

HC summons

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role in constructing a resort on the Cox's Bazar beach in violation of environmental laws.

The suo moto rule came following a report published in The Daily Star under the headline "Oli's castle on beach" yesterday.

As per the report, lawmaker Oli Ahmed without any permission from the authorities concerned has built a four-storey structure at a site that falls in an ecologically critical area on the Cox's Bazar beach. Any type of construction there is prohibited by Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, 1995 (amendment 2010).

The court yesterday directed the deputy commissioner (DC) and the superintendent of police (SP) of Cox's Bazar district to prevent further construction of the resort.

The HC bench of Justice A H M S h a m s u d d i n Choudhury Manik and Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim issued a rule upon Oli Ahmed to explain in 12 days why legal action should not be taken against him for the illegal construction. Besides, it asked for an explanation from the authorities concerned within the period as to why they should not be ordered to demolish the resort.

The land secretary and the environment secretary as well as DC and SP of Cox's Bazar were made respondents to the rule.

Supreme Court lawyers Manzill Murshid and Iqbal Kabir Lytton and Deputy Attorney General ABM Altaf Hossain had placed the newspaper report before the judges.

The lawyers told the court that nobody can construct structures on ecologically critical areas and the government should collect compensation under the relevant laws from the people, who were damaging soil and environment in such areas.

Cop apologises

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pledged before the court that in future he would remain alert in filling a case against anyone.

Alam prayed for apology and mercy in a written statement on February 20 in response to a show cause notice asking him to explain the reasons behind implicating the student in the false case.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Rezaul Karim issued the notice on January 26.

Alam Badsha also said that as ordered by the then officer-in-charge of the police station Helal Uddin, he had arrested Kadar, filed the robbery case and forwarded him along with the other arrested accused to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka.

The court fixed March 7 for passing order on the matter.

The same court on January 26 acquitted Kadar, who was tortured in police custody last year following his arrest.

Earlier, Kadar was acquitted in two other false cases filed with Mohammadpur and Khilgaon police stations respectively for carjacking and possessing sharp weapons.

The acquittal followed recommendations by a probe committee formed by the law ministry and a High Court (HC) order.

Kadar, a student of biochemistry and molecular biology, was detained by police while he was on way to his dormitory, around 1:30am on July 16 last year. He was arrested and tortured by police although he had shown them his identity card. And Helal even stabbed him with a cleaver, Kadar told a court later.

Following a media outcry, the HC on July 28 ordered the inspector general of police to probe the incident.

The following day, three officials of Khilgaon Police station, including OC Helal, were suspended and Kadar was released on bail on August 3 last year.

As per an HC directive, Kadar sued Helal on January 23 on the charge of torturing him.

50pc interest

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The government in October last year announced a stimulus package for stockmarket investors to restore stability in the market.

On November 27, the government formed a seven-member special scheme committee to identify small investors who lost money, and how much they lost. Md Fayekuzzaman, managing director of the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh, was made the convener.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday at a meeting discussed the recommendations with the committee, and some capital market stakeholders who will finally implement the stimulus scheme.

"We are trying to compensate those who suffered losses in the stockmarket. However, nothing can be done by issuing orders. We will finalise the stimulus package for small investors in 10 days," Muhith told reporters after the meeting without disclosing the recommendations.

The committee found that the number of adversely affected small BO accounts is 15.26 lakh. The amount of total interest on loans in such accounts is Tk 499 crore.

The total number of adversely affected BO accounts is 17.84 lakh, and the total amount of loss suffered by those accounts is Tk 22,300

crore. The committee came up with the data by analysing the losses incurred between the period of January 2009 and November 2011.

The finance minister told reporters that it will take some more time to take a final decision about the proposals. He said they will discuss the recommendations with the stakeholders before finalising those.

Meeting sources said the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) was tasked with finalising the recommendations after discussing with the central bank, merchant banks, and brokerage houses.

Muhith said their aim is to make the capital market stable through the measures.

He said the market is going through ups and downs now, and the major cause of it is a lack of confidence, not liquidity. He said the Bangladesh Bank, and SEC have been working in coordination to build up confidence.

Representatives of the Bangladesh Bank; SEC; Bangladesh Association of Banks (BAB), the organisation of bank owners; and the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh (ABB), the organisation of chief executive officers of banks were also present at the meeting.

US welcomes N Korea's return to nuke talks

AFP, Beijing

The US special envoy on North Korea yesterday said he welcomed Pyongyang's return to bilateral talks so soon after Kim Jong-Il's death, as he prepared to meet a delegation from the isolated state.

Glyn Davies, coordinator for US policy on North Korea, will hold talks about Pyongyang's nuclear programme with veteran negotiator Kim Kye-Gwan today in the first substantive contact since Kim Jong-Il died in December.

"I find it a positive sign that relatively soon after the beginning of the transition in North Korea, the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) has chosen to get back to the table with us. That's a good thing," he said.

The meeting will be the third since last July. The two sides had been scheduled to meet in December but the plan was shelved after Kim's death on December 17 and the subsequent transition of power to his son Kim Jong-Un.

Teesta water

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Teesta River hampering the irrigation gravely," said an engineer of Teesta Irrigation Project.

Bangladesh constructed the Teesta Barrage in 1990 to supply water for irrigation to about 6.32 lakh hectares of land in Nilphamari, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Joypurhat, Gaibandha and Bogra districts.

"We need more water if we want to run the irrigation project," said Atikul Islam, superintendent engineer of the Teesta Barrage.

Around 3,000 acres of char land in the Teesta has been lying unused for years since farmers do not have enough water to grow rice and other crops, said sources in the Department of Agriculture Extension, Rangpur.

The water level in Teesta has been going down by around two feet a year in the northern region of the country due to excessive use of ground water for irrigation, the sources said.

Many Boro farmers are hence switching to tobacco cultivation since they do not get enough water to grow Boro rice in February and March. This trend is adversely affecting the country's food production on which The Daily Star and other newspapers published reports.

Tobacco cultivation, which needs less water but poses serious hazard to human health and ecology, has almost doubled in the northern districts in the last couple of years.

According to Water Development Board records, water flow in the Teesta used to be at least 4,000 cusec in February before India built the Gazoldoba Barrage in the 1980's and started to divert Teesta water for irrigation and to the Mahananda River.

The river has a history of an average flow of at best 2,80,000 cusec and at least 10,000 cusec at Dalia, upstream of the Teesta barrage in Bangladesh.

Due to increasing withdrawal in the upstream, this flow has come down to about 1,000 cusec to even 500 cusec in the dry season.

According to experts and Internet findings, India's irrigation plan with the Teesta is massive, covering about 9.22 lakh hectare of land in Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda districts.

It is also known that India diverted its water towards the Teesta Irrigation Project areas and has been releasing huge quantity of water towards Bihar through the Mahananda and Mechi rivers.

In his article published in The Daily Star, Hydrologist M Imammul Haque mentioned that the water India diverts and releases in the Mahananda does not reach Chapainawabganj but flows towards the Mechi River, upstream of the Farakka Barrage.

"My government had asked the central govern-

Anomalies found

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the probe report.

The report said the private international gateways and interconnection exchanges use analysers for call data record, which has details of numbers being connected and call durations.

But BTCL does not have any such analysers that could measure the international call durations properly.

The report said not having the analysers leave room for revenue dodging and other anomalies. It said landline company BTCL has no billing platform with its interconnection exchange and it cannot measure the actual call durations and bills of calls.

The exchanges are not even properly connected to telecom regulator Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission's analyser, the report said.

BTCL has three exchanges for international call termination but one of its exchanges often reboots, resulting in traffic data loss. BTCL has no maintenance agreement with its vendors so when it faces technical problems it cannot solve

them, said the report.

According to the report, international gateways and interconnection exchanges of BTCL are under the same platform and they are connected to other telecom operators, which could allow calls to bypass proper channels.

At Teletalk, the state-owned mobile phone operator, the committee gathered evidence of abnormal call durations of 17 to 23 hours from five numbers of the mobile operator. International incoming calls from some more numbers also raised questions.

The committee made two calls from a foreign country to a certain Teletalk number and discovered anomalies. One call was not even recorded in the data recorder of the operator.

The committee said it did not get proper cooperation from BTCL and Teletalk. It said it wanted to hire technical sound officials from BTCL so that it could do the investigation more thoroughly but it could not do so due to lack of cooperation.

The committee also observed that some of the

data was deleted from the exchanges at the time of its investigation.

The committee had demanded information through letters and e-mails from BTCL and Teletalk but the companies did not provide the committee with adequate information, especially on international calls.

The committee made 13 recommendations, including formation of a taskforce involving Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, law enforcement agencies, and the telecommunications ministry.

The Daily Star last night failed to reach the telecommunications minister and two managing directors of BTCL and Teletalk for their comments. They did not respond to telephone calls. The telecommunications secretary, who is also the chairman of BTCL and Teletalk, was abroad and could not be reached either.

Teletalk has the lowest subscriber count, 1.218 million, among the mobile phone operators in the country while BTCL has 872,000 clients.

6.1-magnitude quake strikes Indonesia

AFP, Jakarta

A 6.1-magnitude undersea earthquake struck off Indonesia's eastern Maluku islands yesterday, meteorologists said, but there was no tsunami warning or reports of damage.

The quake occurred at 5:45 pm with an epicenter 98 kilometers northeast of Southeast Maluku district of the Indonesian Meteorological and Geophysics Agency said.

It struck at a relatively shallow depth of 14 kilometers. The US Geological Survey recorded the quake's magnitude at 5.6.

Indonesia sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", where the meeting of continental plates causes high volcanic and seismic activity.

PM hits out

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has confessed to resorting to violence earlier," said Hasina.

The BNP chairperson said on Monday that her party had made mistakes in the past, adding, "We won't take revenge or act out of jealousy. We'll rather establish good governance and social justice."

But speaking at a discussion on the International Mother Language Day, Hasina warned that the price of rice would be Tk 80-90 if the BNP-led four-party alliance was voted to power again.

The ruling Awami League organised the discussion at the city's Bangabandhu International Conference Centre.

On Khaleda's February 14 comment that her party would cripple the government, the prime minister said she wondered how a former prime minister could talk like that.

She also accused Khaleda of "conspiring to capture power by killing people".

Referring to the BNP chief's stance on the caretaker government, Hasina, also the AL president, said the opposition leader was saying different things at different times. "What does she actually want to say?"

She urged the people to remain alert so the BNP-Jamaat-e-Islami coalition could not come to power again.

AL presidium member Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury chaired the event attended by, among others, AL leaders Suranjit Sengupta, Sheikh Fazul Karim Selim, Shahara Khatun, Mahbul Alam Hanif, BM Mozammel Haque and Ahmed Hossain.

Passengers

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evening after a meeting with the communications and shipping ministers at the Ministry of Communications in the capital, meeting sources said.

Bangladesh Transport Workers' Federation had enforced the strike from 6:00am.

The demands include issuance of appointment letters for the transport workers. It has been a practice in the private transport companies that the owners employ drivers or other workers without any job documentation.

Witnesses said the agitating workers had not allowed any bus, truck or human hauler to ply the roads in Bogra, Sirajganj, Pabna, Joypurhat, Natore, Naogaon and Chapainawabganj districts.

Besides, road communications between Dhaka and eight other districts of Rangpur division were suspended as these routes cross Bogra and Sirajganj.

Battery-run auto-rickshaw drivers made a brisk business as they charged higher fares to carry passengers on inter-district routes from Rajshahi, complained commuters.

Contacted, Anwar Parvez, publicity secretary of the federation's Rajshahi division unit, said the government had agreed to fulfil five demands of the workers and assured them of considering the rest.

The other demands of the transport workers include hiking salary and allowances, easing condition for renewing licences, banning three-wheelers (Nasimon, Karimon) on city streets and highways and stop of plying overloaded trucks and lorries.

The bus service between the divisional city and the capital resumed at 10:00pm, according to bus operators.

Before BDR mutiny

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In the statement recorded in September 2009, Taposh said that during the 2008 general election campaign, several BDR jawans had met him four times between November and election day (December 29), and requested him to communicate those demands to Hasina, now the prime minister.

The BDR men introduced themselves also as voters of Dhaka-12 constituency (Dhanmondi, New Market and Hazaribagh) from where Taposh was elected.

The prosecution of the BDR carnage case is preparing to produce the VIP witnesses, including Taposh, before the court for depositions.

"VIP witnesses like the home minister, state ministers and lawmakers are supposed to give their depositions from the middle of March," Mosharaf Hossain Kajol, prosecutor of the case, told this correspondent.

In his statement given under section 161 of the Criminal Procedure Code, Taposh said he had been in no away aware of the leaflets that the disgruntled BDR jawans distributed just days before the February 25-26 blood-bath.

The carnage left 74 people, including 57 top and mid-ranking army officers, dead.

The statement notes that though Taposh had meetings with the mutineers several times to persuade them to surrender arms, he did not know as yet anything about the killings inside Pilkhana.

"Around 1:30pm on February 26, from discussions

with the BDR jawans and from the media, I came to know that they had killed some army officers and taken part in arson and other incidents," the statement adds.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the statement.

The mutineers started surrendering arms soon after the prime minister in a televised speech around 2:00pm on February 26, urged them to immediately lay down their arms and return to barracks. A failure to heed the directive would compel the prime minister to use force to break the standoff.

According to the statement, Taposh came to know about firing at Pilkhana at about 9:45am on February 25. He went to Jamuna, Hasina's residence, around 11:00am and saw some other leaders there.

A 14-member BDR team led by DAD Touhid went to Jamuna for talks.

At the meeting, as the mutineers raised objections, the prime minister asked the chiefs of the three forces to leave the room. Then the BDR members placed their demands in an "undisciplined manner".

Hasina asked them to surrender their weapons first, saying their demands would then be considered. The group then left Jamuna, the statements said.

Taposh also narrated details relating to the surrender of arms following the prime minister's ultimatum and also the rescue of those army officers and their family members who had survived the massacre.

Spelling Bee

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being knocked out in the first two rounds.

The battle of spelling mastery intensified from the third round as words like "catachresis" and "impecunious" rolled in, heightening the margin of errors, albeit by the slightest of margins, and eliminating in the process all but six spellers.

Only Partho Majumdar of class six survived the fourth round and crossed the first round hurdle to become the first speller from Oxford.

The remaining five spellers took part in a tiebreaker from which Mirza Ishraq of class nine emerged as the second speller from the school.

It took two more tiebreakers for the school's third and final speller, Fahim Tajwar of class nine, to make it through to the second round (divisional round) by correctly spelling "myriad".

"Spelling is part of our daily lives which is often overlooked. But now because of Spelling Bee, students will practise harder, just like me. And I'm glad to be a part of

this," he said.

The Head of Academics of Oxford, Farah Naz Haque, was all smiles seeing her school perform remarkably.

"It's a great initiative by The Daily Star and champs21 to have this Spelling Bee [competition] in our country and it's great to see the enthusiasm and hard work put in by the students," she noted.

From Green Dale International, Nayeem Farid of class nine and Khurshida Khanam and Redwan Abul Kasem of class seven made it to the second round of the competition.

From London Grace International, Samia Tasfia Raja, Abdullah Al Masum and Shirajum Munira, all ninth graders, qualified for the divisional round.

Students, who still want to participate in the competition and advance to the divisional round, can do so by playing the Spelling Bee game on www.champs21.com.

At least 500 students will be picked from Dhaka for the divisional round.

Dhaka to ask Delhi

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More joint patrols would be arranged under the Combined Border Management Plan the two countries had signed on July 30 last year, said Kamal Uddin Ahmed, additional secretary to the home ministry.

"Now joint patrol is carried out at 117 points on the Bangladesh-India border. At least 981 joint patrols have been conducted at those points since August last year. It proved very effective in reducing border killings and smuggling at those points."

Border Guard Bangladesh and BSF exchange information and fix the time and spot for conducting joint patrols, mostly at night. Both the security forces patrol the border simultaneously, Kamal said.

The secretary said the issue of conducting joint patrols at 350 more points would be raised today at the three-day talks between the home ministers of the two countries.

Home Minister Shahara Khatun, who will lead a 12-member delegation, leaves for New Delhi this morning to hold talks with her Indian counterpart P Chidambaram.

Bangladesh would ask India to fulfil its pledge to use rubber bullets instead of lethal ones on the border to

check the killings of Bangladeshi nationals, he said.

The government has information that new phensidyl factories have been set up on the Indian side targeting addicts in Bangladesh, though India has repeatedly assured Bangladesh that such factories will be removed from bordering areas, said a source at the home ministry.

Bangladesh has prepared a list of such factories and will hand it over to the Indian authorities during the talks. The two countries will also exchange lists of criminals.

The two sides will review the progress of "Transfer of Sentenced Persons" treaty that was signed during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in 2010.

Under the terms of the agreement, Indian nationals serving jail terms in Bangladesh prisons will be allowed to complete the remaining terms in Indian prisons if they so wish.

The same option will be available to Bangladeshi nationals serving jail terms in Indian prisons, said the source.

Kamal said the jail authorities had prepared a list of Indian prisoners who wished to leave Bangladesh in line with the treaty. The

Farakka dominates

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Mamata was asked about the report of the one-man commission she had formed to conduct a study on the availability of water in the Teesta round the year, particularly during the lean season. She replied that the commission was working on the matter and that she would inform the centre of the report after its submission.

The Paschimbanga government is likely to firm up its stance on the proposed Teesta treaty after receiving the report of the Kalyan Rudra commission.

On the Farakka barrage issue, Mamata at the meeting demanded a high-level inquiry into the leakages from two sluice gates.

Manmohan told her that the Ministry of Water Resources was working on plugging the leakages and that the task was likely to be completed by March, according to an official statement.

Emerging from the meeting with Manmohan at his official residence in New Delhi, Mamata told newsmen that the prime minister had assured her of an inquiry into the leakage issue.

She said a team from West Bengal led by Power Minister Manish Gupta in June last year discovered the leakages.

"My government had asked the central govern-

ment to take care of the problem." Eight months have passed but no action has been taken to repair the leakages, Mamata added.

The chief minister also said that under the India-Bangladesh Ganges water-sharing treaty of 1996, Bangladesh is supposed to get 33 percent of the water but due to the leakages in sluice gates 13 and 16, 88 percent of the water is flowing into Bangladesh.

The excess water flow to Bangladesh lowered the water level of the Bhagirathi River, because of which ships cannot move in Haldia port of West Bengal now, said Mamata.

Moreover, West Bengal depends on the Bhagirathi River for drinking water and electricity, she pointed out.

Mamata continued that West Bengal's rivers, including the Bhagirathi, were drying up as a result of the leakage of water from the Farakka barrage.

"A thermal power plant is about to shut down due to the water crisis," she said adding that a disaster is imminent because of the crisis.

Mamata said the team of West Bengal government after its visit to the Farakka barrage had submitted a report saying the leakage of water was "man-made".

Since the barrage is a property of the central government, it was its duty to address the problem, the chief minister said.

PM wants

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Parliament Jean Lambert called on her at her office.

According to meeting sources, Hasina said Prof Yunus is respected all over the world for his outstanding contribution in alleviating poverty through microcredit activities.

She mentioned that the experience of Prof Yunus would be a valuable asset for the World Bank to expand its activities to different countries of the world.

The EU could persuade the authorities concerned to make Prof Yunus as the World Bank president for the welfare of the world, the premier said.

Hasina also said the Nobel Laureate has a vast experience to run a big institution like Grameen Bank and other organisations having excellent reputations in the world.

The World Bank said it plans to appoint a new president by the time of the annual spring meetings in April.

Current World Bank Chief Robert Zoellick said yesterday that he won't seek a second five-year term, and plans to step down at the end of June.

The bank said the selection process will be "merit-based and transparent" with all the executive directors able to nominate and consider all candidates.

Nominations must be received by March 23. The board will then draw up a shortlist of candidates for a formal interview process.