

Govt plans to give BPC new shape

BSS, Dhaka

The two-day first photography exhibition on tourism ended at Jatiya Chitralaya of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy in the city on Saturday night.

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) in cooperation with Shilpakala Academy organised the exhibition in partnership with BanglaLink, Ekushey Television and the Samakal.

The exhibition aims at projecting the eternal beauty of Bangladesh to foreigners and flourishing the country's tourism industry.

Special Assistant to Chief Adviser for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mahubul Alam was present at the concluding ceremony as the chief guest.

BPC Chairman Shafiqul Alam Mehedi, Shilpakala Academy Director General Bhuiyan Shafiqul Islam, BanglaLink Public Relations and Communication Executive (Marketing) Shamoon Muheeb Chowdhury were present at the programme.

Speaking on the occasion, Mahubul Alam said the government has taken steps to give the BPC into a new shape that would help flourish the country's tourism industry.

Lauding the BPC for holding the photography exhibition, he said it would encourage the people to attract tourism.

A total of 2000 photographs, selected from 3,000 photographs on landscapes, were put on display at the exhibition.

The photographs included panoramic views and landscapes of Cox's Bazar and Kuakata sea beaches, the Sundarbans, tribal lives, rural and urban Bangladesh, fairs and festivals, national days, cultural, historical and archeological sites, wildlife, flora and fauna and seasons.

A three-member panel comprising eminent lens men of the country selected the photographs.

Later, Mahubul Alam handed over awards to three photographers -- Shobeb Faruqui, MM Zahidur Rahman Biplob and Sheikh Mahir Uddin -- for their best photographs. The award carries a crest, a certificate and Tk 10,000 each.

BPC has, however, decided to buy 40 selected photographs from the exhibition for their album.

2 killed in road accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

Two people were killed in a road accident at Sajariya area on Magura-Jhenidah highway in the early hours of yesterday.

The victims were identified as Abul Kalam, 35, and Moslemuddin, 38.

Police said the accident occurred at around 12:30am when a Dhaka-bound bus knocked a rickshaw, killing its passenger Moslemuddin and the rickshaw puller Kalam on the spot.



Children perform a dance number welcoming the road show 'Esho Bangladesh Gori' (Let us build a Bangladesh) when it reaches the port city yesterday.

Road show arrives in Ctg

CU CORRESPONDENT

People from all walks of life gave a warm reception to the road show 'Esho Bangladesh Gori' (Let us build a Bangladesh) when it reached the port city yesterday amid heavy downpour.

The motorcade of the road show entered the city at around 4:30pm.

Chittagong Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Ashraf Shamim welcomed them cutting ribbons at the GEC Intersection.

A dance programme was organised on the spot.

Later the motorcade, escorted by horses, elephants, horse-carts and traditional band party, was brought to

MA Aziz Stadium.

During the journey, people including students from different educational institutions, local administration and non-government organisations welcomed the road show by holding banners, festoons and placards standing on both sides of the road from the GEC Intersection to MA Aziz Stadium.

Earlier, the local administration at Mirsarai upazila, the entry point of the Chittagong district, and Sitakunda upazila welcomed the road show.

Ministries of Agriculture, Food and Disaster Management, Home, Post and Telecommunications, Election Commission and Anti-Corruption

Commission are jointly organising the road show to make people aware of the nation-building activities and inspire them in building a country free from corruption and violence.

To mark the occasion, a daylong programme will be held at the MA Aziz Stadium today.

Adviser for agriculture and water resource ministries Dr CS Karim will attend the programme as chief guest.

The programme includes fair, discussion, essay and debate competition, award giving to eminent citizens, distribution of potatoes among the distressed and cultural show.

The road show will leave for Cox's Bazar tomorrow at 7:00am.

G8 to pledge to take lead in halving gas emissions

AFP, Tokyo

The Group of Eight richest nations is likely to pledge at the upcoming summit to take the lead in efforts to halve emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050, a newspaper said yesterday.

Leaders of the G8 -- France, Germany, Britain, Canada, Japan, Italy, Russia and the United States -- are to start a three-day meeting Monday in the northern Japanese spa resort of Toyoko.

At the previous summit last July, host country Germany overcame fierce US resistance and coaxed the rich nations' club into agreeing to "consider seriously" the goal of at least halving worldwide emissions by

2050.

For the Toyoko summit, negotiations are in the final stages for a leaders' declaration saying "the G8 will take the lead in making efforts to halve" emissions or something similar, the Yomiuri Shimbun said.

Europe and Japan want to upgrade the expression "consider" in Germany to "agree" but the United States has been seeking an accord that would include China, India and other major emitters, Japan's best-selling newspaper said.

Another major daily, the Asahi Shimbun, reported yesterday that developed countries, including the United States, are to agree to set their own mid-term targets in cutting gas emissions.

The developed nations' pledge for country-by-country mid-term targets will be in a leaders' statement of 16 countries, including the G8 and developing countries, to be held on Wednesday, the newspaper said.

Japan's environment minister, Ichiro Kameshita, said Sunday that Japan was unlikely to volunteer to declare its mid-term target at the upcoming summit.

"We should weigh this against our national interest. We will have heated discussions on mid-term targets from now," he told public broadcaster NHK.

Japan has vowed to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 60-80 percent by 2050 but said it would only announce a mid-term goal next year.

Tarique exempted from court

FROM PAGE 1

Rafiqul Islam Mia appealed to the court for exempting Tarique, saying he is seriously ill and needs proper treatment immediately.

"Anything much worse might occur to him if he is brought to the court frequently," barrister Rafiq submitted.

Tarique's physician Dr Kazi Mazharul Islam Dolon also told the court that it was not possible to take his client out of the ambulance and bring him to the court even on wheelchair as he is seriously ill.

The prosecution pointed out that the petition does not have Tarique's signature. The defence said it was not required, arguing that those who were given exemption earlier did not sign their petitions.

The judge asked two lawyers each from the defence and the prosecution to collect Tarique's signature on the petition and when the four went to the ambulance Tarique gave his signature in their presence.

Judge Shahed Noor then passed the exemption order.

Tarique was taken back to BSMMU around 1:00pm.

Following the exemption order the prosecution wanted to start the hearing on charge framing in the case, but the defence opposed saying the hearing should not go on as they could not consult with their client Tarique regarding the case matters.

The court set July 10 for the hearing.

Following a defence prayer, the court also permitted five defence lawyers to meet Tarique at BSMMU within 24 hours for consulting case matters.

On October 4 last year, Anti-Corruption Commission Deputy Assistant Director Abul Kashem filed the bribery case, involving the murder of Bashundhara Group Director Sabbir with Ramna Police Station, accusing six persons including Babar.

Tarique and former BNP lawmaker Qazi Saleemul Huq Kamal were later included in the case as investigation found their involvement in the bribery.

Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan alias Shah Alam, his two sons Shafiq Sobhan Sanvir and Sadaat Sobhan, East-West Property Development Ltd Director Abu

Sufian, and Tarique's personal secretary Mia Nur Uddin Apu are the other charge-sheeted accused.

The ACC said the eight were involved in receiving and giving the bribe to ensure that Sanvir does not face charges for killing Sabbir whose body was found outside a building in Bashundhara residential area on July 5, 2006.

NASIM'S PETITION Nasim's counsels yesterday filed a prayer to defer the hearing on their petition to exempt Nasim from appearing in person before the court, saying they did not get the necessary documents and medical reports.

Judge Shahed Noor set July 10 for the hearing of the petition.

On June 26, Nasim's lawyers filed the petition seeking exemption for Nasim from personally appearing before the court on health grounds in the case filed in connection with illegal setting up of 3,000 digital telephone lines by Worldtel Holdings Ltd.

Nasim has been undergoing treatment at Labaid Specialised Hospital in the city after he suffered brain haemorrhage.

5 lakh depositors swindled by Jamaat's farmer wing

FROM PAGE 1

"My illusions are now shattered. I've become penniless as I had to return money to many members from my pocket."

Nazmul was not alone. Aminul Islam, a BCKS supervisor, field workers Rafiqul Islam of Damadi village, Nazrul Islam, Khalid of Namajgram and Aminul of Agla also left both party and job.

Even a number of Jamaat leaders have expressed opinions against BCKS activities.

"We were against Jamaat's involvement in financial activities, loan recovery with interests and irregularities were turning us into enemies of the people," said Rafiqul Islam, Chapainawabganj BCKS president and district Jamaat executive member.

The closure came more as a result of our demand than the central direction," Islam added.

Jamaat members -- Rakibul Islam, BCKS regional coordinator, and Abu Hanif, Pabna district president -- echoed Rafiqul.

BCKS COMINGINGGO BCKS came into existence before the country's independence.

Maulana Abul Kalam Muhammad Yusuf, founder of collaborator Razakar force and convener of Khulna district peace committee during the Liberation War, was also president of East Pakistan Chashi Kalyan Samity.

Now acting Jamaat ameer, Yusuf still heads BCKS. The district and upazila Jamaat ameer were made BCKS advisers across the country, the sources say.

However, BCKS got registered as an NGO for farmers' welfare with the Department of Social Welfare in September 1990 showing its inception in June 1977.

It also became involved in bank

ing in different districts in 1997 and availed the social welfare department's approval to expand business across the country in January 2002.

It also managed the NGO Affairs Bureau (NAB) registration in January 2005 for receiving foreign funds.

Economist Abul Barakat in an essay on "Economics of Fundamentalism" writes that NAB registration was contradictory to law of the land that says "political party or their affiliates cannot be registered with NAB."

Contacted, NAB Assistant Director (Registration) Pranab Kumar Ghosh said during registration there was no objection from the home ministry.

However, Mozakker Ali, deputy secretary, security-4 section of the home ministry, refuted the NAB claim.

"The Bureau preserves all rights of registering... We only look into some points whether the NGO men are accused of criminal activities or corruption or if the organisation is involved in any anti-state activities," he explained.

Ghosh categorically said the process might have been influenced by the political government. "Earning profit from not-for-profit organisations is a major strength of religion-based political parties and it's dangerous both for politics and society," said Golam Arif Tipu, senior lawyer and president of Rajshahi Concerned Citizens' Committee.

NGO OFFICES FOR SALE!

Months after 1/11 changeover, BCKS issued a directive to close all branches by December 2007, said insiders, adding, all branches were sold in time.

The act violated BCKS constitu-

tion, which says opinion of 80 percent members is mandatory for the organisation's shutdown.

Moreover, NAB and bank experts say by no means an NGO office or its activities can be sold.

"NGOs are aimed at non-profit social welfare jobs and can never be sold," said former deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank (BB) Khondoker Ibrahim Khaleed.

He said BCKS banking activities without BB approval and sale of offices were punishable offence.

BCKS central auditor Shah Alam admitted they decided for the closure following allegations of corruption and "we had no clearance from Bangladesh Bank."

He however denied the sale, adding, "We opted to hand over our activities to willing organisations on condition of returning the deposited money."

However, The Daily Star has managed a copy of a deed that says BCKS branch at Kahu upazila in Bogra was sold up to Shekhahar Krishak Kalyan Samity (SKKS) at Tk 2.5 lakh in presence of central officials in August 2007.

Abdul Momen, Kahu upazila Jamaat president and BCKS adviser, who signed the deed as a witness among others confirmed it.

BCKS insiders say Baneshwar branch was sold to Namajgram Chashi Unnayan Sangstha (NCUS) at Tk 2.2 lakh in November 2007.

Marjina Begum of Jaigirpara of Puthia showed her NCUS passbook, saying she was depositing Tk 10 every week to BCKS since 1997.

"The NGO men changed my passbook showing the earlier savings of Tk 4,450," she said.

Field workers Rafiqul, Khaleed and Aminul said nine of them had proposed to buy Baneshwar office.

But it was sold to their colleague Ferdousi Begum, a relative of the

Rajshahi east district Jamaat president, Rafiqul said, adding, "The sale is merely eyewitness to hide Jamaat's bid to retain its control."

Asked how field workers became so rich to own NGO, Rafiqul said, "It's good business and we used to earn 5-10 percent commission from each member's enrolment."

"BCKS was, in fact, made for creating a source of earning for Jamaat and Shibir workers in rural areas," Rafiqul noted.

Ferdousi's version Ferdousi Begum, NCUS president and a Jamaat supporter who became president from a field worker, told another story.

She joined BCKS as a field worker in 2001 and collected Tk 20 lakh from 350 members till 2006.

"In 2004, I was frightened to see authorities avoiding bank dealings and keeping people's deposits in personal possession. I also saw field workers misappropriating money and the authorities turning a blind eye to it."

"I thought of leaving the organisation but couldn't as I had to earn a living. I was trying to get registration of a new NGO."

Finally, with the help of relatives and local Jamaat leaders, she managed NCUS registration in early 2007 and started her new business from November.

She admitted purchasing BCKS Baneshwar office and explained that she didn't have to pay for that. "In fact, I had people's savings with me."

Elsewhere in Rajshahi region, when Ferdousi saw rampant gobbling up of money, the dreadful rise of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) took place with funding from many so-called Islamist NGOs.

BCKS' RAJSHAHI EXPEDITION

BCKS had seven branches at Baneshwar, Basupara, Sadar of Puthia, Monigram of Bagha, Godagari, Tanore and Charghat upazilas in Rajshahi.

Besides, it expanded its activities to Boraigram and Gurudaspur in Natore, Kahu in Bogra, Shibganj and Kansat in Chapainawabganj, Sadar, Atghoria and Ishwardi in Pabna and in Sirajganj of northern region.

Based in Dhaka, BCKS had branches in Narayanganj, Comilla, Netrakona, Kishoreganj, Khulna, Jessore and Kustia.

Each office had around 30,000 members who enrolled giving Tk 40 to Tk 1,000 on monthly payments, or having fixed deposits for 10 years over promises of double return and loans.

Although it was an NGO for farmers, they enrolled teachers, businessmen, and even beggars.

Back in February, all BCKS offices in Rajshahi were closed overnight without any notice or paying off members. As the members approached, Jamaat leaders assured them of payment through NCUS.

But problem occurred in May when NCUS denied paying BCKS members.

During a visit to Baneshwar, no signboard was seen at former BCKS zonal office now taken over by NCUS, although it is mandatory for NGO offices.

BCKS accountant Helaluddin and patron Ahmadullah were in the office. They claimed the office has now unpaid deposit of Tk 56.41 lakh, while they are to get Tk 78.13 lakh given on loans. They denied the office's sale to NCUS.

On bank dealings, Helaluddin said they don't need to submit money to banks as they distribute the collected money instantly on loans. SWINDLED PEOPLE Mina Begum, a widowed domestic

help of Agla village in Puthia, deposited Tk 5,000 in three years to BCKS Baneshwar branch.

"They promised me by Allah of doubling my money. Now they deny giving back even the original amount," she lamented.

Marzia deposited Tk 11,000 over nine years. "They cheated me and snatched away my deposit book [only evidence of deposit]," said the elderly woman.

A field worker took away her passbook in February saying her term of savings completed and money with profit will be returned. "Still I am after them in vain for my money and passbook."

Businessman Ekhasur Rahman of Shibpur deposited Tk 1.08 lakh, village doctor Naimuddin Tk 50,000 and Hazrat deposited Tk 21,800 with no returns yet.

Hazrat and Ekhasur went to Puthia police but didn't file a case following assurance by local Jamaat leaders.

Jamaat leaders at a meeting at local municipal building on June 12 assured that their money would be returned in one month.

"I deposited Tk 1.08 lakh and should get Tk 2.2 lakh, but they pledge to give me Tk 1.4 lakh," said Ekhasur.

"They had made me agree to receive Tk 21,000 against my Tk 21,800 deposit and gave me only Tk 4,000 three days after the agreement," said aggrieved Hazrat.

Hajera, a beggar, expressed anxiety over her Tk 9,000. "What will happen to my money, I have none to lobby for it?"

Day labourer Abdul Karim similarly lost Tk 10,400. Many like him gather in front of the closed offices with hopes but return empty-handed.

BCKS-JAMAAT STATEMENTS

Rajshahi district (eastern) Jamaat Ameer and BCKS adviser Rejaur Rahman and Rajshahi BCKS president and Jamaat member Hafizur Rahman denied the allegations.

"We've just closed offices, not fled. We'll return everyone's money by turns," said Hafizur.

He pinned the blame on field workers, who, according to him, fled with people's money. Asked if he filed complaint against them, Hafizur said, "No, but I will."

However, he didn't go to police until yesterday.

"BCKS got Jamaat colour as its officials and employees belong to the party" said Rejaur Rahman.

Shah Alam, a BCKS central auditor, said BCKS head office had nothing to do with financial activities of branches, other than providing suggestions.

Jamaat Publicity Secretary Tasnim Alam denied the party's link with BCKS.

He claimed Islami Chhatra Shibir is also separate from Jamaat. "Shibir is as separate as BCKS until someone forcibly links those with Jamaat. The organisations just have similar ideologies."

BCKS president and Jamaat acting ameer Maulana Abul Kalam Muhammad Yusuf repeatedly denied talking on BCKS. "I'm on the move," "I'm ill" or "I'll talk later," he said each time he was contacted.

Puthia Upazila Nirbahi Officer Khaleed Mamun Chowdhury said he has yet to receive any complaint. "However, hearing from journalists we started looking into BCKS documents and activities last week."

Earlier in March, some 30 fraud NGOs swindled about Tk 500 crore taking advantage of lax administration in eight northwestern districts. Those fraud NGO leaders and their abettors have not yet been brought to book.

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