

Sand trading

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the foreshore, and alleged the authorities were "illegally harassing" them. One of them, Haji Bashar of the area, claimed he was doing the business on his own land. The other three would not give their names.

Bizarrely enough, Selim Hossen, executive magistrate of Dhaka Deputy Commissioner's office, who led the drive, said: "The perpetrators are yet to be identified. Local people are saying that they do not know anything about them. But we are trying to find them out."

Yesterday's was the first day of a three-day drive against river grabbing, being conducted by the Dhaka district administration and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority.

In most cases, sand trading is used as the means of permanently grabbing river lands.

"We will continue the drive in phases to protect the river," said Selim.

But environmentalists and locals are sceptical about the outcome of the drive. They argue similar drives in the past came to nothing and the grabbers, soon after their eviction, resumed the business with full vigour.

Over the last few years, sand traders, many of them with strong political backings, have gone wild to fill up rivers, canals and other water bodies in and around the capital. Occupying rivers or any other wetlands is an offence punishable under the environment law but the culprits go scot-free, thanks to their power of money and

muscle.

"The grabbers are chocking the Turag by filling up its foreshore with sand. If the river dries, it will severely affect the environment and human lives," Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon Joint Secretary Sharif Jamil told The Daily Star yesterday.

Around 300 feet of the river's foreshore and bank have been filled up by grabbers. The Turag's width at Sinnertek point may be 80 to 100 feet now, he added.

Vast areas of the four rivers surrounding the capital -- Balu, Shitalakhya, Buriganga and Turag -- are dotted with white sandy patches, a sign of continuous filling of river lands with sand.

"After every drive, the grabbers remain quiet for a week or so. We guess they return to grab the river through underhand dealings with the administration," said Ali Akbar, an employee at a shop at Sinnertek.

Magistrate Selim does not disagree. He says the grabbers return to their old business due to lax monitoring by the government bodies concerned, for which he partly blames the shortage of manpower.

He sought cooperation from the community people, environmentalists, social workers and journalists in resisting the encroachers.

Yesterday's seized sand, about 1.80 lakh cubic feet, was sold in auction at Tk 3.33 lakh. Thirty pipes used for piling and some 350 bamboos used for occupying the riverbank were also seized and sold.

"This will send a message

to the illegal traders," added Selim.

But Abu Naser, chairman of Paribesh Bachao Andolon, thinks otherwise. According to him, "The government, by setting up the river-boundary pillars well inside the river, has created abundant opportunities for the grabbers to fill up the foreshores."

Top accused

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nayeb-e-ameer of Cox's Bazar Jamaat-e-Islami.

Abul Hashem, sub-inspector of Ukha Police Station, said police arrested him from his house at Rajpalang around 7:00pm.

Soon after the arrest, Jamaat and BNP activists blocked the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf highway for about half an hour by burning tyres and holding rallies on the road.

Shops were closed as a tense situation prevailed on Kotbazar and upazila sadar areas.

Miscreants attacked Buddhist villages and temples in Ramu, Ukha and Teknaf on September 29 and 30 last year, burning down more than a dozen Buddhist and Hindu temples and homes.

A Facebook page of a Buddhist boy sparked the violence. The Daily Star in its own investigation later found the page showing a photo insulting the Quran was faked, apparently to use it as a ground for the attack.

In one case filed in this connection, Police named Shahjalal as the prime accused. He had gone into hiding following the incident.

2nd phase

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The rituals will start after Fazr prayers. Several million devotees from home and abroad will join the three-day Ijtema.

A large number of people are expected to join the Juma prayers at the Ijtema venue today.

A multi-layer security system by uniformed and plainclothes members of police, Rab and intelligence agencies will be in place to avoid any trouble.

Like the first phase (January 11-13), the local administration has taken measures for smooth holding of the event. All the service providers are working to provide necessary support to the devotees, said Md Nurul Islam, deputy commissioner of Gazipur.

This year for the third time the rituals are being performed in two phases to enable smooth management and security checks for the mammoth Islamic congregation.

Devotees from 32 districts of the country along with around 25,000 foreigners from 89 countries including Pakistan, India, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Indonesia and Palestine joined the first phase of the Ijtema.

Organised by Tabligh Jamaat, the first Ijtema was held in 1946 at Kakrail mosque near the Ramna Park in the capital.

In 1966, the venue was shifted to the present ground in Tongi due to an increased number of devotees.

Mitsubishi

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said yesterday during his meeting with Industries Minister Dilip Barua.

The production of the car, Mirage Sedan, in Bangladesh will create employment and value addition, said Ueki, while adding that the price of the vehicle would not exceed Tk 15 lakh.

He also suggested the government reshuffle the duty structure, particularly on the imports of completely knocked-down cars (CKD).

"Now, the duty rates on the CKD and CBU [completely built unit] are the same," Ueki said.

Barua said people's purchasing power is increasing because of the government's co-ordinated financial policy.

"As a result, car ownership is increasing. Bangladesh is now a lucrative market for the automobile industry."

Romo Rouf Chowdhury, managing director of Rangs Ltd, the sole distributor of Mitsubishi vehicles in Bangladesh, was also present at the meeting.

Earlier on Wednesday, Rangs launched Mitsubishi's latest fuel-efficient, compact vehicle -- Mirage -- targeting the country's growing middle-class population.

AL's Javed wins

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break.

The race was confined to two candidates -- AL's Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed and Gonoforum's Ujjal Bhowmik.

After casting his vote at Khilpara Government Primary School around 11:00am, Ujjal alleged the ruling party supporters had driven his polling agent out from Bairag Government Primary School centre.

The RO told The Daily Star, "I have heard about the allegation and necessary action will be taken if it is found to be true."

This correspondent saw a small number of voters at the centres he visited. Till 3:00pm, there were no queues at any of those centres except Bashiruzzaman Smriti Shikha Kendra and South Isakhal Government Primary School -- two centres adjacent to Javed's house.

The seat fell vacant following the death of Javed's father Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury Babu on November 4, 2012.

The constituency has 2,50,257 voters -- 1,26,293 males and 1,23,964 females.

Some 3,300 personnel from police, Rapid Action Battalion, Border Guard Bangladesh, and the Coast Guard were deployed across the polling areas. Each centre had 27 police and Ansar personnel posted. Besides, there were 52 strike forces at the ready.

Judgment any day

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case sought capital punishment for the Jamaat leader for his alleged crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War.

The defence claimed that the prosecution failed to prove the charges, which included killings, lootings and arsons in the capital's Mirpur area and city outskirts Keraniganj during the war.

Among the five cases pending with Tribunal-2, Mollah's case is the second case awaiting verdict. The case against expelled Jamaat member Abul Kalam Azad is also awaiting verdict delivery after the case proceedings against him concluded on December 26, 2012.

At Tribunal-1, the case proceedings against Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee had ended but the court decided to hear the closing arguments again as the tribunal had been reconstituted. The closing arguments are now going on.

Wrapping up the closing argument yesterday, Abdul Razzaq, chief of defence counsels, said, "The prosecution failed not only to prove the case but also to provide some material evidence to consider [by the tribunal]."

After Razzaq's submission yesterday, the three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Judge M Shahinur Islam thanked the prosecution and the defence for assisting the court.

"It will take some time [to deliver the verdict]. So we won't fix any date [for passing judgement]. We keep the case as CAV," said Justice Hassan.

CAV is Curia Advisari Vult, a Latin legal term, which according to lawyers mean the verdict could be delivered any time.

On Wednesday, the prosecution completed responding to the legal questions raised by defence counsels during their seven-day closing arguments.

Concluding his response, Prosecutor Mohammad Ali said, "The accused [Quader Mollah] had committed crimes against humanity and the prosecution had successfully been able, by adducing both eyewitnesses and hearsay witnesses, to prove the charges beyond any shadow of reasonable doubt."

"The accused deserves to be awarded capital punishment under section 20 of the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973 and the entire nation is waiting for it," said Ali.

Section 20 (2) reads, "Upon conviction of an accused person, the tribunal shall award sentence of death or such other punishment proportionate to the

gravity of the crimes as appears to the tribunal to be just and proper."

Mollah, now assistant secretary general of Jamaat, was born in Amirabad village of Sadarpur in Faridpur in 1948. He was arrested on July 13, 2010 on charges of killing 345 people during the war.

On August 2, 2010, he was shown arrested in connection with crimes against humanity committed in 1971.

After completion of investigation against Mollah, the investigation agency, designated to deal with war crimes probes, handed over its report to the prosecution on October 31, 2011.

The prosecution on December 18, 2011, submitted formal charges against Mollah before Tribunal-1, which took the charges into cognisance on December 28, 2011.

On April 16, 2012, the case against Mollah along with two other cases was transferred to Tribunal-2, which was set up on March 22, 2012.

On May 28, 2012, the tribunal framed six charges against Mollah for his alleged involvement in murders and mass killings during the war.

According to the indictment order, Mollah, the then president of Dhaka University Shahidullah Hall unit Islami Chhatra Sangha, organised the formation of Al-Badr with the members of the student body in 1971.

Islami Chhatra Sangha was then the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami.

The Pakistani army, along with its collaborating forces like Al-Badr, killed around 30 lakh Bangalees and violated some two lakh women during the nine-month-long war.

On June 20, 2012, the prosecution placed their opening statement in the case against Mollah and started to produce their witnesses on July 3.

A total 12 prosecution witnesses including two investigation officers of the case testified against Mollah while six people, including the accused himself, testified as defence witnesses from November 15, 2012.

After Tribunal-1 chairman Justice Nizamul Huq resigned in December, 2012, amid a controversy, Mollah sought retrial of his case but Tribunal-2 rejected his petition on January 7 this year, as "It didn't find any merit of it to consider."

The prosecution and the defence placed their closing arguments between December 17, 2012, and yesterday.

Mollah, 65, is one of nine Jamaat and BNP leaders facing crimes against humanity charges at the two

tribunals formed to try such cases.

He was produced before the tribunal yesterday.

The following are the crimes against humanity charges framed against Mollah:

On April 5, 1971, on Mollah's instructions, one of his aides named Akhter killed Pallab, a student of Bangla College and an organiser of the Liberation War.

On March 27, 1971, Mollah and his aides murdered pro-liberation poet Meherun Nesa, her mother and two brothers at their home at Mirpur-6 of Dhaka.

On March 29, 1971, Mollah, accompanied by Al-Badr, Razakars and non-Bangla speaking Bihari men, apprehended journalist Khondoker Abu Taleb and brought him to a place known as Mirpur Jallad Khana Pump House and slit his throat.

On November 25, 1971, an organised attack and indiscriminate shooting by Mollah and his cohorts killed hundreds of unarmed people of Khanbari and Ghatar Char villages in Keraniganj.

On April 24, 1971, Mollah led Pakistan army men and around 50 non-Bangla speaking Biharis into an attack on unarmed people of Alubdi village in Mirpur that left 344 people killed.

On the evening of March 26, 1971, under the leadership of Mollah, some Biharis and Pakistani soldiers killed one Hazrat Ali and five members of his family in Mirpur. SAYEED, MOJAHEED, KAMARUZZAMAN

Tribunal-2 yesterday completed recording the cross-examination of Chitta Ranjan Saha, the 12th prosecution witness in the case against Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed.

The court then adjourned the crimes against humanity case proceedings until January 24.

Meanwhile, the prosecution in the case against Jamaat leader Muhammad Kamaruzzaman filed a petition asking the court to consider a prosecution witness's statement before the investigation officer as evidence.

The prosecution made the plea as the witness was too sick to be produced before the court.

The tribunal yesterday fixed January 20 for passing order on the petition.

Meanwhile, during the rehearing of the closing arguments of Delawar Hossain Sayedee's case at Tribunal-1, prosecutor Syed Haidar Ali once again sought capital punishment for the Jamaat nayeb-e-ameer.

The defence would start placing their closing arguments again on January 20.

Jubo League

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their proposals.

Around 8:45am, a person came to the office and dropped his tender inside a box, said Shahinur Begum, a sweeper of the office.

Within a few minutes, five to six people stormed into the office, shouting why tender documents were in the box before 9:00am, she said. They then took the proposals out of the box.

Hearing the news, police went to the spot but by that time the miscreants fled the scene, said Moshir Rahman, inspector of Ramna Police Station.

However, no written complaint was submitted to the authority, sources in the public works office said.

"If we get any complaint, we will take action," said Lutful Aziz, executive engineer of public works office.

One person had come to him with a complaint like this, Lutful said, adding he with police then helped him submit his documents.

Six police were on duty at the office from 9:00am yesterday, Lutful said. Rahimafroz Renewal Energy Limited, Nirman Enterprise, Eastern Electric New Nation Solar JV and Sikder Trading participated in the bidding.

Tenders were invited on December 18, last year, sources said. The deadline for submitting proposals was 12:00noon yesterday.

Victim

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overwhelmed by panic and depression, said her brother who preferred not to be named.

At least 18 percent of her body suffered burns, said Samanta Lal Sen, chief coordinator of the burn units of the country and the physicians in charge of Ankhi's treatment.

Until now doctors treated her for her stab injuries, applying medicine on her burns. Yesterday, for the first time doctors had a proper look at the burn injuries during the dressing, said Samanta, and could measure the severity of the damage.

He said a six-member board had been formed to oversee her treatment. A CT-scan was done and eye specialists already did a check-up to determine the course of treatment.

The board hoped to begin the surgeries needed by the end of the week, said Samanta. Board members think she would have to undergo five to six operations that would take around two months.

"We didn't realise how bad the burns were... At this point, we don't know if she would fully recover," Ankhi's brothers said.

A case was filed, identifying the attacker and his family, but to the frustration of Ankhi and her family, the police have so far failed to arrest the accused.

Electricity

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will be able to announce an average retail price hike for all the companies. The announcement might come in the middle of next week," he added.

The price will be hiked in a way that it does not affect the consumers much, mentioned Salim.

The new tariff will be effective from this month.

Since assuming office in January 2009, the incumbent government has raised power tariff at retail level on six occasions. It was last hiked in September last year by 15 percent to Tk 5.75 a unit.

This time around, the rise could be about four to five percent, said an official of the commission.

The distributors, however, have proposed raising the tariff by 9 to 12 percent.

"We are looking at ways on how to help the companies reach their break-even points," said Salim.

The commission last month held a public hearing on the proposals of the distributing companies.

The companies have applied for another round of increase in tariff to reduce the gap between the bulk price (the price the companies pay to power producers) and retail price.

They argued that if the tariff was not increased, they (distributors) would incur a loss of Tk 1,800 crore.

Europe for tougher laws

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inspections in Bangladesh and Pakistan, following deadly fires in garment factories in Dhaka and Karachi.

Liberal democrat Phil Bennion, a member of the Parliament's South Asia Delegation, made the call at the European Parliament. He was co-sponsor of a resolution on the tragedies debated at the Parliament this week. The motion was passed by an overwhelming majority of MEPs in a vote.

In his speech, Bennion welcomed a recent tripartite statement from the government, employers and workers in Bangladesh and urged the Pakistan government to take similar action.

He negotiated on behalf of the ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe) group of MEPs on the compromise text voted through yesterday. He also discussed the proposals with Bangladesh's ambassador to the EU, Ismat Jehan, at a meeting earlier this week.

He said, "Having asked since November for a resolution on these terrible factory fires in Dhaka and Karachi, I am very happy it was included in the agenda.

"Hundreds of people could have been saved if only basic fire safety standards had been in place.

"I certainly welcome recent efforts in Bangladesh to improve basic standards in factories and for instance the tripartite fire safety statement of Commitment signed this week by the government, employers and workers. I urge the

Pakistani government to take similar actions.

"We should not allow such disasters, where doors are locked and fire exits do not exist, to ever happen again.

"Basic safety and health standards must be respected and more needs to be done in this respect.

"More also needs to be done to fight the endemic corruption of the inspection system in these countries, including the auditing pursued by Western brands.

"However, I would like to be clear. Contrary to some in this Chamber, I am firmly opposed to depicting multinationals or any other company involved in global trade, as evil entities."

Bennion said Labour, the Greens and their allies on the left had tried to use the resolution as an opportunity to criticise companies' subcontracting, restructuring plans and consultation mechanisms with trade unions here in Europe, rather than deal with the key problems on the ground.

"They were suggesting that we should enforce European standards on companies in Bangladesh. Such an approach would damage both trade and the Bangladesh economy."

"On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I pushed for the final text to include the important role that consumers can play in improving health and safety. Consumers can encourage companies to use their corporate social responsibility policies to ensure products are manufactured to core ILO Labour

Standards. Consumer power is increasingly effective.

"I call on both the European Commission to continue to support factory safety in Bangladesh, and on the European External Action Service, through its dialogue with the Bangladeshi authorities, to support European Companies willing to develop initiatives tackling the very serious issue of basic fire safety standards."

Court finds

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including the home secretary and inspector general of police (IGP).

Judge Md Shahrir Kabir of the Fourth Joint District Judge's Court passed the order after finding no basis to proceed with the case filed on October 4 last year.

The BNP leader had filed the case against the home secretary, IGP, Dhaka Metropolitan Police commissioner and four others on charges of assaulting him on July 6, 2011, the first day of the opposition's 48-hour hartal.

On September 3, 2012, Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Hasibul Haque dismissed the case, after detectives submitted a probe report saying that the incident occurred after Zainul had behaved arrogantly with policemen and his accomplices provoked the lawenforcers.

In the case statement, Farroque said the probe report, physical tortures by the policemen, medical treatments and the overall damage to his public image caused him a loss worth Tk 10 crore.

nationals. They were believed to include British, Japanese, US and Norwegian citizens.

Some 30 Algerians and 15 foreigners were reported to have escaped from the gas facility before the Algerian military intervened.

The Algerian interior minister said the kidnappers were Algerian and operating under orders from Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a senior commander of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) until late last year.

They occupied the gas plant after killing a Briton and an Algerian.

Algeria strikes

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saying that "about half" the foreign hostages had been liberated.

The Algerian military targeted two vehicles as they tried to escape from the site with an unknown number of people on board. Militants told local media that Algerian forces had opened fire from the air.

Algerian Communications Minister Mohamed Said Belaid said in recent hours that military action was continuing.

"A significant number of terrorists were neutralised during this operation," he said.

Japan appealed to Algeria to stop the operation and not to endanger the lives of the hostages.

Algerian Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal called UK counterpart David Cameron to say the operation was under way at 11:30 GMT, Cameron's spokesman said.

Later, Cameron called it a "very dangerous, a very uncertain, a very fluid situation". He postponed a major speech on Europe scheduled for Friday, and said Britain should be prepared "for the possibility of further bad news".

Militants had earlier said they were holding 41 foreign