

Govt making those legal

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In addition, two housing schemes -- Aftabnagar of Eastern Housing and Green Model Town of Amin Mohammad Group -- which were initiated years ago without the required permission are now in the pipeline for approval, official sources have said.

In November last year, the environment department fined Ashiyan for destroying wetlands, floodplains and local ecology through illegal earth-filling in Dakshinkhan mouja.

According to findings by the assistant commissioner (land) office, Ashiyan has filled up and changed the character of 230-acre low-lying wetlands, homesteads of the rural poor, and destroyed graveyards and cropland though the company owns only 43 acres.

A deputy director of Rajuk's town planning section issued a notice in August last year asking Ashiyan Managing Director Nazrul Islam to stop illegal development of Ashiyan City and Ashiyan Shital Chhaya and their advertisements on television and newspapers.

An executive magistrate has found that Ashiyan has destroyed biodiversity and

local ecology by filling up low-lying wetlands, including Ashkona-Kaola canal, croplands and rural homesteads, according to documents obtained by The Daily Star.

According to records, at least 33 affected locals have filed complaint with the environment department of Ashiyan's earth-filling on their land.

Within Bashundhara housing area, there are 216-acre Court of Wards land and 18-acre Khas land, including river and canal, said Zanendra Nath Sarker, ADC (revenue) of Dhaka.

Also, a 44-decimal Court of Wards land and a 23-decimal Union Parishad land fall within Ashiyan City and a 20-decimal khas land within Swarnali Abashan.

Nurul Huda, chairman of Rajuk, said the organisation had made the recommendation, as the district administration, utility agencies and the environment department had given clearances.

Asked why they recommended approving illegal schemes, Huda said, "Bashundhara and some other schemes recently complied with the rules."

"We cannot hold back approval after a developer obtains clearances from

other agencies," he said.

Sheikh Abdul Mannan, member (planning) of Rajuk board, said, "We initiated the approval process considering the sufferings of land owners under the unapproved housing schemes, as they cannot build structures."

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), said Rajuk cannot play the same role as any other agency and approve housing projects taken up illegally.

"It should have challenged the clearances of other agencies because the developers have destroyed the character of the land and its use."

"The stance the government had taken earlier contradicts what it is doing now," she added.

Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, who led the DAP expert committee, said such schemes were not legally permissible as long as DAP was in place.

Prof Sarwar Jahan, who teaches urban and regional planning at Buet, said the government should have widened and inter-linked all the natural canals, lakes and other water bodies before allowing the development of

urban residential zone on the eastern fringe.

Since the developers embarked illegally on real-estate development by destroying natural wetlands and floodplains years back, he said, who is going to prevent it if they continue with such destruction?

Abu Hasan Mortuza, Rajuk town planner, said all the aspiring developers would soon get approval and flood flow zone would be excluded if there was any in the proposed projects.

Bashundhara has submitted a revised layout of a 1,435-acre first-phase scheme in Baridhara (A-L blocks). However, it owns 1,213 acres only, as per documents at Rajuk and the deputy commissioner's office.

Ashiyan City has placed a layout covering a 43-acre area.

Swarnali Abashan has ownership on 75 acres of land of its 760-acre project area, according to DC office records, while BDDL Natundhara owns 173 acres of its 360-acre proposed area.

Rules say a housing scheme has to leave one-third of an approved area for open space and amenities.

HC weighs in

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in the master plan of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk), according to the petition.

The HC also stayed for four months the environment ministry's decision to waive Tk 36 lakh from a penalty of Tk 40 lakh slapped on the company by the DoE.

The company was fined for taking up the project in the area including the wetland of the Dhaleswari river to the south of Singair Bridge without obtaining the mandatory environmental clearance certificate.

But an appellate body of the environment ministry on May 10 cut the penalty substantially.

Paribesh Bachao Andolan (Poba) filed the writ petition on Sunday challenging the legality of Hallmark Group's move to establish the industrial park in the area. The environmentalist group said the company ventured into the project violating the environment protection law and without obtaining approval from the authorities concerned.

The shipping ministry has already been informed of the matter, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

On Saturday, police seized from Kolkata port 36 trucks carrying over 450 tonnes of wheat. During interrogation, the truck drivers said the wheat had been taken to a Bangladeshi vessel, Khan Jahan Ali-2, which was to carry the consignment to

In the rule, the bench of Justice Mirza Hussain Haider and Justice Kazi Md Ejarul Haque Akondo also asked the authorities concerned to explain why the environment secretary's decision to slash the fine should not be declared illegal.

Secretaries to the ministries of housing and public works, environment, land, industries and water resources, director general of DoE, Rajuk chairman, deputy commissioner of Dhaka, managing director of Hallmark Group, upazila nirbahi officer of Savar and two others were made respondents to the rule.

Advocate AM Aminuddin appeared for the petitioner.

400 workers

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more to the agent and would have to find jobs with low wages as their illegal status would be exploited by employers.

"I urge the authorities concerned to intervene and help us solve this problem," he added, adding that they lodged a police report against the agent and construction company at Alor Setar police station on July 25.

Earlier in May, The Daily Star reported a fraud case filed by a Malaysian NGO Tenaganita on behalf of Bangladeshi workers complaining that an estimated 5,000 workers were cheated by an agent owned by a Bangladeshi businessman.

The agent did not secure work permits though it charged high amounts of fees.

People observing the Malaysian amnesty programme think there could be many more cases of cheating by the legal or illegal brokers in Malaysia since the country started the regularisation process in August last year.

Under the programme, around 2.7 lakh Bangladeshi workers had got registered with the Malaysian immigration department either to return home without facing any penalty or to regularise their job status.

A several thousand workers returned home and the rest were securing work permits, but until now the exact number of workers who secured work permits could not be known though the deadline for application for regularisation ended in April.

There are over four lakh Bangladeshi working in Malaysia, which had frozen recruitment from Bangladesh early in 2009. However, it decided to recruit workers from Sherpur town during the Liberation War.

"Three," replied Monowar. Kafil then asked him to give the names of the headmasters.

"I never went to any school and don't know the names of the headmasters," he replied.

At this Justice Md Shahinur asked the defence lawyer the point of asking the witness such

WHEAT SMUGGLING

India asked to free 2 Bangladeshis

SAJJADUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh has asked India to release its two nationals arrested over their alleged involvement in wheat smuggling, saying that they are workers of a vessel that was to carry wheat ordered from an Indian company.

"We have sent a protest letter to the Inland Waterways Authorities of India via email and requested them to release the Bangladeshis and the vessel," said Mofizur Rahman, director of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA).

The shipping ministry has already been informed of the matter, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

On Saturday, police seized from Kolkata port 36 trucks carrying over 450 tonnes of wheat. During interrogation, the truck drivers said the wheat had been taken to a Bangladeshi vessel, Khan Jahan Ali-2, which was to carry the consignment to

Mongla port.

Ahmed Hossain Khan, director general of the food directorate, yesterday told The Daily Star, "We will see whether there is any deviation in the contract. We do not have any oversight on how the exporter is sourcing the goods."

2 killed falling from buildings

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A construction worker and a baby boy died after falling from two buildings in the city's Gulshan-2 and Kadamtali areas yesterday.

In Gulshan-2, construction worker Salahuddin slipped and fell off the 11th floor of an under construction building on road number 38, while working around 9:30am, said his co-worker Arman.

Salahuddin, 25, son of Abdul Zaher, from Paschim Dighali of Laxmipur, had been working at Trust Alliance Technology Ltd, a developer company.

Locals rushed him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where doctors declared him dead around 10:30am.

Kamrul Ahsan, sub-inspector of Gulshan Police Station, said the body was sent to DMC morgue for an autopsy.

In Kadamtali, Antar Ali, 8, son of Iman Ali, died after falling from the roof of their building on High School Road.

Antar was a student of class two at Shampur Bahumukhi High School.

BLAST IN HANDBAG

2 accused confess involvement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two accused in a case filed over mobile-bomb explosion inside a woman's handbag confessed to their involvement in the incident before a metropolitan magistrate yesterday.

Zubayer Ahmed and Nurul Islam, two of the five accused in the case, gave their confessional statements to Metropolitan Magistrate Farhana Ferdous at her chamber for around three hours.

Zubayer confessed to planting the explosive in the bag of Ayesha Siddique, his colleague, "to teach her a lesson".

Ayesha, an assistant programme officer at Bangladesh Computer Council, was injured when the bomb exploded in her handbag at Agargaon in Dhaka on July 17. Police suspect that the explosive had been activated by a mobile phone.

Following the blast, police detained Zubayer and his friend Nurul in Agargaon Police Station.

On Saturday night, police arrested three others -- Sohrab Hossain Ujjal, 27, Khandaker Enamul Haque Mitul, 27, and SM Abu Hossain Sarowar -- in connection with the case. Sarowar is a mechanic and has expertise in making highly technological and sophisticated bombs activated by mobile phones, police said.

The Tribunal-2 yesterday completed recording the cross-examination of Khondoker Abul Ahsan, the fifth prosecution witness in the war crimes case against Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah.

On July 29, Ahsan, son of journalist, litterateur and lawyer Shaheed Khondaker Abu Taleb, in his testimony told the tribunal that Quader Mollah and his accomplices had killed his father during the Liberation War.

During the 45-minute cross-examination yesterday, defence counsel Ekramul Huq said the witness had given "false and fabricated testimony prepared by political clique" against the Jamaat.

"It is not true," replied Ahsan.

The tribunal adjourned the case proceeding until tomorrow when the sixth prosecution witness is expected to testify.

Meanwhile, the prosecution yesterday informed the tribunal that they had received probe report against expelled Jamaat member Abdul Kalam Azad also known as Bachchu Razakar.

The court asked the prosecution to place formal charges against Azad if they have found prima facie of allegations.

In the case against Delwar Hossain Sayeede, the defence yesterday cross-examined Helal Uddin, investigation officer of the case, for the 39th time at the International Crimes Tribunal-1.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia expressed shock at the death of Hossain, who was a former general secretary of pro-BNP student body Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal.

Born in 1954, Prof Hossain is survived by his wife, two daughters and a son.

Uncertainty

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the problem till filing of this report around midnight yesterday.

After every day's stock trade, the transactions are settled with CDBL.

The malfunction results in incompleteness in trading settlement, said MH Samad, managing director and chief executive officer of the CDBL.

"We are trying to fix it," he said, adding that they had already informed the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the stockmarket regulator, about the issue.

"It would not be right to start share trading without solving the problem appropriately."

But, he said, the decision of trading suspension depends on the regulator.

Rakibur Rahman, president of Dhaka Stock Exchange, said, "We cannot start share trading until the problem is solved."

However, another CDBL official said it would be better not to start share dealing today even if the problem was solved by the night, as smooth trading still could be hampered at the bourses.

On the premier bourse yesterday, a total of 5.24 shares and mutual fund units were traded, generating a turnover of Tk 224.67 crore.

'Small cabinet' was scrapped through a constitutional amendment in line with a Supreme Court verdict.

Meanwhile, apparently rejecting the prime minister's suggestion, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday said the next general election must be held under a non-party government.

"People don't want to see this government anymore. And that is why the next election must be held under a neutral administration. Political parties will not accept any other form of government during that time," she told an Iftar party at the LD hall at parliament complex.

Pro-BNP physicians' platform Doctors' Association of Bangladesh hosted the party.

Urging all to be united to wage a tougher anti-government movement after Eid, Khaleda said the present government has completely failed to run the country and the people want to get out of this situation.

The government will be ousted through a vigorous movement to save the people from its misrule, she noted.

"We will go for movement not to return to power, but to save the country and its people from the miserable situation."

Former president Prof A Q M B a d u d d o z a Chowdhury, BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, former health minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, spoke, among others.

WB failed

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When Sackur said there was a "long struggle" between Hasina and opposition leader Khaleda Zia and so the best thing for Bangladesh was introducing a different political view, the PM only said, "If people want."

Asked why she called Prof Yunus a "bloodsucker of the poor", the PM said, "Did I mention his name? I didn't. I said someone. But why it occurred in your mind that it is him? Why?"

On the model built by Grameen Bank and Yunus, she said there should be an enquiry as to how many people have emerged from poverty because of the programme.

"Poverty reduction is done by my government. Within three years we reduced 10 percent poverty... So it is our government. And about this Grameen Bank, it is a government statutory body."

She went on, "I am telling one thing. Taking interest 40 percent, 30 percent or 45 percent from these poor people -- is it fair? It is not. How can these poor people stand by themselves? If you lend money and take 35 to 45 percent interest, it's a shame."

"And about this Grameen Bank, it is a government statutory body," Hasina said, adding that she had not ousted Prof Yunus from Grameen Bank.

"He [Prof Yunus] himself

provide any substantial proof with that letter. Just a letter cannot prove..."

Asked why she called Prof Yunus a "bloodsucker of the poor", the PM said, "Did I mention his name? I didn't. I said someone. But why it occurred in your mind that it is him? Why?"

Asked whether she believed that she had brought about changes in Bangladesh after a substantial election victory, the premier said already they have taken action plans.

"I do politics not only for political changes but also to ensure people's basic needs, fundamental right. I believe that only I can do it."