

Top opposition

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charge framing was nothing but an indication that the government wanted to push the country into chaos.

The arson case was filed on April 29 with Tejgaon Police Station after a bus was torched in front of the Prime Minister's Office during a countrywide hartal enforced by the opposition.

Metropolitan Magistrate Harun-or-Rashid framed the charges yesterday, rejecting the adjournment petition filed by defence lawyers. Fakhru and 38 others were present during the charge framing.

Following the developments at court, pro-BNP lawyers brought out a procession on the court premises protesting the orders.

Protesting the charge framing, BNP leader Rafiqul Islam Mia said charges could not be framed against opposition leaders, including the BNP secretary general, if anyone took the first information report into consideration.

"Thousands of criminals were released from jail as the government withdrew even murder and rape cases in the last three years. On the other hand, cases are being filed one after another against opposition leaders," he told The Daily Star.

Earlier, Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Erfan Ullah felt embarrassed when defence lawyers filed a no-confidence petition against him as he had rejected two of their petitions during yesterday's hearing. The metropolitan magistrate then sent the matter to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court for the next course of action.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Bikash Kumar Saha sent the case to Metropolitan Magistrate Harun-or-Rashid for disposal. Later, Magistrate Harun-or-Rashid framed charges against the opposition leaders.

PETITION REJECTIONS
Earlier in the day, defence lawyers submitted a petition before Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Erfan Ullah saying that they had filed a writ petition with the High Court on Sunday challenging the legality of appointing him to conduct the case.

As an order on the writ was yet to be delivered and the issues remained pending with the High Court, the defence yesterday prayed for an adjournment of the hearing on charge framing.

The prosecution opposed it saying that the High Court had neither passed an order nor issued a stay order on the matter. So, the case proceedings should go on.

After hearing both sides, the court rejected the adjournment petition. Following that, the defence filed another petition seeking permission to appeal to the High Court challenging the rejection order. The court rejected that petition too.

In this situation, the defence filed the no-confidence petition against the magistrate.

THE ACCUSED
Of the 46 accused, Jamaat-e-Islami acting ameer Maqbul Ahmad and three leaders of Islami Chhatra Shibir have been absconding since the case was filed.

Former Dhaka City Corporation mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka was abroad for treatment while BNP leaders Amanullah Aman and Nazimuddin Alam were in Saudi Arabia for Umrah.

The remaining 39 opposition leaders, including Fakhru, were present during yesterday's proceedings.

BACKGROUND
On May 10, detectives pressed charges against Mirza Fakhru and 45 others in the arson case, which was filed with Tejgaon Police station following the setting on fire of a vehicle in front of the Prime Minister's Office on April 29 during hartal hours.

Opposition alliances had enforced the hartal on the day to protest the disappearance of the party's organising secretary M. Ilias Ali.

Soon after the filing of the case, all the opposition leaders, including Alamgir, went into hiding and then surrendered before the High Court on May 7. In line with HC directives they surrendered before the trial court on May 16. Subsequently the court

sent them to jail.

On June 7 and 14, the politicians obtained bail from the High Court and trial court.

THE INDICTED
BNP leaders Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, MK Anwar, Brig Gen (ret'd) Hannan Shah, Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Mirza Abbas, Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Amanullah Aman, Ruhul Kuddus Talukder Dulu, Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, AKM Fazul Haque Milon, Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anne, Mahbub Uddin Khokon, Lutfur Rahman and Nabi Solaiman; Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal President Sultan Salauddin Tuku; Liberal Democratic Party President Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmed; Jamaat-e-Islami acting ameer Maqbul Ahmad; BNP President Andalib Rahman Partha; Swachhchasebak Dal President Habib-un-Nabi Khan Sohel; Jagpa President Shafiul Alam Pradhan and Pragatisil Ganotantrik Shakti Chairman Sheikh Shawkat Hossain Nilu.

Mohammad Sohel alias Sohan Miah, conductor of the bus torched; Mohammad Jasim Uddin and Manik Ratan, helpers of the vehicle.

The others accused in the charge sheet are: BNP leader Nazimuddin Alam; Swachhchasebak Dal General Secretary Mir Sharafat Ali Safu; JCD General Secretary Amirul Islam Khan Alim; JCD Organising Secretary Anisur Rahman Khokon; Dhaka South Juba Dal President SM Jahangir Hossain Sarder; its General Secretary Rafiqul Islam alias Moju; Swachhchasebak Dal Convenor Yasin Ali; its general Secretary Saiful Islam Nirob; DU unit JCD Convenor Abdul Matin; its Joint Convenor Obaidul Haque Nasir; Dhaka South JCD general Secretary Habibur Rashid; Dhaka North JCD General Secretary Kamal Anwar Ahmed; former Dhaka City Corporation ward councillors Kazi Abul Bashar, Yunus Mridha and Anwaruzzaman alias Anwar; former student leader Mohammad Kamruzzaman Ratan; president of Titumir College unit JCD Mohammad Ismail Khan Shahin; Swachhchasebak Dal president of Mohammadpur Police Station area Mohammad Mannan Hossain Shahin and Chhatra Shibir leaders Nurul Islam Bulbul, Abdul Jabbar and Delwar Hossain Sayedee.

Couple
Police Station said the killers first strangled Mahmuda and as soon as her husband returned to the house from the kitchen market, they hacked him to death.

An almirah in the house was found flung open, but police could not say if it was a robbery.

Relatives said the couple had a feud with some neighbours over a boundary wall and adjacent land. They, however, could not say if that had anything to do with the double murder.

Police recovered the bodies around 4:00pm. Nasir was found lying in a pool of blood on the veranda of his tin-shed house, and Mukta in her bedroom with a rope tied around her neck.

Police found a blood-stained kitchen knife at the scene and detained a woman who would often come to the house to help the couple in domestic chores.

Major Mustak Ahmed, deputy director of Rab-1, told The Daily Star that in primary interrogation the detainee said she had gone to the house around 10:00am but Mahmuda asked her to come later.

When she got back to the house at 3:30pm, she found the bodies of the couple. As she let out a cry, neighbours rushed to the house.

Locals said they did not hear any sound before the woman screamed.

Aziz Ahmed, nephew of Nasir, said the couple had been living in the house for the last several years.

Mahmuda and Nasir have two sons and a daughter. One son is an army major posted in Rangpur cantonment and the other is vice-principal of a college in Banani. The daughter lives in Kalyanpur with her husband.

Eyes

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covering sectors that include water resources, trade and investment, connectivity, tourism and education.

Bangladesh also intends to import hydropower from Bhutan, through sub-regional talks.

Official sources said Dhaka expects to host a meeting of joint working group in September. The joint working group would aim to ensure cooperation among the three countries in managing the rivers shared by Nepal and Bhutan and help involve Bangladesh in the proposed hydropower projects in Shaptakushi of Nepal and Sankush of Bhutan.

Bangladesh and India have suggested names of the experts for the two joint working groups, while Nepal and Bhutan are yet to nominate their experts.

Officials said Nepal has approximately 40,000 MW of economically feasible potential hydropower. It has also been working on another project since 1996 to generate 3,000 MW of hydropower from Shaptakushi River.

Even with a deadline as close as February 2013, Nepal has not made any significant progress in the project, creating an opportunity for Bangladesh to import 1000 mw electricity through extending its cooperation.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, Foreign Secretary Mijarul Quayes said a technical team from Power Division of Bangladesh had recently visited Kathmandu to exchange views with their Nepalese counterparts.

Similarly, Bhutan and India have several hydropower projects with a potential to generate 10,000 MW in which Bangladesh also showed its interest.

"We are expecting both Nepal and Bhutan to nominate their experts for the joint working groups soon," said a senior official of the foreign ministry, adding, "We hope to hold at least one group meeting in Dhaka".

Grameen Bank

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percent interest at the most in any sector, which is 7 percent lower than the government-fixed maximum rate for microcredit organisations.

The statement came following the prime minister's remarks in an interview with BBC's HARDtalk during her five-day London visit to attend the inaugural ceremony of Olympics 2012 on Monday.

BBC World News broadcast the interview, taken by Stephen Sackur, four times on Monday.

When Sackur asked if she had referred to Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus as "a bloodsucker of the poor", the prime minister said, "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," she said.

Grameen Bank said it charges the lowest interest rate in Bangladesh, adding that it has five different types of interest rates for its five loan programmes.

The bank charges a maximum of 20 percent interest for income-generating credit loans. Their flat interest rate is 10 percent, which becomes 20 percent in case of effective interest rates, said Grameen Bank.

The bank charges 8 percent interest on house building loans. In case of higher education loans, it does not charge any interest except after completion of education, when it charges 5 percent.

State-run Microcredit Regulatory Authority, which regulates microfinance institutions, has set 27 percent as the maximum interest rate that such institutions can charge.

BFEA President Kazi

Garment makers

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In June, the factories in Ashulia had to suspend production for 10 days. The owners said the disruption in production was a serious blow to the country's image as the second largest garment maker of the world.

During the unrest, many buyers had threatened to shift their orders to other countries, said Shafiul Islam Mohiuddin, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

He said Bangladesh had improved a lot on labour standards and work environment. "The owners have come to realise that they must take care of workers for the sustainability of the industry."

According to Mohiuddin, 600 garment factories in Bangladesh have participatory committees while the rest 5,500 registered factories have welfare bodies. "The participatory committees have been a platform for the workers where they can raise their problems."

He said BGMEA was now running two hospitals and 12 clinics for workers and many schools for their children. "Every factory has its own medical facility for workers."

The BGMEA was now working with different development organisations to prevent diseases like tuberculosis and HIV AIDS among workers, he added.

"When Bangladeshi camel jockeys had returned to the country, we rehabilitated them. We have also employed the transgender," said Mohiuddin, adding that they had introduced life insurance for workers.

The BGMEA will begin the second edition of its talent hunt from August 5. Last year, the event recognised 10 best singers from the RMG sector, said Mohiuddin.

"There has been significant improvement in owner-worker relationship which was not there even a decade ago. When it comes to work environment, we are better than Cambodia, Vietnam, India and Lesotho. But we cannot sell it," said the BGMEA president.

The garment makers also pointed out that buyers should be ethical instead of looking for opportunities to force apparel makers to cut price.

Mohiuddin said although Bangladesh's garment makers were doing a great job, their contribution was not promoted well. "We are failing to brand our country through a massive campaign," he said.

He also said there was propaganda that international buyers are losing interest in Bangladeshi garment items. "It is not true. We have talked to the CEOs of major companies. They said they were still willing to buy products

made in Bangladesh."

AK Azad, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said the international buyers operating in Bangladesh in a meeting with the labour minister last week had urged the government to increase workers' wage by 10 percent to avert further unrest in the industry.

The buyers feared that the orders would not be executed if there was further violence in the RMG sector.

He said buyers were also concerned about the country's political situation. "After the unrest in Ashulia, they are closely monitoring everything, including the political development."

Fazul Hoque, president of Bangladesh Employers Federation, blamed local influential politicians for the unrest in Ashulia.

He said they would sit with officials of ILO Dhaka office tomorrow to discuss the latest development regarding the Better Work Programme.

The garment makers said although the labour leaders regularly talked about establishing trade unions at the factories, there was no demand from the workers to do so at factory level.

He also questioned the role of labour leaders and urged them to play a positive role. "During the unrest in Ashulia, no labour leaders went there to ask the workers to stop the violence."

Abdus Salam Murshed, president of Exporters Association of Bangladesh, said Ashulia-based factories are of the ideal kind, where the managements strictly maintain compliance.

"Still, a majority of unrests take place there," he said, calling for an investigation into the matter.

He also criticised the central bank for its recent circular on loan classification, which, he said, would hurt the industry.

Mohammad Hatem, vice president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said there was no congenial environment in Bangladesh to allow trade unionism at the factories.

"Our experience with trade union is bitter. About 130 factories started trade unions. Of them, 80 are now closed," he said.

Annisul Huq, former president of FBCCI, said the country's garment owners want a fair and quick investigation into the killing of Aminul Islam. "We want the killers of the labour leaders arrested."

Mohiuddin said although Bangladeshi exporters paid the highest duties to enter into the US apparel market after Cambodia, the exporters are not receiving good treatment from the world's biggest economy.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, also spoke at the discussion.

Dhaka-KL meet soon to finalise Padma deal

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh and Malaysia will hold a meeting early this month in Dhaka to finalise the Padma bridge project, reported Malaysia's national news agency Bernama yesterday.

Special envoy to India and South Asia Datuk Seri S Samy Vellu will lead the Malaysian delegation to Dhaka and hold talks with Communications Minister Obaidul Quader.

"During the visit, the Malaysian side will present its final draft agreement to the Bangladesh government after getting a full commitment from Dhaka," said the report quoting a source as saying.

The two governments entered a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in April this year to implement the project.

As per the MoU, the bridge will be built on a build, operate and transfer basis.

To implement the project, a Malaysian company will form a joint venture with a leading foreign construction firm.

Malaysia has revised its plan twice, said the report, to prepare the final plan to ensure a win-win situation for both the countries. It is now up to the Bangladesh government to decide about the project.

The plan is expected to be submitted to the Bangladesh government in the middle of this month, mentioned the source.

Destiny

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Rafiqul Islam Sarkar, Majibur Rahman, Sumon Ali Khan, Saidul Islam Khan Rubel and Abul Kalam Azad.

At a press briefing at the ACC's Segunbagicha office in the afternoon, ACC Deputy Director Mozahar Ali Sardar said the DTPL authorities had illegally collected Tk 2335.74 crore from people by selling 6.18 crore trees through multi-level marketing between March 2006 and April this year.

In its probe, the ACC found that Tk 2106.64 crore were laundered from the DTPL project in the name of salaries, honoraria, dividends, commissions, incentives and promotional costs, he said.

The DMCSL authorities embezzled Tk 1178.61 crore by cheating people and transferred the money to other non-profitable and non-operational companies of Destiny Group, said ACC Assistant Director Towfikul.

He said the commission had filed the second case against the Destiny officials for violating the Cooperatives Act by transferring money to other non-profitable and non-operational companies.

The ACC officials said only Tk 56 lakh and another Tk 4.87 crore were left with the two bank accounts of the DMCSL and the DTPL after the transfer of the huge amount of money.

They said the Destiny officials tricked people into investing money in the DTPL project, saying if one invested Tk 8,000 under a "golden package," the person would get Tk 20,000 after six years with a 72.46 percent interest.

And under the company's "silver package," the investor would get Tk 30,000 against an investment of Tk 5,000 after 12 years with a 195.74 percent interest.

The Destiny officials took a commission of Tk 4,260 to 4,300 from each investment of Tk 8,000 and a commission of Tk 3,775 from each investment of Tk 5,000.

If the Destiny officials are found guilty of money laundering, they could be sentenced to up to 12 years' imprisonment and will have to pay a fine double the amount they had laundered. Their moveable and immoveable properties could also be confiscated.

AL, BNP turn in audit report

31 out of 38 parties comply with EC rules

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party and 18 other political parties yesterday submitted their annual audit reports to the Election Commission, specifying their annual income and expenditure last year.

A total of 31 out of 38 registered parties submitted their audit reports till yesterday, the deadline for submission. Jamaat-e-Islami and nine other parties submitted their reports earlier. Seven political parties yesterday applied to the EC, seeking additional time to submit their reports.

Mrinal Kanti Das, deputy office secretary of AL, said, "Awami League is not an underground party. So we do not object to disclosing the report. Since the report was submitted to the EC, they cannot make it public ethically."

"We will not have any objection if the EC discloses the reports anyway," Mrinal told reporters after the submission.

BNP's Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said the report was now property of the EC. "So, we will not disclose anything about the report."

But the EC has never disclosed such audit reports since 2010.

Election Commissioner Shah Nawaz, however, said there was no legal bar on making the audit report public. "If the commission thinks it necessary, it will take a decision later."

He said the EC would decide the fate of the applications of the parties seeking additional time to submit theirs.

The election commissioner also said the EC would scrutinize the submitted audit reports and ask for clarification from the political parties in case of inconsistencies.

According to Political Parties Registration Rules, 2008, a party has to have its financial transactions of a calendar year audited by a chartered accountant firm. It should then submit a copy of the firm's report to the EC by July 31 of the following year.

Prior to the ninth parliamentary elections, registration of political parties with the EC was made mandatory and the rule for submitting audit reports was framed to ensure transparency in the financial transactions of political parties.

HC stays

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In the petition, Akond said the ongoing strike demanding the resignation of the vice-chancellor and pro-vice chancellor on allegations of irregularities was illegal as the protesters had not placed the issues before the proper authority.

The court order will remain in force until disposal of a rule attached to it, Additional Attorney General MK Rahman told The Daily Star. The HC issued the rule upon the government authorities and Buet to explain in four weeks why the agitation and strike should not be declared illegal.

The education secretary, VC and pro-VC of Buet, IGP, DMP commissioner, president and secretary of Buet Teachers' Association were made respondents to the rule.

The national interest was protected through the court order, the petitioner told The Daily Star. Now, teachers, students and employees would have to stop agitating on the campus and so the Buet authorities would be able to resume their functions, he added.

During the hearing on the petition, Akond told the HC bench of Justice Naima Haider and Justice Muhammad Khurshid Alam

Discrimination

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social status of religious minorities" for the continued discrimination.

The sporadic abuses have "little political recourse," says the report.

It elaborated on the government effort into amending laws and policymaking in favour of all religious communities. An amendment to the constitution passed on June 30 established Islam as the state religion but reaffirmed that the country is a secular state.

The report also praises government steps to promote religious freedom, appoint minority people to higher government ranks and allocate funds for the major denominations -- Hindus, Buddhists and Christians.

Under the civil law, Islamic fatwa could be issued given that it is not punitive. The report also cites some press and NGO reports on some incidents of discrimination and violence against minorities.

As the report notes, the only minority group that has continued to face violence and discrimination in the country is Ahmadiyya community.

Though the degree of violence against religious and ethnic minorities has come down, its existence concerns the US embassy in Bangladesh, the report states in its conclusion.

Sarkar that the shutdown of Buet for 44 days from July 11 in the name of summer vacation had obstructed regular classes and examination procedures, thus causing a session jam.

Additional Attorney General MK Rahman argued that the government was negotiating with the Buet authorities, students and teachers to end the crisis.

Deputy Attorney General Moklesur Rahman and Assistant Attorney General Nusrat Jahan also represented the government.

Meanwhile, Buet Teachers Association General Secretary Prof Ashrafur Islam said that on receiving a copy of the court order they would consult a lawyer to decide their next course of action.

Teachers and students yesterday held their sit-in programme before the administrative building.

The agitation began on July 11 when the authorities shut the institution for 44 days in advance for Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr. The same day, the heads of all faculties and departments of Buet announced their resignation en masse to realise their demands.

TIB slates

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the projects, the anti-graft watchdog urged the government to cancel the decision immediately and refrain from doing the same. The HC in June last year had declared the projects illegal.

"The decision is as regrettable, illegal and unacceptable as it is damaging for the reputation of the government. It raises questions about the government's commitment to the rule of law, public interest and environmental justice," Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of TIB, said in a statement.

The government decision not only defies the court directive to take action against illegal schemes in wetlands and farmland, but also undermines its credibility in terms of its commitment to environmental sustainability, he added.

It is common knowledge for all including the Department of Environment that the project areas are part of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha's Detailed Area Plan (DAP) and the schemes have been declared illegal particularly for their adverse environmental implications, mentioned the TIB official.

Such moves, he noted, are bound to damage the credibility of the government and raise doubts about the moral and ethical basis of its high-sounding commitment to fight environmental degradation and climate change.