



PHOTO: STAR

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartirpakka (Rajuk) demolishes illegal structures in Hatirjheel area near Rampura in the city yesterday.

SANCTITY OF SHAHEED MINAR
Contempt rule against DCC mayor, cultural secretary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday issued a contempt of court rule against the Dhaka City Corporation mayor and secretary to the ministry of cultural affairs for not complying with its order to protect sanctity and dignity of the Central Shaheed Minar.

In the rule, the court asked Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka and the secretary to explain within two weeks why contempt proceedings should not be brought against them on charge of violation of its order.

In response to a petition, the HC bench of Justice M Mamtaz Uddin Ahmed and Justice Sheikh Md Zakir Hossain also asked them to appear before it on May 22.

The HC directed the DCC mayor and secretary to the ministry of cultural affairs and others concerned on August 25 last year to take necessary steps to protect sanctity and dignity of the Central Shaheed Minar that was set up to maintain the spirit of the Language Movement and pay tribute to its heroes.

Following a writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB), the HC also had asked them to take effective steps so that no function or meeting can be held at the original Bedi (main part) of the minar.

The rights organisation filed the contempt of court petition on May 2 with the HC, saying that the mayor and secretary have not taken any step to implement the HC directives, which is contemptuous for the court.

Advocate Manzill Murshid appeared for the petitioner while Deputy Attorney General Karunamay Chakma stood for the government.

Editors for stronger EC

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After the talks, many participants disclosed to reporters the suggestions they made to the committee.

"It is better not to retain the caretaker government system since it is against democracy. The Election Commission must be strengthened by appointing competent and acceptable people to hold free and fair polls," Prof Syed Anwar Hossain, editor of the Daily Sun, said.

Mohammad Atikullah Khan Masud, editor of a Bangla daily the Janakantha, said the EC should be given full authority to hold parliamentary polls in a free manner by scrapping the caretaker government system.

"We are accepting the caretaker government system due to the prevailing political situation. The system can be retained for holding one more parliamentary election," Golam Sarwar, editor of another Bangla daily the Samakal, said.

The editors suggested increasing the number of seats in the parliament including the number of reserved seats for women, stringent provisions for punishing extra-constitutional usurpation of state power -- treating the offence as treason, amending article 70 to free MPs from absolute control of their parties in the House, and restoration of the parliament's authority to remove constitutional officers.

They also suggested strengthening the parliamentary standing committee system, taking steps to end the House boycott culture, keeping the speaker's office above partisan politics, and introduction of a parliamentary confirmation system for appointments to constitutional posts, etc.

Most of all participants opposed keeping Islam's status as the state religion, and keeping the phrase BISMILLAH-AR-RAHMAN-AR-RAHIM above the preamble of the constitution. A few editors however supported keeping those.

Some editors urged the parties of the ruling alliance to take measures to ensure opposition parties' participation in the process of amending the constitution, to make it acceptable to all. They also said BNP-led opposition parties should join the process.

In response, Abdur Razzaq and Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, two members of the special committee, requested the editors to take steps to ensure that the main opposition BNP participates in the process.

The two committee members, who are also senior leaders of ruling Awami League, said they will continue their efforts to take opinions of the opposition parties on amending the constitution, meeting sources said.

Talking to reporters after the talks, Tofail Ahmed, another member of the special committee also a senior AL leader, said main opposition BNP did not nominate its MPs to work in the special committee, and it also did not join the talks declining the committee's invitation.

"The main opposition will get adequate time to give their opinion after we will place our report to the House on prospective changes to the constitution. They will also get time to express their views when the government will place a relevant bill in the parliament," Tofail said.

Matiur Rahman, editor of a Bangla daily the Prothom Alo, urged the government to ensure the opposition's participation by any means, to make the constitution amendment process acceptable to all.

"If the opposition's participation is not ensured, the process will be questioned and crisis will be created in future. It will be difficult to implement the changes which will be brought to the constitution," Matiur Rahman told reporters about his suggestion.

He also suggested introduction of a parliamentary confirmation system for appointments to constitutional posts, and increasing the number of seats in the parliament.

Mahfuz Anam, editor of The Daily Star, suggested an amendment to keep the office

of the speaker above partisan politics, and to allow him or her function neutrally.

According to his proposal, a speaker will resign from the party post after being elected, and no political party will field candidate in his or her constituency in the next parliamentary election, so the immediate past speaker may win the poll uncontested.

He suggested increasing the number of MPs to 600 with a provision for electing one male and one female lawmaker from each of the 300 constituencies.

He also suggested that the special committee examine the issue of introducing an upper chamber of the parliament in future.

Mahmudur Rahman, editor of a Bangla daily the Amar Desh, proposed dissolving the current parliament and holding a fresh election to form a Constituent Assembly to frame a new constitution for the country.

AMM Bahauddin, editor of another Bangla daily the Inqilab, proposed maintaining Islam's status as the state religion, and to keep allowing religion based political parties.

SC concludes

FROM PAGE 20
deliver a verdict on the appeal on any day.

The apex court yesterday kept the case waiting for its verdict after concluding hearing arguments from the counsels on the matter.

The SC on March 1 started hearing a long overdue appeal against the HC verdict.

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

Human rights organisations Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and Ain O Salish Kendra argued against fatwa before the HC.

The same year, Mufti Mohammad Toyeab and Abul Kalam Azad filed the mentioned appeal against the HC verdict with the SC.

PURULIA ARMS INCIDENT
'Bangladesh had no link'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It has been finally proved that Bangladesh did not have any involvement, alleged by Indian media, in the incident of dropping arms in Purulia of West Bengal in 1995.

Awami League lawmaker Maj Gen (ret'd) Shubid Ali Bhuiyan said this at news conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity (DRU) in the city yesterday.

On December 17, 1995, a huge consignment of arms, mostly AK 47 rifles, rocket launcher, and anti-tank grenade, was dropped from an AN26 plane at Jaipur, Purulia.

The plane was captured by Indian security forces in Mumbai on December 21 the same year, and six persons were arrested.

Following the incident, Indian media alleged that Bhuiyan, who was then the principal staff officer (PSO) of Armed Forces Division (AFD), had signed the "end user certificate" of those arms meant for delivery to Bangladesh Army.

Bhuiyan, referring to a recent TV interview by the prime accused of the incident, made clear that neither Bangladesh nor its army had any link to it.

Kim Devy, the prime accused, disclosed in his interview with Indian private TV channel Times Now that Indian and British intelligence agencies were involved in the incident, and the arms were dropped in Purulia from a Latvian aircraft.

Bhuiyan said, "Kim did not mention name of mine or any other Bangladeshi's for the incident, proving that neither Bangladesh nor its army had any link to the occurrence."

"After Indian media's claim, the DGFI conducted an investigation into the issue and found no involvement of Bangladesh government or its army in the incident."

Also a freedom fighter, Bhuiyan said he had to bear a false allegation over the last 15 years, but finally the truth has come out.

Scrap provision of Islam as state religion

Demand CPB, Sammyabadi Dal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and Bangladesh Sammyabadi Dal yesterday recommended scrapping the provision of Islam being the state religion and keeping secularism in the republic's charter as the state policy.

Both parties submitted their proposals on constitutional amendment to the parliamentary special committee on constitutional amendment yesterday.

However, Sammyabadi Dal organised a press conference at Jatiya Press Club to inform the media about its proposal.

CPB in its proposal said proper amendment should be brought to reinforce the foundation of the 1972 constitution and strengthen its democratic-progressive characteristics.

"No amendment can be brought backtracking from the four main principles of the state or giving different explanation that cancel or lessen the ideals of socialism and secularism," said the proposal.

CPB demanded to keep the secular characteristics of the state by cancelling the eighth amendment that declared state religion.

On the other hand, Sammyabadi Dal General Secretary Dilip Barua said it

would be unrealistic, inconsistent and contradictory if state religion Islam and secularism are both kept in the constitution. "State can't have any religion," he said.

Dilip, also the industries minister, said it would be proper and logical to keep the four main pillars of the constitution which came following the spirit of War of Liberation, intact in the republic's charter.

He opined for cancelling the provision of caretaker government in the going amendment of the constitution for the sake of flourishing democracy.

CPB, however, recommended removing complexities and ambiguity in the question of the caretaker government's tenure and involvement of members of judiciary in the government by bringing proper amendment to the articles and sections concerned.

The parties proposed to bring changes in the headlines of article 59 and 60, replacing "local rule" with "local government" and removing linguistic ambiguity in the articles.

Stressing the need for reorganising country's electoral system, both parties suggested introducing proportional representation system.



Aminul Islam, deputy managing director of Bank Asia, hands over a cheque for Tk 10 lakh to Brigadier General Siddiqur Rahman Sarker, chairman of the governing body of Proyash, yesterday. Lt Col Md Fakhru Ahsan, principal of the school, and officials of the bank were present on the occasion. Proyash, a school for autistic children, is run under the patronisation of Bangladesh Army at Dhaka Cantonment. Proyash has also branches at Chittagong, Bogra and Jessore cantonments. The bank gave the money as a part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

PHOTO: BANK ASIA

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\$16m Australian grant for facing climate change challenges

UNB, Dhaka

Australia will provide 16 million US dollars as grants to Bangladesh for facing the challenges caused by climate change impact.

This was disclosed during a meeting between State Minister for Environment and Forest Dr Hasan Mahmud and Australian Climate Change Affairs Minister Greg Combet in Australian capital Canberra on Tuesday.

Both the ministers vowed to work together on environmental issues in the future.

The Australian minister lauded different steps taken by Bangladesh government for facing challenges of adverse impact of climate change and assured to further strengthen assistance and cooperation in this connection.

In another meeting yesterday, Peter Baxter, director general of Australian development agency Aus-AID, told the Bangladesh minister that the agency decided to expand the areas of cooperation in Bangladesh and further strengthen its activities in Bangladesh in the field of climate change and reduction of disaster in the future.