

EXTORTION BY COPS DMP boss asked to report in 10 days

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday directed Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner to submit probe report within ten days in connection with the extortion case filed against three officers of Rampura Police Station.

Metropolitan Magistrate Abdul Qader passed the order following the case filed by Begum Ziaun Nahar, with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court against Officer-in-Charge Mohammad Saidur Rahman and two sub-inspectors Akbar Hossain and Saiful Islam on Tuesday.

She also accused her daughter Shamimun Nahar Lipi and one Delwar Hossain of harassment.

The complainant alleged that the accused on March 27, 2010, entered the residences of Ziaun Nahar and her son Arifur Rashid at Khilgaon Taltola and demanded Tk 5 lakh as extortion, of which they paid Tk 50,000.

On March 30 this year, the incident occurred again and the policemen received Tk 18,000.

She alleged her daughter Lipi and Delwar are involved in anti-social activities and had been harassing her with threats and even set corrupt police personnel against her.

Probe report

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Bank Chairman Khondkar Ibrahim Khaled, completed the report yesterday.

Sources said the committee is likely to make a 30-point recommendations including formation of a long-term task force and reforming the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Other members of the committee are Director General of Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management Toufic A Choudhury, former president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh Mohammad Abdul Bari and Supreme Court advocate Nihad Kabir.

The committee, formed on January 25, was given 3 months to prepare the report. It, however, finished the report nearly a month before the deadline ends.

The government formed the committee following massive falls in share prices for days in a row prompting thousands of small investors to take to the streets in protest.

The probe body was given 11 tasks including finding out if any individual or groups had influenced the market or taken any undue advantages.

The committee also tried to determine what types of irregularities occurred in both primary and secondary market.

It collected information on who purchased shares when the prices were rising in the secondary market, and who sold those when the prices started to fall.

According to Terms of Reference (TOR), the committee would find the reasons behind the overpricing of shares over the last two years. It would also identify the people and the institutions that withdrew unusually high amount of money taking advantage of the over-priced market through direct listing, book building and fixed price.

The roles of issue managers, regulatory body, audit firms and asset-valuation companies have also been looked into.

The committee detected various irregularities in direct listings, private placements and book building system.

The number of Beneficiary Owners (BO) account in the stockmarket is about 32 lakh. However, the committee found that there was no transaction in 10 lakh BO accounts and there were a few transactions in another 10 lakh accounts.

Multiple accounts in the name of one person were also found.

None jailed

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Conservation Act with an aim to conserve environment in the capital as well as in other urban areas. But no evidence is available that public interest is duly preserved under this law.

Legal experts say this law is being ignored like other environment laws.

"Nobody was punished under this law for filling up wetlands, rivers or canals," said Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association.

This law specifies a jail term of up to five years or a fine up to Tk 50,000 or both in case of its violation by filling up rivers, canals or wetlands or changing the character of lands without permission.

"Once somebody fills up a portion of a river or wetland, it loses its original character," said Rizwana Hasan.

Underscoring the importance of protecting wetlands, rivers and canals, the government last year amended the Environment Conservation Act with provision for jailing offenders for up to two years and fining Tk 2 lakh for filling up rivers or other water bodies.

A second-time offender could have 10 years' imprisonment and be fined up to Tk 10 lakh.

Even this law could not discourage land grabbers as they can always make fake documents and claim portion of rivers or water bodies as their inherited properties.

The enforcement and monitoring wing of the Department of Environment has been conducting drives against illegal land filling. They have fined a number of people in recent months.

For the first time, the environment department was able to arrest one person in January this year.

It had Hazi Mahbub, a known river grabber of Kamrangirchar, detained for filling up a portion of the Buriganga.

This, too, failed to shoo away other land grabbers.

Recently, the enforcement and monitoring wing stopped earth filling by Aslamul Haque, an Awami League lawmaker, in the capital. Aslamul, himself a member of the River Saving Taskforce, was filling up a portion of Aati canal and that of the Buriganga in Keraniganj without taking any environment clearance certificate.

Later the lawmaker wrote to the DoE for permission for earth filling in the low-lying land.

Even though the law specifies what punishment the judiciary may mete out to violators, it does not direct the government to restore the original characteristics of the damaged water bodies.

Influential people continue to possess the occupied riverbanks obtaining status quo from the court against any eviction drive.

At least one hundred such installations exist in and

Shamim's jail

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his appeal against the lower court judgment.

Another HC bench of Justice Md Shamsul Huda and Justice Abu Bakar Siddiquee suspended a trial court verdict that sentenced Shamim Osman to the eight years' imprisonment till disposal of an appeal filed by him.

Osman's lawyer, Golam Kibria told The Daily Star that his client, who earlier got bail in the cases, is fit to contest any election of the state.

Earlier, on April 30, 2007, a Narayanganj court sentenced Osman to prison for not submitting his wealth statement to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

Later, on September 12, 2007, a Special Judge's Court in Narayanganj sentenced him to eight years in jail for evading tax amounting to Tk 17,68,196.

Deputy Attorney General Zahid Sarwar Kajal appeared on behalf of the state during the hearing of the appeal over the tax evasion case.

around the capital where the grabbers have obtained status quo from the court through legal loopholes and turned everything in their favour.

The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) or the district administration could not take legal action against the encroachers following the status quo.

BIWTA insiders say the court orders go in favour of the grabbers, as they never mention they were filing petitions regarding riverbanks and often produce fake documents to mislead the court.

"Most of the times they use false information saying the land belonged to them. We file cases but it takes a long time to free the land from the grabbers," said Sharif Afzal Hossain, senior deputy director of BIWTA.

BIWTA itself has also violated the court order by constructing several commercial installations on riverbanks.

On both sides of the BIWTA office at Sadarghat, the river saving authorities have constructed business sheds on filled up parts of the Buriganga.

It even constructed a jetty filling up the Shitalakhya at Kanchpur after the High Court on June 25, 2009 issued directives to demolish all structures in the rivers.

In addition, it filed a petition with the HC seeking directives not to demolish commercial establishments it had permitted for installation of different industries and business houses on the four rivers.

In its petition, the BIWTA had used the name of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, a fervent supporter of save-the-rivers campaign, to get the court order in its favour.

But the court rejected the appeal.

Failing to comply with the HC order, the government has recently appealed to the court for two more years to implement the order that asked to remove all the structures from rivers.

JCD activists

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attack on a JCD leader.

Agitated activists of the BNP's student wing allegedly chased BNP Joint Secretary General Amanullah Aman too.

In the demonstration, Chhatra Dal announced a two-day programme demanding punishment to those who shot the organisation's Dhaka City (South) unit Convenor Habibur Rashid Habib near Eastern Plus shopping centre in the city's Shantinagar.

According to some JCD members, supporters of Habib demanded a general strike as a part of the protest programme. They assaulted Alim as no such programme was approved.

Despite several attempts, Alim could not be reached over the phone for his comments on the incident.

Some JCD insiders believe internal conflict led to the attack on Alim.

Abdul Matin, Dhaka University unit convener of JCD, told The Daily Star that he heard about the assault on Alim right after the procession when he along with the leaders and workers of Dhaka University unit was returning to the party office.

Alim was later brought to BNP leader Mirza Abbas' house, said Matin trashing the "rumour" of Amanullah Aman been chased.

Preferring anonymity, a senior JCD leader told The Daily Star that after the attack on Tuesday, Habib asked Alim to get out of the room when top JCD leaders went to visit him (Habib) at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Habib claimed that Alim had link with the attackers, the senior leader added.

The leader said Habib identified one of the attackers as Shahriar, brother of former JCD leader Zakaria who now lives in London. Alim has recently went to London and stayed at Zakaria's and made him general secretary of the London unit JCD.

Yemenis mass against Saleh in flashpoint city

AFP, Sanaa

Hundreds of thousands of Yemenis swarmed the flashpoint city of Taez yesterday in a fresh call for President Ali Abdullah Saleh to resign, as world anger mounted over a bloody crackdown on protests.

"Leave Ali, leave" and "The people want to overthrow the regime," the protesters chanted after converging on Al-Huriya (Liberty) Square, where regime opponents have been staging a sit-in demonstration since February.

The protesters erected more tents in the square, blocking the city's main road after more than 20 demonstrators were gunned down in clashes across the Arabian Peninsula country this week.

Yesterday's rally came a day after police shot dead one protester and wounded 30 others during a demonstration in Taez, about 200 kilometres south of the capital, witnesses said.

Following the latest bloodshed, strong statements condemning the violence were issued by the United Nations, European Union, and United States, which has considered Saleh a key ally in its fight against Al-Qaeda.

But the death toll continued to mount as Saleh and his foes welcomed a proposal by Gulf states to mediate in their demands for the veteran president to resign and end his three-decade grip on power.

Dissident General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, however, accused forces loyal to the embattled Yemeni leader of trying to kill him on Tuesday in a deadly ambush in Sanaa.

"Thank to God and the vigilance of General al-Ahmar, this plot was unmasked," said a statement from his office.

Security officials said the firefight between the rebel general's armed forces and tribesmen loyal to President Saleh's regime killed five other people.

BNP brings

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The meeting also decided a series of countrywide agitation programmes and submitting of memorandums for gas and power crisis, price hike of essentials, stock market scam on April 18, 24, 26 and May 5.

The main opposition party will also organise rallies and processions across the country demanding mid-term elections on May 9. Its central executive committee will sit to discuss the current political situation on April 23.

Meeting sources said the party will organise a long march after the completion of the agitation programme but the en route of the proposed long march will be finalised later.

The standing committee also fixed May 2 for the council of its labourer wing Jatiyatabadi Samik Dal.

The decisions came at the meeting of the highest policy making body of BNP at its chairperson's Gulshan office with Khaleda in the chair.

Party's standing committee member Nazrul Islam Khan at a briefing disclosed the party decisions about the agitation programme but he did not agree to make any comment regarding other political decisions.

Earlier on March 20 while leaving the country for Saudi Arabia, Khaleda Zia gave Fakhrul the responsibility to carry out the activities of secretary general as the post became vacant following the death of its secretary general Khandaker Delwar Hossain.

But a few senior leaders including some member of the standing committee later questioned the decision, which irked the party chief.

Asked about the party constitution where there is no provision of acting secretary general, Nazrul said it's not a problem at all as they think senior joint secretary general will act as acting secretary general in his absence.

Expressway losing its way

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day after the deadline.

The company, on the other hand, must pay the government a liquidity damage of \$50,000 a day, if the work remains unfinished after the 42-month construction deadline of June 2014.

Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain said at the signing ceremony that the government aimed to start the construction by March and get it done by mid-2014.

The 26-km expressway from Shahjalal International Airport to Kutubkhali on Dhaka-Chittagong highway will be built under public-private partnership at a cost of Tk 8,703 crore.

The first nine-km segment from airport to Tejgaon will require 96 acres of land -- 18 acres of which are owned by private owners.

Of the remaining 78 acres, 10 acres belong to the Cantonment Board, four to the Roads and Highways Department and the rest is owned by the Bangladesh Railway (BR).

Separate arrangements have to be made to take over the land.

The authorities have to remove 258 structures from

the expressway route, which include 16 five-storey and eight six-storey buildings, shows document.

BBA Secretary Mosharraf Hossain told The Daily Star last month that the BBA would sign a memorandum of understanding with the railway by the third week of March for taking over its land.

But BR Director General TA Chowdhury last week said the railway authorities did not receive any proposal in this regard.

The Italian-Thai company is expected to do a test piling at the airport end this week but it has yet to find a suitable site.

Moreover, the project authority has to resolve the route's conflicts with the Khilgaon Flyover and the proposed metro rail route before the construction can start.

The expressway route conflicts with a new slip road (loop) of the Khilgaon Flyover at Khilgaon while two link ramps of the expressway clash with the metro rail route along Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, said Prof Hoque of DEE.

One of the two ramps, designed to be built underneath the metro rail track,

will connect Manik Mia Avenue with the expressway and the other will connect Azimpur, Dhaka University, Buet and New Market from near the FDC point.

He, however, said the conflicts will be resolved by making certain changes in the alignment and compromising the height of the expressway as well as the surface road.

The expressway's impact on the environment needs to be assessed before the construction, as the assessment report is a prerequisite for the construction company to get bank loans.

It will take at least six months to carry out the assessment, said Prof Mujibur Rahman of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), who led the project's initial environmental evaluation.

The proposed route of the expressway starts from the airport and runs through Kuril, Banani, Tejgaon, Moghbazar and Kamalapur Stadium along the existing rail track and through Gulbagh, by the Syedabad Water Treatment Plant, up to Kutubkhali.

Ivory Coast conflict

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soon," Affoussy Bamba said by telephone from Abidjan.

"They opened the gates and noted that the residence is surrounded by heavy weaponry," she said. "Now the objective is to capture him."

A French government source said that fighting began after Gbagbo showed he was unwilling to negotiate with mediators trying to persuade him to leave.

"We can hear automatic gunfire and also the thud of heavy weapons. There's shooting all over the place. Cars are speeding in all directions and so are the fighters," Alfred Kouassi, who lives near Gbagbo's residence in the commercial capital Abidjan, told Reuters.

He could see French tanks in the street but did not know whether they were taking part in the offensive. The French ambassador's residence is close to Gbagbo's.

Quattara's forces were ordered not to kill Gbagbo. "Alassane Ouattara has given formal instructions that Gbagbo is to be kept alive because we want to bring him to justice," Ouattara spokesman Patrick Achi said.

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe said the only thing left to discuss with Gbagbo was his departure, while French armed forces chief said Gbagbo could surrender within hours.

"They continued through the night but unfortunately I see no breakthrough for now," armed forces chief Edouard Guillaud told Europe 1 radio. "Despite that, I

believe it is a matter of hours, possibly during the day."

Meanwhile, the European Union yesterday imposed additional sanctions on the Gbagbo government, covering bonds, securities and loans, reports AFP.

The 27 EU states "adopted new legislation today to impose additional restrictive measures against Cote d'Ivoire, in view of the gravity of the situation there," the EU said in a statement.

France, the former colonial power, said fighting was under way around Gbagbo's residence, but that French troops in the city were not involved.

Residents however said militias close to Gbagbo and his presidential guard were putting up a stiff resistance, even as most soldiers from the regular army had heeded a call to lay down their arms.

Negotiations to persuade Gbagbo to quit stalled early yesterday as he resisted pressure from the UN and France to sign a document renouncing his claim to power.

A defiant Gbagbo had earlier denied reports he was ready to surrender after a fierce assault by forces loyal to Ouattara, whose victory in November's presidential election Gbagbo refused to accept.

"We are not at the negotiating stage. And my departure from where? To go where?" Gbagbo told French radio RFI yesterday.

He said he was with his family at the residence in

Abidjan's upmarket Cocody neighbourhood.

Gbagbo had told French television channel LCI his army had only called for a ceasefire after its weaponry was destroyed by French and UN air strikes on Monday. He had suggested direct talks with Ouattara, an offer that was not accepted.

France's intervention in its former colony has infuriated Gbagbo, who blames Paris for supporting the north of the country in the civil war of 2002-03, and it comes at a tense time for French diplomacy after President Nicolas Sarkozy's spearheading of the West's military response to the crisis in Libya.

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for Gbagbo to leave power and for Ouattara to work to heal deep divisions in Ivory Coast.

"Gbagbo should leave. He has a lot to answer for, the way he has behaved since the elections," Annan told Reuters in Geneva.

The International Criminal Court prosecutor said on Tuesday he was in talks with West African states about referring alleged atrocities in the Ivory Coast to the court after a reported massacre in the west of the country.

Last year's long-delayed election in the world's top cocoa producing nation was meant to draw a line under the civil war, but Gbagbo's refusal to cede power has plunged the country into violence that has killed more than 1,500 people.

SC verdict next month

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The seven-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice ABM Khairul Haque set the time after a hearing on the appeal for the 10th day yesterday.

The apex court said it will deliver the verdict a week after the court resumes on April 24 following a 16-day vacation starting from tomorrow.

During the hearing, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam placed submissions before the SC in favour of the caretaker government system, saying the mechanism is necessary to hold a free and fair election and protect democracy.

He said there is no fault in the system. But if the 13th amendment has any weakness, parliament can look into it.

The amendment has not damaged the republic character of the state, he observed.

The appellant's counsels

MI Farooqui and Mohsen Rashid placed arguments against the caretaker government system.

MI Farooqui said not only the constitution, but also the country will be harmed by the 13th amendment that allows an unelected government to run the country.

"We must protect democracy," he said.

The apex court last month invited eight legal experts for statements on the caretaker government system during the hearing of an appeal against the HC verdict on the 13th amendment to the constitution.

Of the amici curiae, Dr Kamal Hossain, TH Khan, Mahmudul Islam, M Amir-ul-Islam, and Rakanuddin Mahmud gave opinions in favour of the caretaker government system.

However, two jurists -- Rafique-ul-Huq and Dr M Zahir -- placed separate theories with alternatives to the system.

Amicus curiae Ajmalul Hossain told the Appellate Division that the caretaker government system is illegal and unconstitutional.

Following a writ petition, a three-member HC bench on August 4, 2004 had declared 13th amendment to the constitution legal, and observed that the changes in the constitution did not distort the basic structure of the charter.

On January 25, 2000, advocate M Salimullah, the then general secretary of Association for Democratic and Constitutional Advancement of Bangladesh (ADCAB), had filed the writ petition as public interest litigation challenging the 13th amendment to the constitution.

Advocate Abdul Mannan Khan, acting general secretary of ADCAB, filed an appeal with the SC against the HC verdict after Salimullah's death.

5.8-magnitude quake hits Indonesia

AFP, Jakarta

A 5.8-magnitude earthquake struck off Indonesia's coast yesterday, the US Geological Survey said, although there were no immediate reports of damage and no tsunami warning was issued.

The quake hit at a shallow depth of 18 kilometres at 9.01 pm around 190 kilometres from Sibolga on Indonesia's Sumatra island the USGS said.

The Hawaii-based Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre said there were no warnings or advisories following the quake.

Rab firing

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took him to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College and Hospital in Barisal, which took another five hours on the way.

Doctors on March 25 referred Limon to National Institute of Traumatology, Orthopaedic and Rehabilitation (Nitor) hospital in the capital being sure that the injury was life threatening and irreversible.

Limon's left leg was amputated from the thigh on March 27 as his leg tissues were totally damaged due to excessive bleeding.

"From now on, people will feel pity for me as they do for the disabled. Or perhaps, they would make my life miserable as I am officially labelled as a criminal," Limon sobbed out to The Daily Star in his hospital bed in the prison ward yesterday.

The teenager is now doomed to despair.

"I wanted to be a banker, but that dream of mine is shattered. The Rab members took only two to three minutes before they shot me. I told them that I am a college student and urged to verify the allegations against me with our college principal and villagers," said Limon recollecting the most horrible moment of his life.

Rab, however, claimed that Limon received the bullet injury in a shootout between them and Limon's cohorts. They said the group opened fire at Rab and they retaliated. The Rab members also claimed to have recovered a firearm from Limon and that he was an associate of local criminal Morshed.

Meanwhile, Nasiruddin Mahmud, principal of Kathalia PGS Multipurpose Vocational School and College, said, "Limon has no bad record that we know of. On the contrary, he is studying here for free for being poor but talented."

The 16-year-old who had worked in a brick field on his holidays to chase his dreams now faces two cases including one for possessing illegal arms.

"He was shot without the least evidence and verification of the allegation brought against him. From whom to seek justice now and what would that justice bring when the boy has already lost his leg?" said Limon's uncle Ilias Hossain. He also mentioned that already Tk 20,000, contributed by villagers, has been spent on Limon's treatment.

Limon is the youngest among the three children of Tofazzal Hossain, employee of a fruit shop in Savar. His brother and sister are graduating from another college at their own expense.

After the tragic story of Limon was published in a Bangla daily on Wednesday, Prof Mizanur Rahman, chairman of National Human Rights Commission, visited Limon and his relatives at Nitor.

He said the commission would ask the home ministry to from a body to probe the incident. He also said the commission would investigate the incident itself along with other human rights organisations.

"We want to know who gave the authority to Rab to shoot a man even if he is a criminal," said Prof Mizanur Rahman.

Meanwhile, Rab Media and Legal Wing Director M Sohail said, "Investigation will unravel whether the boy was injured by Rab or his cohorts." He brushed aside all the allegations against Rab saying that the boy is playing sympathy act to mislead people.