

**SAYEDEE'S TRIAL
ICT accepts
statement of
witness who
died recently**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 yesterday accepted the statement of another witness, passed away recently, as evidence against Jamaat leader and war crimes accused Delwar Hossain Sayedee.

With this, the number of witnesses against the Jamaat leader will be 28, excluding Investigation Officer Helal Uddin.

Meanwhile, the tribunal extended the deadline of cross-examining Helal Uddin to August 13 from yesterday as Sayedee's counsels sought for more time to complete quizzing him.

Mentioning that witness Mukunda Chakraborty died three and a half months ago, Prosecutor Syed Haider Ali in his petition urged the tribunal to accept his statements as evidence in line with the rules of evidence of the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973.

According to Rule 19(2) of the Act, a tribunal may receive in evidence any statement recorded by a magistrate or an investigation officer being a statement made by any person who, at the time of the trial, is dead or whose attendance cannot be procured without any amount of delay or expense which the Tribunal considers unreasonable.

On March 29, the tribunal accepted statements of 15 absentee witnesses, given to an investigation officer, as evidence against Sayedee and refused to do the same for 31 other depositions.

Mukunda, who died on April 21, was one among the 31 witnesses.

Opposing the petition, defence counsel Mizanul Islam questioned why the tribunal would accept the statement even though it was rejected earlier.

Justice Anwarul Huq, one of the three-member tribunal, told the defence, "The state of the witness is different now." There was no problem to accept the statement as evidence as Mukunda passed away.

Mizanul argued saying that had the witness was so important to the prosecution, then they would have tried to produce him following the rejection. But they did not do it, he added.

Following the hearing, tribunal Chairman Justice Md Nizamul Huq accepted the petition and asked the defence to cross-examine Helal Uddin on the matter.

Nizamul Huq also observed that the defence needed more time to cross-examine the IO as it was not possible to complete by the scheduled deadline, yesterday.

The tribunal chief also mentioned that after Thursday's order regarding the deadline, the defence counsel yesterday performed well to complete the cross-examining.

The defence yesterday cross-examined Helal Uddin for the 46th day. Nizamul Huq in his order also mentioned that the defence counsel was not feeling well.

"Considering all the matter, the tribunal is inclined to give defence more time," he said and added that the defence would have to complete cross-examining the IO by August 13.

"No more time will be allowed," said Nizamul Huq. The tribunal yesterday rejected another petition of Sayedee's counsels regarding quizzing Helal Uddin about the contents of two confidential reports about inability of producing the 46 witnesses.

Those were submitted to the tribunal on March 17 and 19. Sayedee, who is facing 20 specific charges of crimes against humanity committed during 1971 Liberation War, was produced before the tribunal yesterday.

The tribunal adjourned its proceedings until August 12.

GB paid Tk 10cr

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The Nobel Peace Prize winning entity deposited the money to state coffers for the period from January 2011 to June 2011.

Grameen Bank had enjoyed tax exemption since its start in 1983. But due to a stand-off between the government and Prof Muhammad Yunus founded Grameen Bank, the government delayed the decision whether it would extend the tax-free facility after the privilege had expired in December 2010.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) again exempted the bank from tax payment with a retrospective effect from July 1, 2011 to December 31, 2015, according to a circular issued by the government on June 21, 2012.

However, the tax administration will not refund Grameen Bank the Tk 10-crore tax, an NBR official yesterday confirmed.

The issue came under the spotlight after NBR had asked its field offices for tax-related information on Grameen Bank's 54 associated but legally independent entities.

Last week, the Grameen Bank Commission sent a letter to the tax authority for

information on tax records on Grameen Bank's related organisations.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Bank has instructed Grameen Bank to find out how much on salary and other amenities did Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus avail every month during his time as the managing director of Grameen Bank, past his retirement age of 60, said a Grameen Bank official.

In a letter yesterday, the central bank asked Grameen Bank to monetise the facilities the Nobel Laureate had enjoyed before he stepped down in May last year.

A finance ministry official said it had sent a letter to the central bank on Sunday, seeking the information, as it had no capacity to know it on its own.

Grameen Bank will have until the next week to comply with the central bank instruction, said an official of the micro lender.

On August 2, the cabinet directed the finance ministry to inform it immediately about the salaries and benefits that Prof Yunus had received during his tenure as the bank's managing director past the retirement age and whether those facilities were in line with the bank's rules.

**15 kidnapped
in Rangamati**

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Rangamati

Fifteen activists of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) were abducted from Rajdweep village in Rangamati last night.

Sources said a group of armed criminals picked them up at gun point around 8:00pm. The kidnappers later took them inside the deep forests of Rangamati, they said.

Among the abducted, seven were identified as Shujok Chakma, Shuprovat Chakma, Oni Chakma, Shubash Chakma, Nipom Marma, Shukra and Sadhon Chakma. Identities of the other eight could not be known immediately.

Outcry over

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acting general secretary of Awami League Mahbubul Alam Hanif yesterday.

The government has just formed a probe body to determine the property, liquidity and ownership of the bank as it is responsible for saving the property of the people, he told a discussion marking the 37th death anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad, a pro-AL doctors' platform, hosted the programme at Dr Milon Auditorium of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

The government will not let the culprits go unpunished for looting thousands of crores of taka from some multilevel marketing firms and 54 associated companies of the GB, added Hanif, also a special assistant to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The government was happy to see Muhammad Yunus winning the Nobel award. But a "guilty" person, even if he be a Nobel laureate, should not get indemnity from prosecution, he mentioned. "Nobody is above the law. In the USA, several Nobel laureates were punished for their offences."

But in Bangladesh, the civil society members and their foreign friends have been shedding crocodile tears to save Dr Yunus, whereas they do not feel for around 86 lakh customers of the GB, said the AL leader.

Regarding the caretaker government issue, Hanif said the next national election will be held under the Election Commission. If the opposition parties have any formula to strengthen the commission, they should place it in parliament.

Health Minister AFM Ruhul Haque and Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin MP, addressed the programme, among others, with Bangladesh Medical Association Secretary General Dr Sarfuddin Ahmed in the chair.

People unhappy

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didn't...So yes, people are disappointed," she said in an interview with NDTV, an Indian private television station.

Dipu Moni, however, hoped that the much-awaited Teesta deal would be inked. "I am sure, I am sure, it will be delivered," she said.

On Mamata Banerjee's [chief minister of West Bengal, India] opposition to signing the Teesta deal, she said: "...well, we knew it was not going to be signed just, just on the eve of it, and very late; but we didn't know why, at that moment."

Asked if there was any reciprocal link between signing the deals on Teesta and transit, the foreign minister said, "I wouldn't say one is dependent on the other but it would be very nice if we [Bangladesh] could have Teesta."

On the recent demand of some Indian opposition parties that "Bangladeshi illegal migrants" in Assam should be deported, Dipu Moni said she does not see it as a bilateral conflict "because this hasn't been raised with us [governments of both the countries] at least not in the recent past."

Replying to a query on the issue of border killings by the Border Security Force of India, she said, "...Still killings are happening [along the border] and this is an issue, which I think, this one issue jeopardises all other achievements."

Pak SC summons PM

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of state he enjoys immunity. The government is due to become the first in Pakistan's history to complete an elected, full five-year mandate in February 2013, but the showdown could force polls before then.

The court had given Ashraf until yesterday to write to Switzerland and last week struck down a new law passed by parliament that sought to exempt members of the government from contempt trials, clearing the way for legal proceedings against the premier.

Judge Asif Saeed Khosa said Ashraf had been given notice "under (the) contempt of court act 2003, read with article 204 of the constitution to show cause as to why he may not be proceeded (against) in contempt of court by not complying (with the) relevant direction of the court".

"He shall appear in person at the next date of hearing. Hearing adjourned until August 27," Khosa added. Critics of the judiciary and members of Zardari's main ruling Pakistan People's Party accuse the court of overstepping its reach and waging a personal vendetta against the president.

The government had wanted the case adjourned until September. Attorney general Irfan Qadir said he needed time "to bridge the gap" between the two sides, and "find an amicable solution".

Experts say Ashraf will be asked to explain his position on August 27.

If the court is not satisfied, he risks being summoned to be indicted for contempt, precipitating the second contempt trial against a sitting prime minister in just months.

The allegations against

Zardari date back to the 1990s, when he and his wife, late premier Benazir Bhutto, were suspected of using Swiss bank accounts to launder \$12 million allegedly paid in bribes by companies seeking customs inspection contracts.

The Swiss shelved the cases in 2008 when Zardari became president and the government insists the president has full immunity as head of state.

But in 2009 the Supreme Court overturned a political amnesty that had frozen investigations into the president and other politicians, ordering that the cases be reopened.

Zardari had already signed the contempt law, which sought to exempt government figures, including the president, prime minister and cabinet ministers from contempt for acts performed as part of their job.

**NBR cancels
decision to
calm Muhith
down**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) yesterday cancelled its decision to give additional charge to a commissioner; a move insiders consider was made to calm the finance minister down.

On August 2, the NBR gave Syed Golem Kibria commissioner of Appeal Commissionaire of Chittagong, the additional charge of Customs, Excise and VAT of Chittagong.

But the NBR yesterday gave Md Jamal Hossain, Commissioner of Customs Bond Commissionerate, the additional responsibility. The NBR also sent copies of its orders to finance minister's office.

The NBR last week reshuffled its commissioner-level officials. Its decisions, mainly giving Golem Kibria the additional responsibility, irked Finance Minister AMA Muhith, said insiders.

On Sunday, Muhith through a letter restricted NBR Chairman Nasiruddin Ahmed from making "any important decision".

"He [NBR chairman] is going to be transferred very soon. He will not be able to make any important decision during the time," said the letter sent to the NBR chairman.

FIGHT AGAINST AIDS

**Hillary signs
new deal in
S Africa**

AFP, Cape Town

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton yesterday signed a new deal supporting efforts to fight AIDS in South Africa, which has the world's biggest population of people with HIV.

"South Africa and the entire region has a brighter and healthier and more secure future," she said while visiting a clinic in the Cape Town township of Delft.

ACC to work

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office in the capital. The ACC cannot work with the WB on probing the alleged graft in the project without entering a memorandum of understanding with the WB, he added.

Last month, the graft watchdog agreed with a proposal of the WB for forming a three-member panel of international experts to investigate the alleged corruption.

Replying to a query, Ghulam Rahman said an ACC probe team will quiz former communications minister Syed Abul Hossain, if required.

Meanwhile, the ACC yesterday grilled former secretary of the Bridges Division Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan at its office for around three hours in connection with the alleged irregularities in hiring a consultant for the project.

ACC Deputy Directors Mir Md Zainul Abedin Shebly and Mirza Zahidul Alam interrogated Mosharraf, currently executive chairman of Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA).

Talking to newsmen after facing the grilling, Mosharraf claimed himself to be a clean man. "An unidentified vested quarter sent emails to the Integrity Department of the World Bank, alleging graft in the project. Some junior officials of the bank dealt with it inefficiently."

Asked about his involvement in corruption, he said, "I was not involved in the graft. The World Bank and Canadian police never said that."

He asked the authorities concerned to find out those who had communicated to the Integrity Department of the WB to halt the project and damage the country's image.

Following a request by the WB in October last year, the ACC launched two investigations into the allegations of corruption in the main bridge project and in the appointment process of Canadian consultancy firm SNC-Lavalin.

The bank on June 29 cancelled its \$1.2 billion fund for the project citing corruption concerns.

Realtor silent

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their plots and what would happen now. It seemed some got to know about the court verdict.

"An employee named Mozammel assured them that they would fix the problem," said Mizanur Rahman, a computer engineer who got a three-katha plot in Block-O of Modhumoti Model Town.

The company's attempts to confuse people are still on. They are even saying that plot owners could have their money back if they wanted to since the company would be able to resell the piece of land at a higher price, said Mizanur.

"I paid around Tk 9 lakh for my three-katha plot but Metromakers is saying that it was Tk 48 lakh now even though the apex court cancelled my rights to the land," Mizanur said.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environment and Lawyers Association, told The Daily Star that the people who bought land in the project would not be able to build anything on their plots. People should be careful about illegal housing projects and not invest in them, she said.

"The clients should know about the legal status of a project before investing their money," said Rizwana.

Iqbal Kabir Lytton, a lawyer of BELA, said the land developer was legally bound to give back its client's money. "The Supreme Court's judgment regarding the matter would be clear when we would get the full judgment," said Iqbal.

Hundreds of people were lured into buying plots of the housing project with its flashy advertisements. On its website, the authorities claimed that they had developed the land on a "flood-free zone", which was not true.

They were destroying the environment by filling up wetlands and filling up portions of the Turag river. On their website, however, they were claiming that Dhaka was being given back

its former glory.

When the Modhumoti authorities submitted their documents before the court, the documents said that they had sold around 3,500 plots they made up by filling up over 500 acres of sub-flood flow area.

They had divided their project area in attractive names like Garden Park Lake View, New Valley, Sunny Side, South Lake Side, South Side and plots were available in 2.5, 3, 3.5, 5, 6, 7 and in 10 kathas.

The authorities of the Modhumoti sold plots even when the case was under trial. Like Kutub, The Daily Star too failed to reach Modhumoti authorities to have comments on the matter.

Lock houses

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leave Dhaka before the celebrations, she said.

"That is why those who leave the city should ensure that they have properly locked their houses."

She made the remarks at the secretariat following a meeting on the supply of essentials and security measures during the Eid holidays. State Minister for Home Shamsul Hoque Tuku, Home Secretary C Q K Mustaq Ahmed, Inspector General of Police Hassan Mahmood Khandker and Mohammad Helal Uddin, director of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, were present.

Noting that there was no news of extortion and mugging ahead of Eid, the minister said overall conditions in the country were very good now because of what she called well-maintained law and order.

She, however, acknowledged the poor condition of the roads. There was no other issue in the country except that of vulnerable road conditions, she added.

Talking about government measures to ensure security, the home minister said two thousand Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel were patrolling the city along with policemen. Closed circuit cameras had been set up at Sayedabad, Kamalapur, Gabtali and Mohakhali bus terminals in the capital to monitor activities on the roads so that criminals could not escape.

On the prices of essentials, Sahara said the market of essentials was stable now and that 14 monitoring teams of the commerce ministry were working toward ensuring that the stability remained in place.

Dhaka will take on an unusually vacant appearance for a long time as government officials and employees of private companies enjoy non-stop holidays from August 15 to August 21 due to National Mourning Day, Shab-e-Qadr and Eid-ul-Fitr festival.

Priority high

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Contractors were finally selected at the third bidding in 2009, but then the project went through another hiccup. The then Pakistani consultant demanded additional pay due to the delays. The government then appointed a new consultant, cancelling the contract with the Pakistani firm.

The project suffered delays due to frequent changes of its projector directors as well. So far, the communications ministry has appointed as many as six project directors.

Extortion and threats allegedly from local ruling party leaders have also disrupted work. Contractors have complained about the menace to the communications ministry and, at one stage, stopped work through abandoning their equipment.

The problems have been more or less resolved and work is now going on, albeit at a snail's pace.

The other project, the Joydevpur-Mymensingh highway widening project, has stumbled into an equally frustrating situation.

Launched in January, 2011, with a target of completion in three years, half the work was supposed to

have been done by now. In reality, though, only 13 percent of work has been done.

About 87km of the highway was supposed to be widened under the project, costing the state Tk 904 crore. Work on a 30km stretch has not started even after the tender for this portion's upgrade was cancelled.

The communication ministry, eight months after a contract was signed, could realise that the contractor's claim of a joint venture with a Chinese company was actually a lie.

A fresh tender was floated recently but none in the ministry could say when the work would actually begin.

Meanwhile, the project cost has increased by Tk 400 crore.

Contractors of both projects claimed that they were not getting adequate funds to speed up work. So far, Tk 645 crore have been released for the Dhaka-Chittagong project and Tk 124 crore for the Joydevpur-Mymensingh project.

The amounts were less than half of what was supposed to be disbursed, they said.

At one stage, contractors of Dhaka-Chittagong suspended work due to the

Leave Grameen Bank

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they said in a statement under a banner of Friends of Grameen.

Their comments came nearly a week after the cabinet division approved the government proposals to bring changes to the Grameen Bank Ordinance, 1983, that governs the activities of the micro lender.

On August 2, the cabinet approved the proposals to give more power to the Grameen Bank chairman to choose the managing director of the micro lender.

The post of the managing director fell vacant after Prof Muhammad Yunus was forced to step down as its chief executive by the central bank in May last year.

Ninety-seven percent of Grameen Bank is owned by poor women. The government owns a mere 3 percent of the bank.

"The proposed amendment would enable the government-appointed chairman to appoint the managing director of the bank," said the women leaders and professionals in the statement.

"This represents a de facto imposition of government control on the bank; in other words, the poor women, who are also its owners, are being deprived of their right to manage their own bank and are being made powerless."

"This must be stopped at the earliest," they said.

Owned by impoverished women, Grameen Bank is unique in the world, they said. Representatives of the 8.3 million women borrow-

ers sit on the board of the bank and have participated over the years in its decision making, something that has not happened with any other bank in the world.

Of the 12 members on the board, nine are women members of Grameen Bank and the other three including the chairman are government nominees.

The women leaders and professionals said the government's proposed amendment has the effect of allowing the chairman to take undemocratic decisions, overriding the views of the majority of the board who are the women representing its borrowers.

Under the changes being brought to the ordinance, the Grameen Bank chairman - instead of the board as originally provided - would form a selection committee in consultation with the board for selecting the bank's managing director. The chairman will also be able to select a three-member panel for the appointment of the managing director.

"Through this amendment, the government aims to deny the owners of Grameen Bank their right to have a say in the management of their bank," said the statement.

The statement said the power to appoint managing director of any bank lies with its board of directors. In the case of Grameen Bank, by investing the chairman with the power to appoint the managing director, the government will have created an example that is partisan in nature.

fund crisis and resumed operations in June this year only after getting their dues.

The delays in completing the project will also raise the project's cost. "There will be a Tk 350-400 crore price escalation due to the rise in the prices of construction materials," a communications ministry official told The Daily Star, preferring anonymity.

This year the government allocated Tk 500 crore for the Dhaka-Chittagong and Tk 140 crore for the Joydevpur-Mymensingh projects. But the communications ministry officials and the contractors have doubts whether the allocated money will eventually come through.

Acting Communications Secretary MAN Siddique was, however, very hopeful of speeding up the upgrade work. He claimed that the authorities had already overcome all the bottlenecks in the two projects.

"We had problems like funds shortage and dirt to fill the road but those have been solved. This year we have got more money than in past years," he told The Daily Star.

"Now we are pushing the contractors to speed up their work so that the projects are completed on time," he added.