chairman's criticism, saying, "We have been distributing the VGF cards according to the demand."

The local UP chairmen and members are distorting the fact and making all these accusations for political gains, Malek added.

Villagers under Angaria Union in Dumki upazila alleged that the local UP members are listing multiple members of a household to be the recipients of the VGF card.

Rafiq, Sharu and Glas Uddin, three brothers living in the household of their father Menaj Uddin at Rupashia village in Angaria Union, have been listed as recipients of the VGF card.

Names of Monjed Ali's three sons

-- Siddiq, Rezaul and Shah Alam, who

live with their father, have also been included on the list.

Local UP member Sekander has included their names on the list in exchange for money ranging from Tk 25 to Tk 50 from each, the villagers claimed.

Sanjoy Kumar, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Dumki, said, "We are verifying the VGF list turned in by local UP chairmen and members."

DRRO Abdul Malek said, "We are getting complaints against different UP chairmen and members for their involvement in irregularities in the VGF card distribution process. We are going to take action against them. They must be punished."

Meanwhile on Saturday night, amid widespread allegations of irregularities in listing VGF card recipients and distribution of the cards, joint forces arrested five UP members of two union parishads under Patuakhali Sadar Upazila.

They are Zaki Hossain and Eskandar Ali of Badarpur Union Parishad, Khokon Hawlader, Mainul Islam alias Zia and Nurul Haq of Bara Bihui Union Parishad.

Sources at Patuakhali Sadar Police Station said the five UP members were arrested for violation of rules as they have distributed the VGF cards to more than one person of a family and manipulated the recipients' list to include names of their close ones.

Kohinur Begum, sadar upazila project implementation officer, filed two separate cases with the Patuakhali Sadar Police Station on Sunday against the arrestees.

"We will take legal action against the UP members after investigation," said Delwar Hossain, officer in charge of the police station.

30 lakh tonnes

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director of Brac, said at a joint press briefing with CPD.

It is essential that the government ensure smooth supply of fertiliser during the Boro season to offset this shortage, he added.

Executive Director of CPD Mustafizur Rahman and senior research fellow of the organisation Uttam Deb were also present at the briefing.

"An agricultural rehabilitation programme needs to be initiated immediately to generate employment and increase food production to minimise the effect of rising food prices and household level food insecurity," states the report jointly commissioned by Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Brac.

The report was prepared after Brac and CPD researchers consulted over 120 farmers in different parts of the Sidr-affected areas recently.

The package should include smooth supply of fertiliser and seeds, tilling equipment, low-lift pumps for irrigation and agricultural loans, the report states.

The report notes that irrigation facilities are absent in the cyclone-affected areas and a huge number of cattle were lost in the disaster. Due to these reasons, the small and marginal farmers should be given power pumps and power tillers instead of damaging forestry and wildlife instead of protecting them.

The CPD-Brac report states that the farmers demand seasonal crop loans of Tk 4,000 per bigha for irrigation and cultivation of hybrid-Boro, to be repaid in one or two instalments after the next crop harvest.

The fish farmers on the other hand asked for a much higher amount, Tk 20,000 to Tk 50,000, for fish cultivation in large ponds, to be repaid within two years with a six-month grace period.

Talking to the reporters, Mahbub said that the current government plan to supply only fertiliser and seeds to Sidr-affected farmers is not enough, adding that it should also include irrigation facilities and loans.

He said the NGOs alone cannot provide the irrigation tools and facilities package and the farmers should be assisted through coordinated efforts by NGOs, the private sector and the government.

The government moved the application seeking stay on the operation of the High Court order, as it preferred leave to appeal to overturn the HC orders.

Hasina was arrested on July 16 in connection with the case filed with Gulshan Police Station on June 13.

Hasina, her younger sister Sheikh Rahana, living in London, and detained cousin and former health minister Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim have been implicated in the cyclone.

Senior research fellow of CPD Uttam Deb said that cash-for-work schemes for the landless should be introduced as they do not have any assets left after the cyclone.

Many still

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Ahmed Chowdhury, Coordinator of UN System in Bangladesh and UNDP Resident representative Renata L Dessallien and Secretary in charge of the Law Ministry Kazi Habibur Awal also spoke on the occasion.

On allegations that the commission has exaggerated the wealth accounts of Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Hanif said, "The ACC does not provide information without documents. Whatever information was given was based on papers."

CASE AGAINST MIRZA KHOKAN

Meanwhile, the anti-graft body yesterday filed a case against Dhaka City Corporation Ward Commissioner Mirza Khokan and his wife Masuda Ekram for accumulating wealth beyond their known sources of income and concealing information in their declarations of assets.

ACC Assistant Director SM Sahidur Rahman filed the case with Motijheel Police Station.

According to the first information report (FIR), Mirza Khokan, younger brother of Mirza Abbas, has concealed information about property worth Tk 28.19 lakh in his wealth statement submitted to the commission on July 23.

Assets earned beyond his known sources of income are worth Tk 1.54 crore.

The FIR also mentions that Khokan has shown his assets to be worth Tk 3.19 crore but the ACC probe found that he has held back information about property valued at Tk 28.19 lakh.

He also said that though the commissioner is a business man according to income tax documents, his tax returns for 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 tax years showed zero for his income.

GOVT PLEA FOR STAYING HC ORDER REFERRED TO FULL BENCH

UNB adds: The chamber judge of the Supreme Court yesterday referred a government appeal for halting the High Court order that stayed former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's trial in a makeshift court to the full bench of the Appellate Division for hearing.

Justice Hassan Ameen, after hearing the application moved by Additional Attorney General Salah Uddin Ahmed, passed the order.

A competent source told the news agency yesterday that the government application for stay would come up on the cause list on December 13.

On Sunday, the High Court, following a writ petition filed by detained Hasina, also president of Awami League, stayed the trial proceedings of the Tk 3-crore extortion case filed against her by Azam J Chowdhury, managing director of a power company.

Govt to procure

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ministry has already announced its plan to import 5 lakh tonnes of rice from neighbouring India and other countries.

The purchase committee also approved a proposal placed by the industries ministry to appoint a foreign firm at a cost of Tk 103 crore to repair and rehabilitate the burnt gas compressor and turbine of Ghorasal Fertiliser Factory. He hoped that those steps would strengthen the foundations of democracy in the country.

Sundarbans after Sidr

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local people in Sharankhola and Chandpuri ranges to mark the "trees to be sold" even before completion of a damage assessment, they added.

"Fortunately, the government order came and the forest department's move to sweep clean a quarter of the Sundarbans has stopped," an environmentalist said.

"An agricultural rehabilitation programme needs to be initiated immediately to generate employment and increase food production to minimise the effect of rising food prices and household level food insecurity," states the report jointly commissioned by Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Brac.

The environmentalist who declined to be named has just returned from the forest after a weeklong visit to see the damage caused by Cyclone Sidr last month.

From the general impression, forest department high officials had earlier told the press Sidr had damaged at least one-fourth of the Sundarbans, 10 percent severely.

The 600,000-hectare Sundarbans offers more than 400,000 hectares of forest, the remaining part comprising water bodies.

However, a leading environmentalist speaking anonymously told The Daily Star the forest department might inflate the damage assessment so that an unscrupulous section can benefit from selling trees.

The forest department is perceived to be one of the most corrupt departments of the country and often accused of damaging forestry and wildlife instead of protecting them.

The environmentalist explained to The Daily Star why regeneration of the forest is the best when it is left alone. "The decaying trees provide good nutrients for the soil. If the forest floor is swept clean, it will become difficult for regeneration as direct sunlight may dry up the sub-soil."

In addition, the logging activities will bring in hundreds of wood cutters. It will be a living hell for the

wildlife that already lost their habitats in the cyclone.

"The animals should also be left alone to help them find their new homes and settle down," he added.

The forest department usually works on its own as there is no agency to monitor its activities. Allegations are rife that unscrupulous officials thrive on selling trees illegally.

"They illegally lease out parts of the forest to woodcutters, even to outlaws, and make quick cash," said another environmentalist. "This was exactly what was about to happen there."

"My impression of the real damage is that the forest has lost about 10 percent trees. Judging from the nature of the Sundarbans, it will take about five years to regenerate and make up for this loss," he noted.

"Already I have seen new sprouts coming out in the damaged areas."

Hamidur

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Hatimara Chara village of Tripura.

Later, he was awarded with "Birshreshtha", the country's highest gallantry award.

The remains of the 17-year-old freedom fighter were exhumed from the grave on Sunday and handed over to a Bangladesh delegation.

The forest department is perceived to be one of the most corrupt departments of the country and often accused of damaging forestry and wildlife instead of protecting them.

His remains will be brought to Dhaka today.

Later, the remains will be taken to National Parade Square where 21 gun salutes will be heralded to pay tribute to the war hero, said a press release of Inter Services Public Relations.

Hamidur's remains will be buried in state honour at Mirpur Intellectuals' Graveyard today.

President Iajuddin Ahmed will receive the remains and place floral wreaths on the coffin.

Death threat

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harassed and threatened with severe consequences, including death threats, since he had filed the sedition case.

Unknown miscreants were following him around all the time, he said.

Fazlur filed the case against Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahed, Assistant Secretary General Abdul Quader Mollah and former chairman of Islami Bank Shah Md Abdul Hanan for their anti-state activities.

Referring to the stories run against him in the Daily Sangram, Fazlur said one Tofazzel Hossain Kamal, a reporter of the newspaper, had approached him right after he filed the case. Kamal had asked Fazlur what party he supported and who had instigated him to file the case against those named.

The Daily Sangram ran two reports against him right after this incident, he said.

Fazlur denied the allegations published against him - reports, which he complained, were written with intention to cast a shadow on his own character.

Since filing of the case, the government has said that a private person could not file a sedition case. Fazlur asked at the conference how it was that Barrister Omar Sadat, in the very recent past, had filed a sedition case against Dr Kamal Hossain and some other eminent

lawyers.

Fazlur Rahman's lawyer Abu Mohammad Abdur Razzak, who is also coordinator of the legal aid committee of Bangladesh Tarique Federation, was present at the conference. He told the reporters that a set of eminent lawyers, including Barrister Rafique Ul Haq and Dr Kamal Hossain, has expressed their solidarity with the sedition case.

This set of eminent lawyers have also offered their assistance to all people who will file sedition and murder cases against war criminals, Razzak added.

Meanwhile a Dhaka court hears matters today related to government approval for registering the sedition case as a regular case.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Emran Hossain Chowdhury on Sunday fixed the date for the hearing and asked the complainant to be present. The court also asked the deputy commissioner (prosecution) to appear before the court during the hearing.

Fazlur Rahman filed the sedition case with the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate. The court initially ordered Tejgaon Police Station to register it as a regular case. But Tejgaon police refused to register it as a regular case, saying they did not have necessary government sanction to register such a case.

The OC then sent back the case file to the court seeking directives about the next course of action.

Climate change

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"we might have something like a global civil war," said Schnellhuber.

According to the Nobel-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), by 2100 global average surface temperatures could rise by between 1.1 C and 6.4 C (1.98 and 11.52 F) compared to 1990-99 levels.

The UNEP document, issued on the sidelines of the December 3-14 meeting of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), is the starker warning yet by a United Nations agency on the security risks that flow from climate change.

These perceived risks -- also shared by a growing number of political and military think-tanks -- stem from competition over dwindling water resources as well as tensions arising from the aftermath of major storms, failed harvests or other catastrophes.

The report, "Climate Change as a Security Risk," placed the spotlight on a number of "regional hotspots," including:

-- **NORTH AFRICA:** Worsening water shortages, dwindling crop yields, galloping population growth and "poor political problem-solving capabilities" will intensify the potential for political crisis and migratory pressure. The Nile delta will be at risk from rising sea levels and salinisation of farmland.

-- **SAHEL:** Climate change will exacerbate the problems of a region characterised by weak states, civil wars and refugee flows.

-- **SOUTH ASIA:** India, Pakistan and Bangladesh face "especially severe" risks from climate change, led by glacial retreat in the Himalayas that will threaten the water supply for millions of people.

Sea-level rise and cyclones will threaten the coastline of the Bay of Bengal and changes to monsoon rains will hit agriculture.

40 immigrants drown off Turkey

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president's office after taking care of the legal process involved," Mainul said.

"The government doesn't at all intend to detain university teachers. Since there were cases filed against them, the government had to clear them legally after their appeal to the government for absolving them of the charges," the law adviser said.

As news of the presidential clemency reached Rajshahi in the morning, family members of the detained teachers, their relatives, and journalists started gathering at the jail gate from 10:00am.

But the jail authorities told the families that they had yet to receive any information regarding the mercy.

They also visited Sabash Bangladesh, a liberation war memorial, and showed respect to the martyrs of the liberation war by observing a minute of silence there.

Moloy Kumar Bhoumik and Dulal Chandra Biswas addressed the crowd there. They expressed their gratitude to all their colleagues, students, lawyers, and others who had demanded their release.

"We are happy that the government showed its goodwill and rational approach