

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.

CONTTEMPT 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 Tk 10 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 Rakkha 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.

Replies 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 Modassar 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 Ainur 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 Nazirul 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 Bangladeshi 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 politi-

2001 POST-POLL ATROCITIES

HC rule on govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday issued a rule upon the government to explain within four weeks why it (government) should not be directed to form a judicial inquiry commission to probe into the 2001 post-elections violence.

The HC bench comprising ABM Khairul Haque and Justice Md Abdul Hye passed the rule upon a writ petition that challenged the inaction of the law enforcing agencies to prevent the criminal activities taking place immediate after the 2001 post-elections violence.

Home secretary, cabinet secretary, principal secretary to the prime minister's office, inspector general of police (IGP), additional IGP and deputy inspector general (DIG) of six divisions have been made respondents in the rule.

The court fixed March 4 for hearing of the rule.

During the hearing of the petition, petitioners' counsel Advocate Manzill Murshid told the court that despite hundreds of criminal activities, including killing, torture and looting, against the opposition leaders and workers across the country after the 2001 polls, the law enforcing agencies didn't take appropriate actions to save lives and properties of the people.

He also said many people suffered a lot and had been deprived of the citizen rights due to inaction of the law enforcing agencies and their failures to perform the constitutional duties.

Seven lawyers of Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB) Asaduzzaman Siddique, Sarwar Ahad Chowdhury, Akhlas Uddin Bhuiyan, Farhad Ahmed, Tapati Kanti Das, Sheikh Atiar Rahman and Swapna Kumar jointly filed the petition as a public interest litigation (PIL) with the HC on Sunday.

Additional Attorney General (AAG) M Enayetur Rahim was present for the state.

cians 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.

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 Bangladeshi army in the peacekeeping mission would be tarnished if the peacekeepers are withdrawn."

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 lawbreakers 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's 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 scheduled. 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 Bangladeshi 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 book.

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 them from the post, Moeen says in his book. "But I am an optimistic person. I thought he would take an appropriate decision."

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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