

Nepal court lets ex-prince off with warning

AFP, Kathmandu

A court in Nepal yesterday found former crown prince Paras Shah guilty of disturbing the peace after he allegedly fired his gun during a drunken argument, but let him off with a warning.

Shah, heir to the Nepalese throne until it was abolished in 2008, did not attend the hearing at a district court in the southwest of the country, and officials said he would not be punished because it was his first conviction.

Shah became the first former royal ever to be arrested in Nepal last December over allegations that he let off a firearm following a late-night argument with fellow guests at an upmarket hotel.

His detention caused shock in a country where the king was once revered as the reincarnation of a Hindu god, and the royal family was seen as above the law.

Shah, who as crown prince was widely disliked for his heavy drinking and playboy lifestyle, spent two nights in police custody before being released on bail of 10,000 rupees (\$140).

"The court has concluded that the former crown prince committed a public offence by disturbing the peace at the Tiger Tops hotel," court official Hari Sigdel told AFP following the hearing.

The former prince, who denied firing his gun, will have to sign a document pledging not to repeat the public order offence, Sigdel added.

Businesses

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caretaker government. He said around 50 percent businessmen in Bangladesh will leave the country if a caretaker government assumes power in future. The business community do not want to be harassed anymore, he added.

Azad was speaking at a workshop organised by International Business Forum of Bangladesh on business ethics at Sonargaon Hotel in the capital where eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain and Commerce Minister Faruk Khan also spoke.

The apex trade body chief said, "The Election Commission can conduct the national elections freely and fairly without any caretaker government if the commission is strengthened."

Cop who finds

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48-hour deadline by a Jhalakathi court to take the case.

The six Rab personnel accused in the case filed by Limon's mother Heno Ara Begum are Md Lutfor Rahman, deputy assistant director of the crime prevention company no-1, Corporal Md Majaharul Islam, Nayek Moktadir Hossain, Nayek Prahllad Chandra, soldier Kartik Kumar Biswas and constable Md Abdul Aziz of the Rab-8.

She demanded arrest of the accused and informants of the law enforcers who have been allegedly threatening the witnesses of the Rab shooting and the locals for giving statements to a probe body in favour of Limon.

Limon, a 17-year-old student, was shot by Rab in the left leg on his way to bring his cattle back home at Chhaturia village of Jhalakathi on March 23. The leg had to be amputated later.

The same day, Rab-8 Deputy Assistant Director Lutfor Rahman filed two cases against Limon and several others with Rajapur Police Station.

The cases were lodged on charges of possessing arms and ammunition, obstructing law enforcers from discharging their duties and attempting to murder.

The charge sheet accuses Limon to be an armed terrorist "arrested with arms and ammunition after a 'gunfight' with his gang and Rab members".

Rab Director General Mokhlesur Rahman at a press briefing on April 11, however, said Limon is not a criminal, rather a victim of a "shootout".

Arab uprisings may boost economies: IMF

AFP, Dubai

Political changes in the Arab world could boost the region's economies in the long term through inclusive reforms that would render them more dynamic, the International Monetary Fund said yesterday.

But oil-importing economies face pressure due to increased crude prices and disruption to economic activities, the IMF said in its Regional Economic Outlook report.

"The changes taking place in the region could provide a boost for its economies" over time, the report said.

"A more inclusive reform agenda that meets the population's demands by providing greater access to opportunity and more competition would make the economies more dynamic and leverage

the region's inherent strengths," it said.

The strengths include "a young labour force and a privileged geographic position at the crossroads between major markets in Europe and fast-growing emerging and developing economies in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa."

In the near term, however, a wave of pro-democracy uprisings spreading across several Arab countries pose risks to the oil-importing economies, including the "possibility of spreading unrest, sharply higher oil prices, and rising fiscal deficits."

The IMF also warned that "further deterioration of investor confidence and associated capital outflows could leave governments short of needed financing."

Saarc nations

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particularly electricity, between India and neighbouring countries.

The Indian state minister stressed the need for integrating the entire region by a robust power grid for exchange of power since no South Asian country will be able to meet its energy needs entirely from its own domestic resources.

He said although India has reached a significant installed capacity of 1,72,000MW, the shortages have been in the range of more than 8 percent in the energy and 10 percent during the peak hours, according to a release of Press Information Bureau (PIB) of India.

India's revised 11th Five Year Plan target of capacity addition is more than 60,000MW, which is more than the total capacity added in the previous two plans, the PIB said.

Minister Venugopal said although the issue of cross border trading is a complex one involving market, technology, finance and most importantly geo-political issues, there has been some success as well.

He was of the view that electricity is the most convenient form of commercial energy that is required to fuel economic growth.

Citing example, he said one of the good examples of cross border power trading is between Bhutan and India and also to certain extent between Nepal and India, and added that Bhutan is supplying almost 1,200 to 1,400MW to the Indian grid and the arrangement between the two countries has been working to the satisfaction of both sides.

The success of power trading between Bhutan and India has encouraged the two countries to take up more hydro-projects through cooperative ventures and many Indian public sector companies are engaged in collaboration to

add 10,000MW capacity in Bhutan by the year 2020, the minister added.

Expressing satisfaction on increasing private investment in power generation, Venugopal said that out of more than 58,000MW power projects under construction, private developers are supporting about 32,339MW.

Thus Indian power sector is showing good example of Public-Private Partnership to enhance generation capacity and overall electricity availability in the country, he added.

Fatwa

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A six-member Appellate Division bench, headed by Chief Justice ABM Khairul Haque, will continue hearing today.

The scholars yesterday told the court that fatwa is a means of interpreting Islamic principles.

It has been playing a vital role for centuries in answering questions raised by Muslim believers, they said, adding that fatwa is related to the existence of Muslims.

Only the scholarly persons, who have vast knowledge on Islamic jurisprudence, can be allowed to give fatwa, they said.

If fatwa is banned, the principles of the Holy Quran and Sunnah will be affected, the scholars said.

They, however, said the abuse of fatwa is a different factor, which has to be stopped by the law enforcers, administration and court.

On January 1, 2001, the HC declared illegal all punishments imposed in the name of fatwa after a hearing on a suo moto ruling of the HC. The court issued the ruling following a newspaper report on hilla marriage (marriage with a third person).

Mufti Mohammad Toyeeb and Abul Kalam Azad challenged the verdict at the SC the same year.

Changes to charter

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be held under a caretaker government that is neutral and free of controversy," he said while addressing a roundtable discussion at the Jatiya Press Club.

Sammilito Peshajibi Parishad, a pro-BNP professionals' organisation, arranged the meeting on "Uncertainty over constitution".

Fakhrul said BNP will not accept an Election Commission that is reconstituted with biased and controversial persons.

Introduction of electronic voting system in the country will also not be acceptable to the opposition, he added.

He said that people did not give any mandate to the Awami League government to bring changes to the constitution.

Prof Emajuddin Ahmed said the constitution can not be finalized without hearing the people's opinion.

Those who said that there is no relation between state and religion, lack adequate

Graft-free

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Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala yesterday.

Talking to journalists after a meeting with Finance Minister AMA Muhith at the secretariat, she also asked for an assurance of quality and timely completion of the construction work.

She appreciated the commitment of the prime minister and the finance minister to transparency in the project implementation.

The present government aims to complete the bridge's construction within its tenure.

Asked whether that is possible, she replied, "If all the processes are followed step by step, as we have reminded them, why not?"

"Step by step means no corruption and there must be transparency", said Ngozi who later met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the PMO.

The World Bank MD said the management of the macroeconomic factors of the economy has been quite good and stable except for inflation.

She said the World Bank will assist the government in keeping food prices stable and within people's reach.

Finance Minister Muhith told journalists that the WB is going to lend Bangladesh a record amount of \$2.2 billion in the current fiscal year.

Of the amount, \$1.2 billion will be given as concessional credit for the construction of the Padma bridge, he said.

This is the highest the World Bank is lending to any country of the world for a single project, he mentioned.

Police stop

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Police also took position on the 2nd Buriganga Bridge at Babubazar to halt activists pouring into the city.

Hundreds of others, who took bus routes, were barred from entering the city through Sayedabad, Jatrabari, Nayabazar and Mohakhali.

Mohammad Salahuddin Khan, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said they did not allow the launches reach the terminal to avert any untoward situation.

DMP Commissioner Benazir Ahmed said he imposed the ban on holding rallies at the city's Muktangon, Paltan, Baitul Mukarram Mosque and adjacent areas as three organisations -- Shariyah Ain Bastobayon Committee, Sarbodalio Islami Oikya Parishad and Islamic Front -- announced to hold rallies at Muktangon at 11:00am.

Leaders of Sarbodalio Islami Oikya Parishad, which was scheduled to hold a meeting, condemned and protested police action against their activists.

Noor Hossain Kasemi, convener of the organisation, said they took permission from Dhaka City Corporation to hold a meeting at Muktangon, but the other two had no clearance.

He alleged the government had managed the two organisations to foil their rally.

Claiming their organisation non-political he said they will not go for any out-governments movement. Rather they would push ahead to pursue their demands.

Secy served

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published two photographs of the Crescent Lake adjacent to Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK) and Bangladesh Legal and Services Trust (BLAST) served the legal notice on the home secretary, inspector general of police (IGP), commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) and Tejjagan police. It also asked them to remove a signboard with a prohibition notice.

The organisations also asked the authorities concerned to inform through investigation about who and under what authority has installed the signboard.

Protesting the prohibition they held that it is totally unlawful and an instance of abuse of power as Sections 32 and 36 of the constitution ensure every citizen's right of recreation and free movement.

The Daily Star found the signboard already removed yesterday.

Past govt to hold polls if CG fails

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About formation of caretaker governments, one of Hasina's proposals is to introduce a system of forming a 10-member advisory council to an interim government -- five from the treasury bench and five from the opposition bench of the parliament.

And those 10 advisers will select a chief adviser based on a consensus among themselves, the proposal said.

Another proposal said every time a caretaker government is formed, it will be formed on the basis of discussions among ruling and opposition parties in the parliament.

In yet another proposal the premier said how many advisers will come from which party might depend on how many seats a party has in the parliament.

"There could be other proposals in this regard. I placed these proposals to keep the judiciary out of controversy as the eminent jurists desired," the AL chief said.

She however expressed skepticism about her own proposal for forming caretaker governments based on consensus, as the main opposition BNP neither nominated its MP to work in the special committee nor did it join the talks with the committee.

Hasina however said there will be no need for caretaker governments if the Election Commission is strengthened enough to hold polls in a free and fair manner.

On limiting the president's unilateral sweeping authority to declare a state of emergency during a caretaker regime, the AL chief said her party is in favour of restricting the presidential power.

When an elected government is in power, the president acts on advice of the prime minister, and requires a counter signature of the premier to declare a state of emergency.

"The special committee will discuss more about how to restrict the president's unilateral authority to declare a state of emergency during a caretaker govern-

ment," Hasina said.

AL's other proposals include insertion of a clause against extra-constitutional takeover of state power, restoration of the parliament's authority to remove constitutional officers, maintaining Islam's status as the state religion, keeping the phrase BISMILLAH-AR-RAHMAN-AR-RAHIM above of the preamble of the constitution, allowing religion based political parties, keeping article 70 unchanged, and increasing reserved seats for women in the parliament to 50 from 45.

In defence of maintaining Islam's status as the state religion in the constitution, Hasina explained the ground reality. But she said she personally believes that religions are for people, not for the state.

The AL chief, however, questioned the rationale behind making Islam the state religion through the eighth amendment by the HM Ershad-led government in 1988.

"There was no rationale and need for giving Islam the status of state religion. The parliament back then, which was formed through an election without participation of voters, passed the constitution's eighth amendment act," Hasina said.

She said it is not possible to scrap Islam's status as state religion now because people's emotions are attached to religions, and it has been a long time since the status was given to Islam.

Therefore, Islam's status as the state religion will be maintained in the constitution, Hasina said adding, "Other religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity will enjoy equal rights."

When her attention was drawn to political parties based on religion, which are facing a ban after the cancellation of the constitution's fifth amendment, the prime minister said her party is in favour of allowing them to continue with their politics considering the prevailing situation.

She said religion based politics was banned by the constitution after the coun-

try's independence. But the situation drastically changed after the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the toppling of his government on August 15, 1975.

During the first martial law regime, which began after the bloody changeover, military ruler Ziaur Rahman allowed religion based politics, amending the constitution through martial law proclamations. He also rehabilitated war criminals who had left the country after the independence, Hasina said.

The AL president said she personally believes none should be allowed to use religion for political or personal gain, and it should be kept out of controversy.

AL proposed bringing changes to the proviso of Article-38 of the constitution in light of the Representation of the People's Order (RPO), so that religion based political parties do not face a ban.

"The special committee will further examine the matter to find what to do in this regard," Hasina said.

About the proposals for stopping extra-constitutional takeover of state power and the process of validating illegal power grabs, Hasina said her party made the proposals to consolidate people's power.

She cited previous practices of military rulers who validated their illegal power grabs by amending the constitution.

On the issue of restoring the parliament's authority to remove constitutional officials on grounds of misconduct and incompetence, AL supported the special committee's move to restore the House's authority.

Hasina said the parliament has the authority to impeach the president, so what would be wrong if it gets the authority to remove others including judges of the Supreme Court and other constitutional officers on grounds of misconduct and incompetence.

"However, we are not rigid about it. But we think it will be better if the parliament has that authority," she added.

AL is against bringing any

change to Article-70 of the constitution that imposes some restrictions on MPs, preventing them from going against any decision of their parties in the parliament.

"Article-70 will remain unchanged, otherwise the government will not have stability. Therefore, we do not want any amendment to this article," Hasina said.

About the current provision of displaying portrait of the president and the prime minister in government and semi-government offices, she said her party proposed to scrap this provision.

She said there is no need for such a provision in the constitution since a government can issue an order and make it mandatory to display those portraits.

"Instead, we proposed making a provision of displaying the portrait of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in government, semi-government and autonomous offices," she added.

On constitutional recognition of indigenous people, Hasina said they can get constitutional recognition as "ethnic minority groups".

Asked whether she suggested that the special committee invites the main opposition BNP again, Hasina said it would be a waste of time as they did not respond positively the first time.

3 factories

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Colour Tex Ltd and Roshwa Composite.

"None of the factories collected environment clearance certificate or set up ETP," said DoE Director Munir Chowdhury, who led the drive.

DoE sources said the three factories dye almost 20 tonnes of fabrics a day, and have been discharging liquid waste into the Buriganga for about 12 years.

The factories ignored repeated DoE orders to set up ETPs.

"They would not even allow the government inspectors to enter the factories," Munir Chowdhury told this correspondent.

Finger now pointed at main donor WB

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the criteria of the tender. "The Applicant C [CRCC] is the parent company of Applicant F [China Railway 15 Bureau Group Corporation] which violates ITA 4.5 as amended by Section-II pre-qualification Data Sheet. Also, the information provided on request of clarification do not show an evidence of extensive use of large driven raking steel tube piles. The proposed equipment appears quite inadequate and revealed no work experience to undertake this type of work," technical evaluation committee says in its evaluation on CRCC.

Prof Jamilur said, "Being the lead financier of the project, the World Bank may sometimes impose its opinions but we will remain transparent and do everything to protect the country's interests."

Bridge Division Secretary Md Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, who is overseeing implementation of the project, told The Daily Star last week, "Following the World Bank suggestion, we have asked CRCC to provide additional documents to prove its eligibility."

"We will again verify the documents and if we are convinced we will consider it as a responsive firm."

Bridge division sources said CRCC sent the additional documents which are now being evaluated by the consultant. The technical evaluation committee will also see the submission and send opinions to the WB.

"The two rounds of evaluation qualified the same group of companies. In between, we lost nine months. If there were no such delay, by now the project would have reached contract-signing stage," said a senior official of the communications ministry speaking on condition of anonymity.

The qualified companies are Samsung C&T Corporation of Korea, China Major Bridge Engineering Co Ltd, Daelim-Bam-VCI (a joint venture entity of Korea), Vinci-HCC (a joint venture of France and India) and China Communication Construction Company Ltd.

The WB is providing \$1,200 million, Asian Development Bank \$615 million, Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) \$400 million and Islamic Development Bank \$140 million for construction of the bridge.

The WB has also committed to giving another \$300 million while the government will provide the rest of the fund.

The 6.15km bridge over the Padma, together with 3.68km of land-based approach viaducts on both sides of the river, will connect the country's 19 southwestern districts with the capital. It will reduce distances to Dhaka by about 100km.

The bridge will have road traffic on the upper level and rail on the lower level. The main bridge structure would have a dual carriageway, and have also provisions for future installation of a broad gauge rail-line as well as other facilities including gas, and telecommunication lines.

According to official documents, the first pre-qualification bid was floated in April, 2010, upon approval of the government and financiers. It had both concrete bored piles and steel raking piles options. Five of the 11 companies' bids qualified and the evaluation report was sent to the WB on July 18, 2010, for concurrence.

The WB had queries about Hyundai Engineering and Construction which also bid for the project but was disqualified. The WB then insisted the govern-

ment accept more documents from the firm for further evaluation. But the government did not entertain it.

Meantime, the design consultant finalised the design keeping the option of steel raking piles. The WB pressed the government to go for fresh pre-qualification bidding on this ground and also giving scope to new firms.

The consultant and the government, however, insisted the change will not affect the first pre-qualification process, and requested the WB to give concurrence to the pre-qualified firms.

The government called re-invitation for pre-qualification on October 11, 2010. This time 10 firms, including two new ones, submitted documents. Three firms who participated in the first bidding did not bid.

During evaluation, the technical evaluation committee and consultant found the same five firms qualified again.

"Both the second pre-qualification and the ongoing re-evaluation of CRCC were not necessary. It only delayed the project and increased construction cost," said a bridge division official.

Officials concerned said construction work of the Padma Bridge will begin at the end of this year if the WB gives concurrence without further delay and other formalities are completed timely. At least three years is needed to complete the bridge which means the Awami League government's dream to open it within its tenure will not materialise.

Asked about the WB's role and the delay, Communications Minister Syeed Abul Hossain said, "Everything is being done in coordination with the gov-

ernment, consultant and the financiers."

WB'S RESPONSE

WB country director Ellen Goldstein in response to The Daily Star queries on the project said, "The Padma Bridge is a large and highly complex investment which is expected to have exceptional economic and social development benefits for Bangladesh. With respect to the construction of the main bridge, pre-qualification of firms is still proceeding, and the WB is not in a position to comment on specific cases or firms."

"An earlier round of pre-qualification was launched before the detailed design of the bridge was completed. The detailed design worked to a significant change in the engineering of the bridge. This meant that the pre-qualification process needed to be re-launched with modified criteria in order to identify bidders with the best qualifications to construct the bridge according to the final, more complex design. This re-launched round is ongoing and nearing completion," she said.

"The World Bank and co-financiers have worked with the government to put in place measures to enhance the transparency of procurement processes and strengthen governance of this mega-project," added Ellen.

LOAN SIGNING The loan signing ceremony between the government and the WB will be held on a ferry on the Padma today.

Ellen Goldstein and Economic Relations Division Secretary Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan will sign the loan agreement.

WB Managing Director Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, senior ministers, advisers to the prime minister, secretaries and other government and WB officials will attend the function.