

Kamaruzzaman

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told The Daily Star that the International Crimes Tribunal-2 might fix a date for hearing the petition today.

Kamaruzzaman was indicted by the Tribunal-2 with seven charges of crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War. Fifteen prosecution witnesses have so far testified in the case against the Jamaat assistant secretary general.

The flurry of retrial petitions began after an alleged Skype conversation between former Tribunal-1 chairman Justice Md Nizamul Huq and expatriate legal expert Ahmed Ziauddin was published by a Bangla daily in December last year.

On December 11, Justice Nizamul stepped down citing personal reasons.

Former Jamaat ameer Ghulam Azam, incumbent Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami and Nayeb-e-Ameer Delwar Hossain Sayedee filed similar petitions with the Tribunal-1 that fixed today for passing orders on those.

Tajul said they were preparing the retrial petitions for cases of three other accused - Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, Abdul Quader Mollah and Abdul Alim -- pending with Tribunal-2.

He said from the Skype and email conversations, they had ascertained that "the formal charges of all first eight cases pending with the two tribunals were prepared by Ahmed Ziauddin and his associates and came from Brussels on which the cases advanced".

In the retrial petitions of the Jamaat trio, their counsels, however, claimed the indictment orders against their clients had "come from

abroad".

About the allegation, AKM Saiful Islam, conducting prosecutor of Kamaruzzaman's case, told The Daily Star, "I myself prepared the formal charges. Their [defence's] allegation is totally baseless."

Tajul said, "We don't find direct involvement of any judges of Tribunal-2 [with Skype conversation] as we found the involvement of [Tribunal-1 former chairman] Justice Nizamul Huq.

"We mentioned [in the petition] that the proceedings of the cases advanced through a scandalous process; there may be no actual biasness, but there was an appearance of biasness. So we filed the petition for reinitiating the case," Tajul added.

He told The Daily Star they had filed the petition under section 46 (A) of the rules of procedure of the international crimes tribunal.

Section 46 (A) says: "Nothing in these rules shall be deemed to limit or otherwise affect the inherent power of the tribunal to make such order(s) as may be necessary to meet the ends of justice or to prevent abuse of the process."

Saiful Islam said, "This petition has no rationality. They have filed the petition to kill time for delaying the proceedings."

Meanwhile, the International Crime Tribunals-2 yesterday completed recording cross-examination of Beauty Khanam, eighth prosecution witness in the case against Abdul Alim, a former minister of BNP founder late president Ziaur Rahman's cabinet.

Ahsanul Haq Hena and AEM Khalilur Rahman,

Alim's counsels, cross-examined Beauty, daughter of a martyr subedar major, before the case proceeding was adjourned until January 15.

On November 22, Beauty testified that Shanti [Peace] Committee and Razakar men upon Abdul Alim's order had killed her father in Joypurhat for fighting against the Pakistani army.

She had earlier faced cross-examination on several days but not for long on each occasion.

At one stage of yesterday's cross-examination, the witness expressed discontent over Hena when he repeated the same questions he and his colleagues had asked her earlier.

"You [Hena] are making repetition again and again. You are playing a farce in the name of cross-examination," said Beauty.

The tribunal asked the defence to decide among themselves who would ask what questions.

Meanwhile, the tribunal extended time until January 14 for Suranjit Sengupta, a minister without portfolio, to explain his "imaginary comment" on the date of verdicts in the cases pending with the tribunal.

The tribunal fixed the new date as Suranjit's counsel Abdul Baset Majumder sought time for preparation.

On December 24, the tribunal on its own motion issued the show-cause notice on Suranjit following a report in a Bangla daily. Suranjit was quoted in the report as saying, "Verdict of 14 identified war criminals has already been finalised. Trial of these 14 war criminals would be completed anytime within 2013."

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Stop them, right now

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another High Court bench in June, 2011. In December, 2011, the court banned publishing of advertisements of any unauthorised housing projects in the print and electronic media.

The High Court then ordered the government to take stern legal action against publicity and filling of land for such projects.

Yesterday, the High Court stayed for three months the effectiveness of Ashiyani City's site clearance, issued by the Department of Environment, and the renewal of the certificate.

It also issued a rule upon the government authorities concerned and Ashiyani City to explain within four weeks as to why the issuance of the environmental certificate and the renewal should not be declared illegal.

The DoE issued Ashiyani City the certificate on December 24, 2009, and renewed it on June 12, 2012.

The court yesterday stayed an order of the Ministry of Environment that had reduced Ashiyani

City's penalty for illegally filling up water bodies with dirt.

The DoE in November, 2011, fined Ashiyani City Tk 50 lakh for destroying wetlands, flood plains, aquatic life and local ecology by illegal filling of land in Ashkona. The ministry later slashed the fine to Tk 5 lakh.

The court yesterday asked the authorities concerned to explain within four weeks as to why this reduction of fine should not be declared illegal.

Secretaries to the ministries of housing and public works, land, forest and environment, home, information, and Rajuk chairman, director general of DoE, and its director (monitoring and enforcement), deputy commissioner of Dhaka and managing director of Ashiyani City have been made respondents to the rules.

In a rule, the bench of Justice Mirza Hussain Haider and Justice Khurshid Alam Khan asked the managing director of Ashiyani City to explain as to why he should

not be directed to remove the dirt he had dumped in the wetlands.

It asked him to immediately submit a list of plots he had already sold to people and all papers and documents relating to the approval of the housing project.

The court came up with the order and rules after hearing a writ petition jointly filed by eight rights organisations that said Ashiyani City authorities had been filling and constructing structures on around 230 acres of land even though the company had Rajuk permission for development on only 43 acres.

Ashiyani City grabbed land of locals for the projects violating wetland conservation and other relevant laws and the High Court's earlier directives, the petitioners claimed.

Scores of affected people of Holan and Ashkona had gathered with complaints against Ashiyani City on November 17, 2011, when a DoE team had gone there and fined Ashiyani City. They

complained of land-grabbing and destruction of their homesteads.

At least 33 affected locals formally filed allegations against Ashiyani City.

Ain O Salish Kendra, Association for Land Reforms and Development, Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon, Institute of Architects Bangladesh, Nijera Kori, and Paribesh Banchao Andolon filed the petition on December 22, 2012.

Iqbal Kabir Lytton, a counsel for the petitioners, told The Daily Star that around 100 unauthorised housing projects were filling water bodies and selling plots of land in and around the Dhaka city.

Most of them were also running advertisements through the media ignoring the court's earlier orders, he claimed.

Rajuk must take steps immediately to stop activities of the unauthorised housing projects, he said.

Graft main hurdle

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The topics include economy, living standards, the role of religion in political system, fight against corruption, migration, security threats of South Asia, connectivity, regional cooperation and obstacles to establish closer ties in the region.

The interviews were done in May 2012. Thirty percent of the respondents were from Dhaka, 22 percent from Rajshahi and 18 percent from Chittagong. The rest 30 percent interviewees were from Khulna, Sylhet and Barisal.

According to the survey, 62 percent of the respondents think living standard of their families had improved in the past five years.

Twenty percent said living standard got worse and 19 percent said it "remained the same".

Young respondents, especially between 15 and 24 years, held a more optimistic view of their current and past standard of living, said Gallup citing that 65 percent of the 15-24 years olds believed their families' standard of living had "improved" in the last five years.

Replying to which South Asian country had the biggest impact on Bangladesh's economy, 59 percent mentioned India.

Gallup said India and Bangladesh, with other South Asian countries, have taken a number of initiatives over the years to remove trade barriers such as tariffs and some non-tariff restrictions at the unilateral, bilateral, and regional levels.

"Therefore, as the bilateral trade relationship continues to grow, India will have an even greater impact on Bangladesh's economy," it said.

Forty-five percent said other than the South Asian countries, the USA had the biggest impact on their economic conditions.

Sixty percent choose education as the most important issue in their personal lives. Religion and spirituality came second followed by family, work and living condition.

On corruption, 57 percent said they were happy with the government's initiatives to fight corruption while 39 percent were dissatisfied with the government initiatives. And 6 percent did

not answer the question.

"More likely to be dissatisfied with the government's efforts to fight corruption were those with university education or higher and those living in large cities," said Gallup.

In the survey, a vast majority of respondents -- 85 percent -- rejected violence as a means to resolve conflicts within Bangladesh. Only 9 percent favoured violence as a way to resolve conflict.

Thirty-two percent wanted religious principles to be the most influential factor in political decisions. Twenty percent said religion should have a major influence on the political system together with other factors, followed by 16 percent who thought religion should have only a minor influence.

But 17 percent of the respondents wanted a completely secular political system.

The respondents also pointed to terrorism as the number one threat to regional security in South Asia. Religious fundamentalism and rivalry between India and Pakistan also pose major threats to regional

security, according to Gallup.

Respondents saw Pakistan as the biggest security threat to regional security. India came second. Among countries outside the region, the USA was perceived as the greatest threat to security in the region.

"But respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to see India as a major threat to security than were those with lower educational attainment," said Gallup.

On migration, 59 percent confirmed that they would like to continue their lives in Bangladesh. The rest expressed willingness to migrate to other countries, mainly Saudi Arabia, the USA and India, temporarily or permanently, if given the opportunity.

In the survey, a large majority of the respondents acknowledged the importance of regional cooperation. Fifty-five percent identified historic animosities and 46 percent pointed to arms race between India and Pakistan as the two major obstacles to regional cooperation.

MKA dropped

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Affairs Secretary Nooh-Ul-Alam Lenin have been promoted to the presidium, the highest policymaking body of the party.

Four posts -- two of presidium members, one of departmental secretary and one of central committee member -- of the 73-member AL Central Working Committee (ALCWC) are still vacant. AL General Secretary Syed Ashraf Islam said the posts would be filled up later.

Announcing the party's committee yesterday, Ashraf said Alamgir, Raju and Humayun had been made members of the AL Advisory Council. Party stalwarts Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta and Abdul Jalil have also been kept in the 41-member AL advisory council like the last committee.

Besides, some other ALCWC leaders have also been dropped from the

party and replaced by some new faces, including newly elected AL lawmaker from Gazipur Simeen Hussain Rimi, also daughter of the country's first prime minister Tajuddin Ahmad.

Among those excluded are former communications minister Syed Abul Hossain, who was the international affairs secretary of AL.

Both Abul and Raju have been at the centre of controversies over the last two years -- the former for his alleged involvement in the Padma bridge project graft and the latter for his brother's alleged involvement in the murder of Narsingdi municipal mayor Lokman Hossain.

Abul was first removed from the communications ministry and then from the cabinet altogether following the World Bank's allegation of corruption conspiracy against him.

Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury, state minister for women and children

affairs, has replaced Abul in the central committee.

Party insiders said the exclusion of Abul Hossain would help the government negotiate with the World Bank regarding the Padma bridge financing.

Highly placed party sources said Alamgir had also been removed for his involvement in a recent controversial incident.

Hasan Mahmud, party's former forest and environment affairs secretary, has been promoted as the top publicity secretary. His earlier post remained vacant.

The new faces in the committee include Rimi [Gazipur], Subhas Bose [Narail], Dharendra Chandra Debnath Shambhu MP [Borguna], Rabiul Muktar Choudhury MP [Brahmanbaria], Alauddin Nasim [Feni], prime minister's Special Assistant Abdus Sobhan Golap [Madaripur], Nasrul Hamid Bipu MP [Dhaka], and Junaid Ahmed

Polok MP [Natore].

Those who have been dropped from the central committee are Mohammad Altaf Hossain [Magura], Sheikh Harun-or-Rashid [Khulna], Syeda Zebunnesa [Syhet], Bipul Ghosh [Faridpur], Tipu Munshi MP [Rangpur], Mojibur Rahman Majnu [Bogra] and Akhtar Jahan [Rajshahi].

The names of AL's Parliamentary Board and the committee of the Awami League's assistant secretaries were also announced yesterday.

In the parliamentary board, former AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil has been included anew.

On December 29, 2012, party councillors re-elected Sheikh Hasina as the AL president for the seventh term and Syed Ashraf as general secretary for the second term.

Hasina and Ashraf were also empowered by the councillors to form the central committee.

Expressway to link Mawa

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Shantinagar, Paltan, Fulbaria intersection, Naya Bazar intersection, Victoria Park, Babu Bazar and Buriganga second bridge, and will end at Jheelmil housing project beside Dhaka-Mawa road.

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) has already completed the pre-feasibility study of the expressway recommending four routes.

Finally, Rajuk and the Bridge Division came up

with a route through Victoria Park, Babu Bazar, Buriganga second bridge and Jheelmil project considering its technical viability.

A Rajuk official said several meetings were held at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on construction of expressway, and a decision was later taken for quick implementation of the project.

If the expressway is built, the proposed Jheelmil housing project will turn into a modern city, he said, adding that it will also improve road

communication with the capital through the proposed Padma bridge.

The official also said directives were issued by the PMO in 2010 to turn Dhaka into a modern and jam-free city.

One of the directives was to expand the jurisdiction of the capital covering Narayanganj and Gazipur.

The second one was to build four satellite towns around Dhaka, and the third was to construct 22,500 flats at Uttara for low and medium income people.

The initiative to construct the expressway has been taken as part of the government's plan to connect the satellite towns with the capital, the Rajuk official said.

The tender for construction of the elevated expressway will be floated by the PPP office after getting approval from the cabinet committee, he said.

According to the preliminary projection, the completion date of the project has been set at 2016, he added.

Jamaat-Shibir

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adjacent roads remained suspended for around an hour from 4:00pm, causing a severe traffic jam. Shops downed their shutters and houses closed their doors as panic prevailed in the area at the time.

The Jamaat-Shibir men brought out the procession demanding release of top Jamaat leaders being tried on war crimes charges.

Witnesses said 300 to 400 Jamaat-Shibir activists in a procession suddenly appeared on DIT road at Malibagh in the afternoon and marched up to Rampura. As police intercepted the procession, the activists attacked them, resulting in a clash.

Participants in the procession blasted several cocktails, threw brick chips at the law enforcers and vandalised at least five vehicles. Police then swung into action.

"Police had to fire rubber bullets and teargas canisters to bring the situation under control", Anwar Hossain, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said when contacted.

Meanwhile, in a statement later, Jamaat claimed that police attacked its men who brought out a procession as part of an earlier announced programme, demanding release of their leaders and activists.

The party claimed that more than 100 of its leaders and activists were injured in the police action.

In Chapainawabganj, the district unit of Jamaat last night announced a three-day programme including hartal on Saturday protesting, what it claimed police firing on the party leaders and activists in Dhaka that left city unit secretary Nurul Islam Babu. He hails from the district, reports our correspondent.

Our Chittagong office reports: Police yesterday foiled a procession of Jamaat-Shibir.

About 150 Jamaat-Shibir men brought out the procession from the port city's Colonel Hat area and marched up to AK Khan Intersection.

The procession chanted slogans against war crimes trial and demanded release of the Jamaat leaders under trial.

As the law enforcers rushed to the spot to prevent any destructive activities, the Jamaat-Shibir men fled the scene, said Arefin Jewel, assistant commissioner of Chittagong Metropolitan Police.

Our Staff correspondent in Rajshahi adds: Police dispersed a Jamaat-Shibir procession at Oloka intersection in the city yesterday afternoon and picked up six persons.

Hafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Boalia police station, said police resorted to baton charge on the procession as some of the participants in it threw stones at them.

Iraq, UK discuss prisoner swap

AFP, Baghdad

Baghdad and London are discussing a prisoner transfer deal that could see a British security guard convicted of murder in Iraq serve the remainder of his sentence in his home country, officials said.

Justice Minister Hassan al-Shammari has been invited to London to finalise and sign a memorandum of understanding over the transfer of convicts between the two countries, and while the deal would not solely affect Danny Fitzsimons, he would be a key beneficiary.

Fitzsimons became the first Western contractor to be convicted of a crime by an Iraqi court when he was sentenced to life in prison, equivalent to 20 years in jail under Iraqi law, in February 2011 for killing a Briton and an Australian in Baghdad's heavily-fortified Green Zone in August 2009.

"The British are insisting to make an agreement with Iraq, to take Danny Fitzsimons," justice ministry spokesman Haidar al-Saadi told AFP.