

10-truck arms haul

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Rumi told a court yesterday. The huge consignment of arms and ammunition was seized on April 2 of that year at the jetty of Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Ltd.

Following the seizure, Babar forbade the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence to conduct an independent investigation into the incident, said the then DGFI director general (DG) Maj Gen (ret) Sadik Hasan before the Chittagong Metropolitan Special Tribunal-1.

Rather, Babar insisted on nominating the then DGFI director of Counter Intelligence Bureau (CIB) Brig Gen Rezzakul Haider Chowdhury as the representative from DGFI in the government probe body, court sources quoted Sadik as saying. The probe body was led by the then home secretary Omar Faruq.

Sadik added that he had recommended another DGFI officer for the probe body, but Babar had been pushing for Rezzakul's inclusion in the committee.

He was submitting his deposition yesterday as the sixth prosecution witness of the arms haul case. Judge SM Mojibur Rahman recorded his statements and fixed April 3 for his cross-examination.

Sadik told the court that he at first heard about the

incident at 6:00am on the day from the then chief of DGFI, Chittagong Col GS Rezaur Rahman over the phone. He then informed Khaleda Zia, the then prime minister, of the matter.

He with Babar and a few other officials immediately flew to Chittagong in a helicopter to inspect the seized arms. A meeting was held at the office of Chittagong Metropolitan Police commissioner in the afternoon.

"While going to the meeting Col GS Rezaur told me that he had heard some NSI [National Security Intelligence] officials had connections with the arms smuggling," Sadik said.

Rezaur had also told him that the name of Rezzakul Haider came up as one among them, who were involved in the incident, and there was also an allegation that the arms were brought for Indian separatist group Ulfa (United Liberation Front of Assam).

From the discussion with Rezaur and then Babar's instructions at the meeting not to carry out an investigation by DGFI, Sadik said he had started realising that, "It was not a small smuggling case and that some senior officials might be involved in this."

"After the meeting was over, Col Rezaur and some field-level DGFI staff,

Chittagong informed me that they had heard the then NSI DG Brig Gen (ret) Abdur Rahim, former NSI director wing commander Sahabuddin, ex-NSI deputy director Maj (ret) Liakat Hossain and ex-NSI field officer Akbar Hossain Khan were involved in the smuggling."

Sadik also said he had informed then prime minister Khaleda Zia of the inspection the following morning (April 3). Listening to him, she said a committee would be formed and asked him to nominate a DGFI representative for that committee.

In the afternoon, Babar phoned Sadik and asked him to nominate Rezzakul.

"I ordered Rezzakul to keep me posted on the progress of the investigation but he never did that," Sadik told the court.

He said he came to know in January or February of 2004, months before the arms haul, from his sources that Ulfa leader Paresh Barua had been staying in the capital's Uttara.

"I ordered Rezzakul to capture Paresh," said Sadik, adding that Rezzakul along with his force had gone to the place but apparently failed to capture Paresh.

He then suspected that Rezzakul might have links with Paresh Barua, he told the court.

BNPPP sits Sunday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Parliamentary Party will sit on Sunday to discuss its possible return to parliament, party sources said last night.

The party lawmakers, including its chief Khaleda Zia, might attend the House session the same day, they added.

The BNPPP meeting will be held at the Jatiya Sangsad office of leader of the opposition in parliament at 4:00pm, party leader Zainul Abidin Faroque said.

Faroque, who is the opposition chief whip, added the meeting would decide its joining the House.

Senior leaders of the party chose Sunday for joining the House as Khaleda is scheduled to fly abroad for treatment the next day, a BNP lawmaker told The Daily Star around 1:30am today.

ETV

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of a conspiracy by a minister". Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission issued the notice on March 11, saying ETV's broadcast was illegal since the channel did not have necessary legal papers and it was using frequency that had been suspended.

Pressed for the name of the minister he was pointing the finger at, Salam said, "I don't believe in attacking anyone. You know under which ministry the mass media are."

He said, "Issuing a letter on the basis of another whose operation has been stayed by the High Court is akin to a contempt of court."

The channel turned in its reply to the notice yesterday morning. It said it had paid all charges and fees and that a related writ petition had yet to be disposed of.

Salam, who is also chief executive officer of ETV, added that BTRC in April 2007 issued a notice saying the broadcaster must pay over Tk 30 crore within 15 days, or else its allotted spectrum would be cancelled.

However, in response to a writ petition by the channel, the High Court stayed the operation of that notice, and the case was still pending.

The first private terrestrial channel of the country, ETV was launched on April 14, 2000.

In August 2002, a court order forced it to go off air during the tenure of the BNP-led alliance government. It got back on air in March 2007 as a satellite television after obtaining permission for broadcast in April 2005.

PM sorry

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residence Gono Bhaban. Hasina, also the president of Awami League, said the government had information that the opposition had planned to create anarchy in the city on the rally day like the December 18 incidents last year. For that the government had to act accordingly.

"Had there been bomb explosions and killings in Dhaka like the December 18, wouldn't people blame the government for not ensuring security to the mass?" she said.

The AL president claimed that the government had not obstructed people from joining the opposition's rally.

She said when AL was in the opposition, the BNP-Jamaat government did not allow them to bring out processions and hold rallies.

Referring to the allegations that Khaleda had taken Rs 50 million from Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) prior to the 1991 general elections and that the result of the polls had been rigged, the premier said, "After all these years my claim proved to be right."

Reiterating that the government firmly wants to establish democracy, she said, "The country will be run according to democratic norms, not by unconstitutional means."

The next parliamentary elections would be held in the same fashion as it is held in countries that have parliamentary democracy, she said, adding that those who would work for the people, stand beside them and be able to earn their confidence would win the next election.

AL General Secretary Syed Ashraf Islam, party leaders Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury and Mabbubul Alam Hanif were present, among others, at the meeting.

BNP sets Sangsad boycott

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The last sitting of the BNP chairperson joined was on March 15 last year, as the records show.

Under Article 67 (1) (b) of the constitution, a member of parliament shall vacate his seat if he is absent from parliament, without leave of parliament, for 90 consecutive sittings.

On an average, the other opposition MPs have remained absent for 78 consecutive sittings since they last joined the House proceedings on March 24 last year. They walked out on that day, and have not returned since.

The BNP-led opposition has 39 MPs -- 36 from the BNP, two from the Jamaat-e-Islami and one from Jatiya Party of Bangladesh.

Experts say the culture of prolonged boycott has been crippling the parliamentary system since its restoration in 1991.

And even as the boycott continues, the MPs draw their remuneration and enjoy other facilities as lawmakers, they added.

Till yesterday, the ninth parliament that began its

journey on January 25, 2009, had 284 sittings. Of them, the BNP-led opposition MPs attended only 51 sittings on average.

In the five-year tenure of the eighth parliament, the AL-led opposition lawmakers skipped 223 out of 373 sittings. The BNP-led opposition MPs stayed away from 163 of the 382 sittings in the five-year term of the seventh parliament (1996-2001).

The fifth parliament, which was dissolved a few months ahead of its five-year term, held 400 sittings. Of them, 135 sittings were boycotted by the AL-led opposition MPs.

The BNP-led opposition lawmakers, who joined the inaugural sitting of the current parliament, opted for boycotting the House in phases. First, they started to keep away from House proceedings in June 2009 and continued the boycott till February 2010.

Having remained absent for 64 consecutive sittings, they returned to parliament on February 11 that year.

A fresh boycott began in June 2010 and did not end till March 16, 2011, by which

time the opposition had been away from the House for 74 consecutive sittings. They then stormed out of parliament on March 24 and have not returned since.

The current session, which was supposed to be prorogued yesterday, may continue till March 29 or further, officials at the parliament secretariat said.

"I need to consult the Leader of the House, Sheikh Hasina, to decide how long the current session will continue. But it is certain that the current session will have some more sittings," Speaker Abdul Hamid told reporters at his office yesterday.

In the wake of the prevailing situation, the BNP high command has asked party MPs to stay in the capital. Party sources say their lawmakers may return to parliament any time next week.

"I was preparing to leave the capital for my constituency. But today [yesterday] I got a phone call from the office of the opposition chief whip requesting me not to leave the capital," BNP MP Nazrul Islam Manju told The Daily Star over the phone.

1 percent

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divisions in executing ADP in the aforesaid seven-month period.

The land ministry topped the list by using 51 percent of the ADP, while the agriculture ministry and disaster management division jointly stood second with a 47 per cent rate of implementation.

The report does not give details, especially on the issue of how much money had been allocated to ministries and divisions and how much they spent.

The youth and sport ministry, bank and financial institutions division and bridges division have done better than the civil aviation and tourism ministry with 3, 6 and 9 percent ADP implementation rates.

The status report interestingly shows that the statistics division has implemented 144 percent of the ADP.

The rate of ADP implementation of several other ministries and divisions are: local government division 46 percent, rural development and cooperatives division 41 percent, environment and forest ministry 26 percent and food division 26 percent.

In response to a lawmaker's query, the finance minister told the House that the government's monthly expenditure for salaries to public servants had increased by Tk 125 crore in the current fiscal year.

"Monthly expenditure for salaries to government officials and employees was Tk 915 crore in 2010-11 fiscal year," the minister said.

Row over dress

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second year student. "He told me to either give up the dress or leave the university."

Earlier this month the administration officer had asked him to sign an agreement stating that he will not wear punjabi-pajama any more. As he refused to sign, the official took away his identity card.

The dress code of the private university in the city's Uttara, however, does not restrict punjabi-pajama or any such Islamic attire.

On Sunday, around 50 students shared similar experiences with The Daily Star. Fearing action from the university authorities, they wished not to be named.

Most of them alleged that Kazi Tanvir H Dewan, coordinator at College of Business Administration, is creating much of the problems.

Finding no other alternative, a few of them have already opted for trousers, shirt and necktie. They claimed to have faced the trouble for the past few months, but it worsened recently.

A final year student at civil engineering department said during his admission in 2008 he had told the administration about his attire, which they seemed to accept.

"Being a student of madrasa background, I told them of using punjabi and pajama from my childhood and I would not give it up. But last week they got me out of the classroom," he mentioned, adding, "Even a teacher didn't allow me to take my course exam. I don't know what's wrong with following Sunnah."

The husband of a female student said he has asked his wife not to attend classes as several teachers had complained about her burkah (veil).

Contacted, Kazi Tanvir Dewan said, "How can I be sure that somebody has raised allegation against me?" Without continuing further, he hung up the phone on this correspondent.

Asked about the complaints, IUBAT Vice-Chancellor Prof M Alimullah Miyan said the allegations are not true.

"The dress code is nothing new. It's a published document and we have been routinely following it for the last 10-12 years," he noted adding, "We have not received any complaint about the dress code."

"Although punjabi-pajama and prayer cap is not in the dress code; we don't bar anyone from wearing those," he asserted.

The VC also said there are some "fanatic elements" who are trying to make it an unnecessary issue. There are some students with "fanatic ideas" and the authorities are counselling them.

"We are a Muslim majority country and at the same time we need to compete with modern world. Everything we are doing here is to make the students fit for the challenges of the future world," he maintained.

Verdict already effective

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court sustained Bangladesh's claim to rights over a 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic and territorial zone in the Bay of Bengal, thereby rejecting the claims of Myanmar. The verdict cannot be appealed against and has become effective immediately.

"Fortunately the people of Bangladesh voted the Awami League to power at the 2008 elections. After we formed the government in 2009, we took measures to establish our rights on our maritime boundaries. And for this reason, we had to do a lot of work," she said at her Gono Bhaban residence while talking to district and upazila level Awami League leaders.

Later, in parliament, Hasina said, "The unresolved issue with India over maritime boundaries is expected to be settled in 2014. If people vote for us and give us scope to serve them, we will be able to bring good news for them as we did today."

The dispute with India over maritime boundaries is scheduled to be settled in late 2014 at the UN's Permanent Court of Arbitration based in The Hague, the Netherlands, while parliamentary elections are scheduled for early January 2014 in Bangladesh.

"We will be able to bring good news as no successive government after 1975 looked into this matter," she said, citing the Awami League-led government's measures to establish the country's rights in the Bay.

In her brief speech in the House, Hasina said, "Today is the happiest day for independent and sovereign Bangladesh, which we liberated through bloodshed."

Earlier at the meeting with district and upazila level leaders of the Awami League, the prime minister said Bangladesh had got more than what it had wanted. "We have got 1.11 lakh square kilometres... There are many natural resources like oil, gas, mineral resources and fish. All these are now ours, we own these resources."

She said, "Had we not come to power and placed the demand at the right time, the opportunity might have slipped away. Had the BNP come to power, it would have resorted to looting and the demand would not have been met."

Hasina said Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman initiated discussions on the maritime boundary issue with Myanmar in 1973 for the first time. But after his murder in 1975, no government, led by former presidents Ziaur Rahman, HM Ershad or now opposition leader Khaleda Zia, took any initiative to resolve this issue as

also the land boundary disputes with neighbouring states, she added.

"After coming to power in 1996, we signed the international law on maritime boundary in 1997. Although there was a provision to place Bangladesh's demand on the maritime dispute issue at the UN by 2011, the BNP which came to power in 2001 did not take any steps to this end," she said.

VERDICT EFFECTIVE Talking to The Daily Star over telephone from Germany, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said, "The verdict has been made effective immediately after its pronouncement."

"There is no need for its ratification or any other formalities that could take time." She said, "The 151-page verdict laid out all aspects of the maritime delimitation in minute detail."

The tribunal applies the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other rules of international laws compatible with the convention.

As per the law, all parties to a case have to accept the jurisdiction of the tribunal before the case is dealt with. The jurisdiction may be accepted either before a dispute arises or afterwards. The decisions of the tribunal are final and binding and the parties to the dispute are required to comply with them.

However, the tribunal has no means of enforcing its decisions.

The parties to a dispute are required to comply promptly with any provisional measures prescribed by the tribunal under specific articles of the UN convention.

AL ROLE INVICTORY Records show that since 1974, only the Awami League-led governments had pursued to establish Bangladesh's territorial rights in the Bay of Bengal.

Only three years after the country's liberation, the first step was taken by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who enacted the Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones Act, 1974, the first to enact in the region.

He initiated a dialogue with Myanmar and India to fix maritime boundary issues.

As a result, Bangladesh and Myanmar signed an agreement in 1974, in which Myanmar accepted Bangladesh's claim for 200 nautical miles exclusive economic zone.

However, Myanmar later changed its stance. After the assassination of Bangabandhu, successive governments did not follow up with discussions and

decisions agreed upon by Bangladesh, India and Myanmar. Despite repeated calls over decades by the UN to submit Bangladesh's claim for the continental shelf in the Bay, there had been no initiatives for scientific survey or anything.

The next progress was made after Sheikh Hasina assumed office in 1996 and ratified the long overdue United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea in 2001.

During the previous BNP rule (2001-2006), a project was launched regarding maritime issues, but no tangible development was achieved and a lot of money was spent on this.

After the Awami League returned to power in 2009, Bangladesh lodged cases against India and Myanmar in two separate UN courts on October 8, 2009. Bangladesh was forced to file the cases after the two neighbours unfairly cut off a significant portion of Bangladesh's maritime area in the Bay, sources said.

They said Foreign Minister Dipu Moni then took all-out efforts to prepare Bangladesh for the legal battle against India and Myanmar.

In the case with Myanmar, she, as the main agent of Bangladesh, placed Bangladesh's claims during the final hearing held between September 8 and September 24, 2011, in Hamburg.

Additional Secretary to the Foreign Ministry Rear Admiral (ret) Khurshed Alam played a crucial role as he was the main man behind all scientific surveys conducted in the Bay. Bangladesh possibly appointed the best lawyers in the world who were experts in complex maritime issues.

Due to the relentless efforts by Dipu Moni, Khurshed Alam and internationally reputed lawyers, Bangladesh came out triumphant.

Afghan blast kills 13 women, children

AFP, Kandahar

A Taliban roadside bomb tore through a civilian vehicle in southern Afghanistan yesterday, killing nine children and four women, police said.

The bombing in the troubled province's Dihrawud district comes a day after a similar incident killed eight civilians in the neighbouring province of Helmand.

The blast hit a station wagon travelling on a dirt road in Uruzgan province, provincial police spokesman Farid Ail told AFP.