

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.

After hearing the petition, the court issued a rule upon the authorities concerned to explain within four weeks why the company's initiative to establish the industrial park should not be declared illegal.

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.

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 being taken to a Bangladeshi vessel, Khan Jahan Ali-2, which was to carry the consignment to Bangladesh.

Kolkata police arrested 13 people, including the Bangladeshis, in this connection.

However, the consignment was being exported by LMJ International Ltd, an Indian commodity trading company, to Bangladesh upon work orders from Directorate General of Food on behalf of Bangladesh government.

According to food directorate officials, LMJ International obtained three work orders to export a total of 1,50,000 tonnes of wheat to Bangladesh this year. So far, the food department has received 50,000 tonnes of wheat, which had been shipped from Kolkata port and carried mostly by Bangladeshi vessels up 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.

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, the stock market 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.

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 a key minister [Syed Abul Hossain] had quit if there was no wrongdoing, Hasina said many had started accusing him of corruption. So, he resigned.

"He has done a brave thing. Had he been involved in this corruption, perhaps he would not have resigned."

The Anti-Corruption Commission is investigating the matter and it asked the World Bank for all the documents. But the global lender denied sending those, she said.

"Now my question is why they denied? If they have substantial proof, why they denied to send all the papers and documents they have? They are not supplying; I personally want it."

As Sackur pointed to a World Bank letter sent to the government outlining its "concerns", she said the letter doesn't mean anything. "They should have proof with it. They could not

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?"

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

did it. According to the Grameen Bank Law, MD can continue till the age of 60. How old he is? He is 71-year-old. His age did not permit him."

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."

Hasina, also president of the ruling Awami League, said her government amended the constitution to ensure the democratic rights of the people so that unconstitutional or authoritarian government could not come to power.

The prime minister sought more support from the world community, including those responsible for climate change and global warming as the people of Bangladesh will be the worst sufferers.

"We have adopted mitigation plan without waiting for foreign assistance. But they should come forward with necessary funds so that we can assist our people," she said.

Kamaruzzaman

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friend," said Monowar alias Mohan Munshi, second prosecution witness in the war crimes case against Kamaruzzaman, during his cross-examination.

He said the accused was made a leader of Al-Badr [an auxiliary force of the Pakistan occupation army] in Mymensingh during the war.

"I cannot say by whom or when he was made the leader but he was my Sir [superior]," said Monowar, who testified against Kamaruzzaman on July 25.

Monowar's duty as a guard of the Al-Badr camp that had been set up at one Surendra Saha's house in Sherpur gave him the opportunity to witness Kamaruzzaman's activities during the war in 1971.

Kamaruzzaman, president of greater Mymensingh Islami Chhatra Sangha, the then student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, played key role in the formation of Al-Badr there and committed genocide and mass killing during the war, according to prosecution documents.

The three-member tribunal headed by Justice ATM Fazle Kabir with members Justice Obaidul Hassan and Md Shahinur Islam recorded the two-hour cross-examination.

During the time defence lawyer Kafil Uddin Choudhury asked the witness around 90 questions.

The defence said Monowar along with other Razakars had looted and set fire to shops in Nayani Bazar after the Pakistani army reached Sherpur during the war.

The witness replied in the negative saying, "I was an Al-Badr member, not a Razakar."

Replying to a question, Monowar said, "He [Kamaruzzaman] was [in 1971] like what he is now, but only younger and nice. He did not have a moustache then."

"I came to know that he had become the leader of Al-Badr when I joined the Al-Badr camp at Surendra's house," said Monowar replying to another question.

At one point of cross-examination, Kafil asked whether the witness knew how many high schools were in Sherpur town during the Liberation War.

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

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 Bangladeshis working in Malaysia, which had frozen recruitment from Bangladesh early in 2009. However, it decided to recruit workers from Bangladesh, but the mode of recruitment has not been finalised yet.

Bangladesh government wanted a state-level arrangement for recruitment of workers in Malaysia, but private recruiters have been lobbying so that they are engaged in the recruitment process.

'Small cabinet'

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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 Badruddoza Chowdhury, BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, former health minister Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain, spoke, among others.

City kitchen market

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"What are you saying [to media]? Prices in the fish market have shot up so high that I could not touch fish... I had to buy a hilsa fish at Tk 800 as I am a patient. Where has the fish gone?" the old man shouted at ABM Abul Qasem, chief of the committee, when he was expressing satisfaction over market prices to reporters.

After visiting three fish vendors and two groceries at Mohammadpur Krishi Market, the one-member JS body expressed satisfaction over the current market prices of daily essentials and iftar items.

But when reporters drew Abul Qasem's attention to the aggrieved consumer's reaction, he said they were urging the government to stop export of all kinds of fish including hilsa.

Not only fish, most items including onion, gram, edible oil, potato, garlic were selling at higher prices compared to pre-Ramadan period at this kitchen market, alleged Mizanur Rahman, Soheli and Tania who came to the market at this time.

It was seen that in front of the visiting team accompanied by market leaders and police and magistrates, the sellers claimed lower prices.

Talking to this correspondent, Mizanur, a service holder, Jahanara Begum, a housewife, and several other consumers also said they

bought lentils and okra at higher prices.

Mohammad Shamim, a staff of a grocery shop at the Mohammadpur Krishi Market, admitted that they had to ask lower prices of essentials fearing action by the market leaders.

"Price of onion is now Tk 34 per kilogram today [yesterday], which was Tk 30 last week," Shamim said, adding, "Prices of tomato is now Tk 90 per kilo which was Tk 70 one week ago. Potato is selling at Tk 24 per kg which was Tk 22 last week."

Prices of cucumber, eggplant, green chili and some other vegetable items however decreased by Tk 4 to Tk 30 item basis.

Tania, a student, said a fish trader demanded Tk 1,200 for a large size of hilsa and Tk 900 for a medium one.

But when this correspondent asked prices of the same fish, the trader demanded Tk 800 for the large one and Tk 700 for the other.

"Now you see!" said the student, adding, "Assuming you a journalist, he [fish seller] just reduced the price." The fish seller however denied her allegation.

Before visiting Mohammadpur Krishi Market, the JS body went to a part of Karwan Bazar kitchen market.

As soon as the committee's motorcade reached the

market, general secretary, joint secretary, organising secretary and other leaders of the market association surrounded the JS body. The committee was accompanied by Helal Uddin, president, Dhaka Dokan Malik Samity, and Joint Secretary of commerce ministry Kamal Krishna Bhattacharyya, among others.

The association leaders guided the JS body, which visited three fish vendors and three groceries. In some cases, Helal Uddin was seen asking prices of essentials to sellers with an authoritarian voice in front of the JS body chief.

Ebola fear: Uganda bans physical contact

AFP, Kampala
Uganda's president yesterday banned all physical contact after a victim of a deadly outbreak of the Ebola virus was reported in the capital Kampala for the first time.

"The Ministry of Health are tracing all the people who have had contact with the victims," Yoweri Museveni said in a state broadcast, adding that 14 people had died in total since Ebola broke out in western Uganda three weeks ago.

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Following the blast, police detained Zubayer and his friend Nurul the same day, and filed a case with Agargaon Police Station.

On Saturday night, police arrested three others -- Sohrab Hossain Ujjal, 27, Khandakar 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.

JU teacher

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The accident occurred around 8:45pm when the private car of Prof Golam Hossain, 58, crashed into a stationary truck, leaving him and his driver critically injured, Badrul Alam, officer-in-charge of Ashulia Police Station, told The Daily Star.

Prof Hossain, the senior most teacher of JU government and politics department, was returning to the university from his village home in Gazipur, one of his colleagues said.

He was rushed to East West Hospital where doctors declared him dead while the injured driver was being treated at a local hospital, JU sources said.

The body was taken to the teachers' quarter on the campus around 11:00pm yesterday.

His namaz-e-janaza will be held at 10:00am today at the university and the burial schedule will be fixed after discussions with his family members.

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

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