

Beautified Hatirjheel

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Colourful lights illuminating the wide expanse of concrete structures, lake and waterfronts would take anyone to a world of fantasy. No wonder that within a few days since its inauguration on January 2 it has become a popular spot for city dwellers, who search for peace and beauty in their never-ending struggle in the concrete jungle of Dhaka.

"It is magnificent," said Sumona Mazhar on her very first visit to Hatirjheel with her three children last weekend.

"There is a severe shortage of open space and recreational facilities for families in Dhaka and I am very glad that now we have a place to visit with our children."

A group of people were seen strolling down, giggling and gushing. With much exuberance, they were taking photographs, posing in front of the lake, bridges and flowerbeds.

A family of seven, they said they had got the news of the inauguration of Hatirjheel on TV and came all the way from Narsingdi to see the place in their own eyes.

"It's worth the five-hour-long trip to the city," one member of the family said.

The new and yet pristine place attracts young lovers too. Bridges with the lake water beneath, lights reflecting off the water sur-

face and rows of trees around the lake -- all together give you a sense of romance.

On conditions of anonymity, a young couple agreed to talk to The Daily Star. They said they went there to escape the prying eyes of their friends and families. Unfortunately, however, they spent much of the time on the lookout for TV cameras and photographers to avoid unwanted public exposure, they noted wearily.

Young men were seen idling their time away at the benches by the lake while some were engaged in lively addas.

Some garment workers were roaming around the new walkways. They were trying to figure out the shortest route from their quarters to their factories, said Amena Begum, who came to Hatirjheel with her roommates.

"It'll be a pleasant everyday walk if we can go through this place to our workplace. Moreover, it will save us some time," she said.

Many visitors opted for car or motorcycle rides through the maze of inter-connecting roads and bridges in order to grasp the true magnitude of the project. Traversing distances that once took hours now became a few minutes' journey.

Many said they were amazed by the well-planned project.

"Is this a time machine? How else is it possible to travel from Gulshan to Rampura in less than five minutes?" a university student said.

Everyone congratulated the government for taking such an initiative but with fear that like other public places in the city it would eventually become dirty and polluted for a lack of maintenance. There were paper bags and garbage already in some parts of the lake, said a visitor, while another pointed to some men who stood in a line urinating into the clean water of the lake as if it was their birthright.

"With citizens like these, who have no civic sense, for how long can you keep on blaming the authorities?" she said with rage and disgust. It is a fair question to ask, especially when people were actually caught on TV, destroying flower beds not even a week after the opening of Hatirjheel.

The construction of a theatre, park, garden and some other beautification projects has not yet been finished. Once the project is fully functional, asserted the authorities, the facilities would include an information centre, celebration point, viewing decks, benches at different points, game equipment for children, water taxi terminals and footbridges.

Till then, visitors seem content enjoying what the prime minister said a New Year's gift to Dhaka dwellers.

Counsel for Mollah

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the defence, told the International Crimes Tribunal-2 this during the closing argument of the case yesterday.

Citing examples of war crimes cases from abroad, Razzaq placed his submission on five charges and argued why the testimonies of the prosecution witnesses do not carry any probative values.

On May 28, 2012, the tribunal indicted Mollah with six charges of crimes against humanity and 12 prosecution witnesses, including two investigation officers of the case, gave their testimonies supporting the charges.

During their arguments, the prosecution claimed five "eyewitnesses" had given their testimony in favour of the charges number four, five and six. Four other "hearsay" witnesses testified charges one, two and three, and another witness partly witnessed the incident mentioned in the fourth charge.

Razzaq, also a Jamaat assistant secretary general, almost completed his arguments yesterday, while defence counsel Abdus Sobhan Tarafder would place argument on factual matters on next date, Farid Uddin Khan, Mollah's another counsel, told The Daily Star.

The three-member tribunal headed by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Judge M Shahinur Islam adjourned the proceeding until January 13.

According to the second charge, Mollah and his cohorts had killed pro-liberation poet Meherun Nesa, her mother and two brothers at their house in Mirpur during the Liberation War. Razzaq spoke about charge-1 on Tuesday.

Syed Shahidul Haque Mama, second prosecution witness, testified, "On March 27, 1971, Abdul Quader Mollah, Hasib Hasmi, Abbas Chairman, Akhter Gunda, Nehal and many others killed poet Meherun Nesa, her brothers and mother and chopped their bodies into pieces."

Razzaq said, "Mama is a hearsay witness and un-attributable." Quazi Rosy, a close friend of Meherun Nesa and fourth prosecution witness, testified, "On the evening of March 27, I got information that Quader Mollah and his accomplices wearing red and white bandanas entered Meherun's house around 11:00am.

"Seeing them, Meherun embraced a holy Quran firmly and pleaded for life, but they slit the throat of all four of them [Meherun Nesa, her mother and two brothers]," Rosy added.

About Rosy, Razzaq said, "She is more than a hearsay witness."

"Whether the PW-4 [fourth prosecution witness] said conflicting something?" asked the tribunal.

"Yes," replied Razzaq and partly quoted Rosy as saying, "They [attackers] entered the house under the leadership of Quader Mollah that day. I could not say whether Quader Mollah had entered the house or not."

Razzaq said a book written by Rosy was published in June 2011 on the killing of Meherun where she did not mention the name of Mollah.

"If the incident was true, she could have written it in her book," said Razzaq. During cross-examination, Rosy, however, said she did not mention the name of Mollah in her book as there was scope for trial.

Razzaq said 10th prosecution witness Syed Abdul Kaium did not say anything on the second charge which could implicate Mollah.

According to the third charge, Mollah accompanied by Al Badr, Razakar and non-Bangalees detained journalist Khandakar Abu Taleb from Mirpur-10 bus stand on March 29 and brought him

to a place known as Mirpur Jallad Khana Pump House and slaughtered him.

Khondaker Abul Ahsan, son Abu Taleb, testified Mollah and his accomplices had killed his father and he had heard about the killing from their non-Bangalee driver Nizam during the war.

Giving a similar statement, tenth prosecution witness Syed Abdul Kaium, who was neighbour of Abu Taleb, testified he had heard about the killing from his colleague Faruk Ahmed Khan in June 1971.

About their testimony, Razzaq said, "Both of them are hearsay and un-attributable witnesses. [Their testimonies] may be admissible but don't have probative value."

Mentionable, Razzaq on Tuesday said, "Family witness is very important."

According to the fourth charge, a systematic attack and indiscriminate shooting by Quader Mollah and his cohorts killed hundreds of unarmed people in two villages, Khanbari and Ghatar Char, in Keraniganj on November 25, 1971.

Freedom fighter Mozaffar Ahmed Khan, Abdul Majid Palowan and Nur Jahan, first, seventh and eighth prosecution witnesses respectively, gave their testimonies supporting the charge.

Terming Mozaffar a "hearsay witness" Razzaq said he claimed that two freedom fighters were killed that day, but killing of freedom fighters does not fall under the jurisdiction of crimes against humanity as they were not civilian.

About Abdul Majid Palowan, Razzaq just said, "I would not tell about PW-7. He [Majid] himself admitted that he was ward Awami League president."

Majid testified that hiding behind a tree he saw Mollah shooting at the people at Ghatar Char School ground on November 25, 1971.

About Nur Jahan, Razzaq said, "She is totally a hearsay witness. She heard about the killing of her husband from her father-in-law."

Nur Jahan testified Mollah had not allowed her to touch her husband's body at Ghatar Char in Keraniganj on November 25, 1971.

Narrating the incident she said, "I saw some Pakistani soldiers and a short and dark Bangalee man. My husband lay on the ground there. When I approached to hold my husband the Bangalee man asked me to leave the spot, pointing something like a rifle at me."

She identified the Bangalee man as Mollah in the dock during her testimony at the tribunal on August 13 last year.

According to the fifth charge, Pakistani army and around 50 non-Bangalees led by Mollah launched an attack on Alubdi village of Mirpur killing 344 people on April 24, 1971.

Shafiuddin Mollah and Amir Hossain Mollah, sixth and ninth prosecution witnesses, testified supporting the charge, while Altab Uddin Mollah, younger brother of Shafiuddin, testified as the fifth defence witness.

Razzaq did not say anything about the testimony of Shafiuddin, who was an eyewitness of the massacre but claimed Amir Hossain was an "un-attributable hearsay witness."

But Amir in his testimony said he had seen hiding in a bush Quader shooting at the villagers on April 24, 1971.

Razzaq said, "So many people were killed there [Alubdi]; there should be more eyewitnesses [supporting the charge]."

At that point, the tribunal said testimony of the fifth defence witness corroborated the number of killings, and Shafiuddin and Shafiuddin both were members of victims' family.

Razzaq said, "The DW-5 said against the PW-6."

According to the sixth charge, under the leadership of Mollah, some

Biharis and Pakistani soldiers had killed six members of his family in Mirpur in the evening of March 26, 1971.

Razzaq said a single witness testified for the case and she was a "hearsay witness".

According to the prosecution, the witness, who gave her testimony behind closed-doors, was the daughter of a victim and an "eyewitness" of the brutal killing.

Meanwhile, the tribunal cautioned English daily New Age for a report published yesterday over the court proceeding. "The court will go in action if [the matter] repeats [itself]," said the court.

Meanwhile, the first defence witness in the war crimes case against former Jamaat ameer Ghulam Azam continued exhibiting defence documents at the International Crimes Tribunal-1.

Brig Gen (dismissed) Abdullahil Aman Azmi yesterday exhibited about 90 documents and with this the defence completed exhibiting a total of 246 documents. The two-member tribunal adjourned the proceeding until January 13.

It's arson

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Muhiuddin said, and those who did not like its progress might have been behind the inferno that killed 112 workers on November 24 last year at the factory in Ashulia on the capital's outskirts.

Neighbouring garment factories often engage in an ill competition, he said, and so, there was a chance that one of those less productive factories nearby had committed the act of sabotage to win the race.

And the third possibility was that some workers who had been angry with the management did the crime, the ministers said.

An investigation was also going on to find out whether any negligence of the factory authority had been behind the blaze, he said, adding he had directed the authorities concerned to take legal actions against the people responsible.

A home ministry team probed the incident, only to find that the country's deadliest fire was an act of sabotage.

Asked why the owner of Tazreen Fashions was not yet arrested, he said the Criminal Investigation Department was engaged in an investigation. After the submission of the probe report, proper legal actions will be taken -- not only against the owner but all who were guilty.

Besides, the home ministry has formed a five-member team comprised of officials from Fire Service and Civil Defence, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association and Labour Division and Industrial Police to conduct a survey on safety issues in garment factories.

The committee would find out whether garment factories ensured workers' safety in line with the existing rules, Muhiuddin said, and would ask the non-compliant factory units to follow the rules.

After that if any factory fails to do so, the committee would take legal steps against them.

The committee was given three months to complete the task, he added. Garment factories were not only of their owners, the minister said, adding they also belonged to workers, loan providers and the state.

Therefore, he said, "I urge all quarters to refrain from making unsubstantiated comments that can tarnish the image of the [Bangladesh garment] industry abroad."

Tremor jolts

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kilometres north-east of Dhaka, said Met office sources.

The US Geological Survey, however, measured the quake at 5.8 on the Richterscale.

The quake struck at a depth of 90.5 km below the Earth's surface.

Strike disrupts

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telling them that they knew nothing about resuming service.

At least 50-55 launches were scheduled to leave for the districts in the Southwest on 36 routes but only 18 left as of 7:00pm, Saiful Haque, senior deputy director of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority, told The Daily Star.

Chowdhury Ashikul Alam, general secretary of Noutjan Sramik Federation, claimed that some launch owners kept their vessels in service using unskilled workers.

A number of the federation leaders said their strike would continue until their 16-point demand was met. The federation consists of six organisations of inland water transport workers.

Their demands include ensuring workers' security on waterways, maintaining navigability of rivers, proper fitness certification of all vessels, immediate disposal of cases pending with the marine court.

However, launch owners claimed that workers' demand for revision of their wage was "illegal" and "irrational".

"The government revised their wage scales in June, 2010. According to the gazette, the new salary structure would be effective from January 1, 2009 to December 31, 2013. We cannot understand why they [workers] are continuing with the movement," said Badiuzzaman Badal, senior vice-president of Bangladesh Inland Waterways (passenger carriers') Association.

Ashikul Alam on the other hand said, "We rejected the gazette a day after its issuance. We have been demanding its [salary] restructure since then. Moreover, the price of daily essentials is soaring. Under these circumstances, we are continuing with our movement."

Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan told The Daily Star last night, "We will try to resolve the crisis through discussion with both the parties, water transport owners and workers." The owners are reluctant to increase salaries of workers right now, he said.

As of filing of this report around 9:00pm last night, around 21 hours after the strike was enforced, no meeting was convened by the government to resolve the crisis.

A joint secretary of the Ministry of Labour and

Employment had called for a tripartite meeting on Tuesday afternoon at the ministry to resolve the crisis. But the meeting was of no use as vessel owners did not join.

The workers had gone on strike three times before to press home the same demands. They called for work abstention on November 8, 2009; from March 16 to March 19, 2010; and from May 8 to May 15, 2010.

The government on June 28, 2010, revised the wage scales for water transport workers, fixing Tk 2,190 as minimum basic wage and Tk 6,720 as maximum basic wage.

Meanwhile, loading and offloading of goods at the outer anchorage of Chittagong Port and terminals on the Karnaphuli, and transport of goods and passengers from Chittagong were hampered due to the strike, our Chittagong correspondent reports.

Syed Farhad Uddin Ahmed, secretary of Chittagong Port, told The Daily Star that nothing was offloaded from 12 vessels at the port.

Md Abu Taher, president of Bangladesh Lighterage Sramik Union, told The Daily Star that workers of 400 vessels, 200 tankers and 70-80 fishing vessels joined the strike at Chittagong, bringing all activities to a standstill.

In Barisal, all passenger and cargo vessels stayed put from early yesterday. No vessel on the 26 routes from Barisal River Port left their terminals.

However, BIWTC Rocket Steamer PS Lepcha and PS Mahsud did ply the Dhaka-Morelganj route as usual but were overloaded with passengers, said Prangopal Majumdar, assistant general manager BIWTC Barisal station.

Our Chandpur correspondent reports: No launch had set sail from there yesterday. Thousands of passengers got stranded at Chandpur and Echlee launch terminals in the morning and some of them headed for Dhaka by road.

Many people, including those intending to join the Biswa Ijtima in Tongi, got stranded at terminals in Bhola, reports a correspondent in Bhola.

Meanwhile, our Madaripur correspondent reported that vessels plied normally on the Mawa-Kawrakandi-Majhikandi route.

Workers to join

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The government will start registering the interested jobseekers online from January 13. The registration needs to be done at 4,500 information and service centres at the Union Parishad offices across the country.

Around 500 UP offices are not properly equipped, so some unexpected anomalies may occur during the registration process, said the minister.

But the jobseekers under those UPs should not be worried as they can register at neighbouring information centres, he added.

Meanwhile, news has been published in some media mentioning the shabby condition of some information centres where the candidates might face troubles.

The centres will be operated through the 'A 21' project of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). The PMO's people's perspective specialist Naimuzzaman Mukta told reporters they would ensure proper logistic support to complete the registration.

Initially, a database of 35,000 interested jobseekers would be prepared. From that list 11,500 names would be selected through a lottery for this phase of recruitment in Malaysia.

The registration dates for

Dhaka and Barisal divisions remain the same, but dates for other divisions were rescheduled yesterday.

The online registration will begin with the Dhaka and Barisal divisions. Interested jobseekers will have to register between January 13 and 15. Their names will be selected through a lottery on January 16.

Fortune seekers from Rajshahi, Rangpur and Sylhet divisions will be able to register between January 16 and 18. Names of the selected from these divisions will be announced on January 19.

For the Chittagong and Khulna divisions, registration will be held between January 19 and 21. Their selection would be made on January 22.

The selection of workers from each union will be done under a quota system based on the demographic map, but there is no restriction on registration. The selected workers will be provided training with 14 government technical training centres across the country.

Expatriates' Secretary Dr Zafar Ahmed Khan and Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training Director General Begum Shamsun Nahar, among others, were present at the press briefing.

AI asks govt not to harass

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Mahmudur Rahman had been threatened with prosecution for publishing an alleged Skype conversation between the then chairman of the International Crimes Tribunal-1 and a legal expert in Brussels, said the UK-based human rights body on Tuesday.

After being warned that he could be arrested anytime, he had not left his newspaper offices since December 13, 2012, except for a brief trip to the court on January 8 to seek anticipatory bail, Amnesty International claimed on its website.

The court is yet to grant his bail.

Abbas Faiz, Amnesty International's Bangladesh researcher, said, "Everyone, including Mahmudur Rahman, has the right to freedom of opinion and to seek, receive and impart information through any media."

"He has been previously detained and tortured for publishing articles in the public's interest."

He said, "A full report on the Skype conversation had already been published by the UK magazine The Economist and also posted on the YouTube website."

Amar Desh published a series of the alleged Skype conversation transcripts between December 9 and

December 13, 2012.

There was no legal bar on the publication of the material in Bangladesh during that time, Amnesty International said in its report.

Amar Desh stopped further publication of the series after International Crimes Tribunal-2 issued an injunction against publishing the material.

Amnesty International said the government then obtained a High Court order, which required the police to take "necessary action" against Mahmudur Rahman on the basis of the allegation that he had committed sedition by publishing the material.

Teachers clash

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today to press home the demand for inclusion of their educational institutions in the Monthly Payment Order (MPO) system.

The clashes erupted around 12:45pm when several hundred teachers reached Gate-5 of Bangladesh Secretariat with a rally to lay siege to the ministries of finance and education as per their scheduled programme.

As police and Rab personnel intercepted the rally a scuffle broke out between the two parties. At one stage, police sprayed liquid teargas and the teachers in retaliation pelted the law enforcers with brick chips, witnesses said.

The law enforcers also used truncheons, teargas and rubber bullets to disperse the agitators. Chases and counter-chases took place during that time.

Meanwhile, students under the banner "BCS in Health Technology (Dental) Students' Association" also clashed with police in front of Jatiya Press Club in the afternoon.

They tried to lay siege on the health ministry to press home their five-point demand, including renaming of their course as Bachelor of Dentistry or BSC in Dentistry.

The clash left at least 20 people injured. The students' association would hold a sit-in in front of the Jatiya Press Club on Saturday protesting police action.

BSF shoots 1 in C'nawabganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

Indian Border Security Force shot and injured a Bangladeshi cattle smuggler and detained another at Kironganj in Shibganj upazila of Chapainawabganj yesterday evening.

The injured was identified as Mohammad Shahin, 25, son of Thomas Ali, and the detained was identified as Imran Hossain, 26, son of Nazrul Islam of Zaminpur of the upazila.

Lt Col Monzurul Alam, commanding officer of Border Guard Bangladesh 9 Battalion, said BSF jawans of a battalion in West Bengal opened fire on Shahin and Nazrul when the two came near the border around 7:45pm.

Shahin received a bullet in his leg but managed to escape. BSF jawans detained Nazrul in connection with illegal intrusion.

Explosion, fire at port in Nigeria's largest city

AFP, Lagos

An explosion and fire hit an area of Nigeria's main seaport yesterday in the country's largest city of Lagos, shaking buildings in the area and wounding at least four people, an official said.

Details were still emerging of the incident in the Apapa area of Lagos, but initial information indicated there had been an explosion on a ship and fire broke out afterward in an area where fuel was being unloaded at a jetty.