

Give judicial magistrates logistics

HC asks govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday again directed the government to provide judicial magistrates with all necessary support staff, vehicles and other requirements.

The full bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice MM Ruhul Amin passed the order during the hearing of the Masdar Hossain case, popularly known as judiciary separation case.

The apex court also adjourned the hearing of this case until March 22.

Attorney General M Enayetur Rahim told the court that the Attorney General's office will pursue the government to implement the apex court's order.

Earlier, the apex court had at least six times asked the previous caretaker government through the attorney general (AG) to recruit manpower and provide transports for judicial magistrates.

The caretaker government officially announced separation of the judiciary from the executive branch on November 1, 2007.

CONTEMPT PETITION HC rule on Prothom Alo reporter

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday issued a rule upon senior journalist Mizanur Rahman of the Prothom Alo to explain within two weeks as to why contempt proceedings should not be drawn against him for writing a report headlined 'Various events concerning the bail of Babar' published in the newspaper on January 29.

After hearing a contempt of court petition, the HC bench of Justice Syed AB Mahmudul Huq and Justice Mayeenul Islam Chowdhury also asked the reporter to appear before the court in this connection on February 18.

Senior Supreme Court lawyer Barrister Rafique-ul Huq filed the petition with the HC on Sunday.

Advocate Ahsanul Karim appeared for the petitioner.

Extortionist beaten to death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One of the three extortionists who were mercilessly beaten by the mob on Sunday night at Mirpur succumbed to his injuries at Orthopaedic Hospital in the city yesterday.

The dead was identified as Raju, 28, of Kafrul while two others are Raja, 26, and Abid, 28. Police rushed them to hospital in critical condition.

Sub-Inspector Ejajul Islam of Mirpur Police Station said locals caught the three while they fired three shots at the house of trader Iqbal on Road 21 in Block-C of Mirpur-10.

The locals severely beat up the extortionists and then handed them over to Mirpur police while another identified as Raihan managed to escape, police said.

Sub-Inspector Ejajul said the gang of four extortionists riding an autorickshaw reached the spot and attacked the house of Iqbal who refused to pay them Tk10 lakh in extortion.

He quoting Iqbal said the extortionists had been demanding the money for the last 15 days from him after he starts construction of a CNG filling station at Kafrul.

Police seized the autorickshaw.



Members of Jagannath University Hall Uddhar O Chhatra Odhikar Raksha Andolon form a human chain at Central Shaheed Minar in the city yesterday demanding reopening of the university and recovery of dormitories.

PHOTO: STAR

700 ophthalmologists for 14 crore people

Eye specialists tell BAO conference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The leading eye specialists yesterday said there are only 700 qualified ophthalmologists for 14 crore people in the country.

The ophthalmologists said this while they were speaking at the inaugural function of the 6th annual scientific conference at a city hotel organised by Bangladesh Academy of Ophthalmology (BAO).

There is only one ophthalmologist to take care of diseases of four lakh eyes of every two lakh people on an average, they said at the conference.

"The figure itself is indicative of how deplorable the situation is in eye treatment," said Sheikh Altaf Ali, secretary of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare as special guest at the conference. "It is easily understandable how a mammoth task it is to ensure health care for all at grassroots level," he added.

Health Minister Dr AFM Ruhul Haque in his speech as the chief guest said healthcare situa-

tion with the marginalised people is really miserable not only at Dhaka Medical College Hospital but also at any district or upazila level hospital or healthcare centre.

Replying to newsmen's question on corruption in the health sector, Dr Haque said, "None of us was in power when corruption took place. We expect to get the national health policy within three months."

Prof Syed Modasser Ali, adviser to the prime minister, told reporters "Let the new team in health ministry work for some time and there will be some positive changes in the sector in next two to three months."

The BAO, an academic auxiliary of OSB, has been promoting academic and research activities in the field of ophthalmology since its journey in 1993.

BAO founder Prof MA Matin and Director General of Health Services Prof Shah Monir Hossain also spoke at the function with outgoing BAO president Prof Deen Md Noorul Huq in the chair.



PHOTO: STAR

BM Transport, Green Bangla and Baba Auto Gas take control of the cab service counters at Zia International Airport yesterday after ousting the 'grabbers'. (Story on Page 1)

'Conserve wetlands to safeguard biodiversity'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Main wetlands in the country should be conserved properly to safeguard the biodiversity and to help poverty reduction as well, said speakers yesterday at a discussion to mark the World Wetlands Day 2009.

They also said a community-based approach should be followed in wetland management and the wetlands should be used as a tool of poverty reduction and achieving food security.

The discussion was jointly organised by the Coastal and Wetland Biodiversity Management Project of the Department of Environment and Nature Conservation Committee (NCC) at the seminar room of Public Library in the city.

Speaking as the chief guest, Secretary to the Environment and Forests Ministry AHM Rezaul Kabir said there are some trans-boundary challenges in the wetland management and a regional collective approach is needed to save the wetlands.

The ministry had taken some proactive measures to protect the wetlands, he added.

IUCN Country Representative Dr Ainun Nishat said the main wetlands in the country

are drying out day by day causing huge damage to the biodiversity.

He also regretted that the country has no survey of its wetlands and its biodiversity.

He suggested protecting some selected wetlands in a community-based approach.

Dr Nishat said the crisis of water in Dhaka city prevails mainly due to the frequent damage of wetlands, which reduces ground water level.

He also suggested taking measures with a view to protecting ecosystem and biodiversity instead of only eyeing revenue.

UNDP Country Director Stefan Priesner said the wetlands play an important role for the livelihood of the poor, so destroying wetlands actually means destroying the livelihood of the poor people.

He also said the UNDP would continue collaborating with the Bangladesh government in protecting the wetlands and biodiversity.

Shahjahan Sardar, president of NCC, presented the keynote paper at the discussion. He underscored the need for using tools for wise utilisation of the wetlands.

Abdullah Harun Pasha, chief adviser of NCC, also spoke at the discussion presided over by Md Najibur Rahman, director general of Department of Environment.

'SHANTIR SWAPNEY: SAMAYER SMRITICHARAN'

Gen Moeen explains how martial law was averted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It sounded like a veiled threat to Army Chief General Moeen U Ahmed when envoys of some powerful countries told him, prior to 1/11 changeover, that they would request the UN to withdraw Bangladeshi peacekeepers if the army cooperates in holding the elections, which was scheduled for January 22, 2007, without participation of all parties.

"The thought of its consequences sent a chill through me, as the UN could not ignore their request," General Moeen said in his book titled 'Shantir Swapney: Samayer Smriticharan' (Dream for peace: Reminiscence of time) published last week.

The 384-page book contains accounts of the days during the political turmoil before 1/11, army's role and his own experiences in those critical days alongside his reminiscence about his childhood and student and professional life.

About the consequences of the threat, Gen Moeen wrote, "The soldiers who earn a fixed income can only look forward to the UN mission. If this opportunity is taken away, it will be difficult to control them. At the same time, the image of the Bangladesh army in the peacekeeping mission would be tarnished if the peacekeepers are withdrawn."

During the days of political turmoil when the army naturally became the focus of all attention, the army chief says, the people were ready to welcome the martial law, but he never wanted to involve the army in state affairs.

"I deeply felt the nation was eagerly looking at me... Ambassadors of different countries asked about my plans... But I firmly told them political

chians have created the problem. Let them find out the solution," he continues.

A sense of frustration was also prevailing in the army, he notes, recalling the events of November 6 and 7 in 1975 when soldiers took to the streets with arms, violating the army discipline.

The pressure on him was mounting as the four-party alliance was sticking to its stance of holding the election on January 22 and the grand alliance opposing it, putting the country at risk of anarchy, Gen Moeen says, adding that the army was misguided in the past, but they could not follow suit this time.

The army chief says he had spent sleepless nights in the run-up to 1/11. "The scenes of anarchy, vandalism in the streets and the cry of helpless people on television... I got tired of thinking of what I need to do to bring peace," Moeen continues. However, it was his patriotism, respect to democracy and loyalty to the state that kept him calm, he adds.

At that time, Gen Moeen questioned himself whether any of his moves to save the country would go against Khaleda Zia or would be tantamount to an act of betrayal. Then he himself had the answer -- nothing is more important than protecting the country during the period of national crisis.

It was January 10, 2007. A circular was issued empowering the army to arrest any law-breakers without warrants. To Moeen, it sounded like putting the army against the people.

At that time, pressure from inside and outside the country was high on him to halt the electoral process, Gen Moeen says. The intelligence sources also informed him that the army officers of all ranks were opposed to their involvement in such an election.

In the afternoon, the telephone operator told him that the UN Peacekeeping Mission Undersecretary General John Mary wanted to talk with him. "I then realised that the threat to the future of our peacekeepers is going to be a reality."

On January 11, 2007, the army chief got up early in the morning and prayed to the Almighty to guide him the right way. He went to the office earlier than schedule. He then received a call from the UN Peacekeeping Mission under-

secretary general who told him that the election without participation of all political parties would not be acceptable to the UN.

"The UN will seriously consider withdrawing the Bangladesh peacekeepers from the UN missions, if Bangladesh Army plays any role in such an election," said the UN official.

"After receiving the warning, it was not difficult for me to realise that the involvement of the army in such an election would make the role of Bangladesh Army controversial," Gen Moeen wrote in his



Moeen U Ahmed

book.

"The reputation that the Bangladesh Army gained at home and abroad since the '90s was about to be destroyed. Apart from that, the army will also have to take the responsibility of any possible civil war if the elections are held. I, as the Chief of Army, could in no way accept it."

General Moeen then talked with the chiefs of Bangladesh Navy and Air Force regarding the overall situation in the country and the UN stance on election. They agreed to meet President Iajuddin Ahmed and explain the situation to him for his directions.

Thousands of questions arose in his mind about the possible reaction of the president. The president might be angry with them and give order to arrest them, shoot or remove him from the post, Moeen says in his book. "But, I am an optimistic person. I thought he would take an appropriate decision."

Before heading for Bangabhaban, Gen Moeen informed CGS Major General Iqbal Karim Bhuiyan of everything, asking him to tackle the situation initially in the event of his not returning from there.

"I also told him to be ready to

see me in civil dress if the president disagrees with our proposals," Moeen wrote. "I started from the Army Headquarters at 2:00pm."

Incidentally, all the chiefs of the three services entered the Bangabhaban together. The president was then at lunch. They waited for the president for about an hour and then they were called into the sitting room at 4:00pm.

"I informed the president of the latest situation, electoral issues, the ultimatum of the grand alliance, and the UN's and foreign countries' stance on the elections. The chiefs of the Navy and Air Force also explained the gravity of the situation. Brigadier General Bari of DGF also explained that the country might see fierce violence if they go ahead with the elections on January 22."

They discussed with the president that to overcome the crisis, there were three options - firstly, holding election as per schedule; secondly, declaring martial law and holding elections in a convenient time and thirdly, declaring a state of emergency without suspending the constitution and holding the election as soon as possible for restoring democracy.

As per the first option, the dangers were that election without participation of all political parties would be questionable, which could lead to conflicts and put the army against people, and finally the risk of withdrawal of Bangladeshi peacekeepers from the UN mission. Besides, there were also fears of major shake-up in the army, Gen Moeen says.

Secondly, the army was against the martial law and there is no acceptability of martial law worldwide. Besides, the country would move backward because of the martial law, Gen Moeen writes. "We, therefore, put forward the third option. The president listened to us carefully, but did not make any comments."

After a long pause, the president wanted some more time to decide. "I knew earlier that many good decisions of the advisory council were changed for reasons unknown. So, we did not want to give any more chance to any vested quarters. The room then plunged into pindrop silence. Finally, the president agreed to declare a state of emergency countrywide."



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