

'ASSAULTING' DEFENCE COUNSEL Witness may face contempt charge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday asked a prosecution witness to reply why a contempt of court proceeding should not be initiated against him for allegedly assaulting a counsel of war crimes accused Ali Ahsan Mohammmed Mojaheed.

Jahir Uddin Jalal, second prosecution witness in the case against Jamaat secretary general, was asked to submit his explanation in person on June 5.

The three-member tribunal headed by Justice Obaidul Hassan issued the show-cause notice following a petition filed by Munshi Ahsan Kabir, who was allegedly assaulted by Jalal.

Moving the petition, chief defence counsel for Jamaat-e-Islami leaders Abdur Razzaq said Jalal along with several others started verbally abusing Kabir for conducting Mojaheed's case when he had reached Segun Bagicha Sunday evening.

Jalal threatened and physically assaulted Munshi when the latter had responded by saying it was his professional duty, Razzaq alleged.

The attack was carried out solely with a view to intimidating the lawyer and preventing him from performing his professional duties, Razzaq alleged, saying it was tantamount to obstructing the course of justice and sought action against Jalal.

The chief defence counsel also produced news reports clipped from the daily Sangram, Naya Diganta and Destiny on the incident to substantiate the allegation.

The tribunal, in its order, said the prima facie assault "was not only a threat to an individual counsel but also tends to prejudice the case, which is now at the stage of summing up by the defence".

"The prima facie intimidation caused to the petitioner appears to have prevented him from performing his professional duties of defending accused Ali Ahsan Mohammmed Mojaheed," the tribunal added.

The alleged conduct of Jalal would create a disparaging notion in the mind of the public about the lawful process being carried out by the tribunal, it said, adding, "In consideration of the nature of the matter, we are convinced to take it into cognisance."

Jalal, who is a freedom fighter, is also the second prosecution witness in the war crimes case against Jamaat Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami pending with the Tribunal-1.

Opposing the petition, defence counsel Fakhru Islam said all the GDS (general diary) on the five missing people had been filed within this month which suggested neglect of the prosecution in producing their witnesses.

In another war crimes case against Mobarak Hossain, the defence cross-examined prosecution witness Khodeja Begum.

Khodeja in her deposition said Mobarak shot his father Abdul Khaleque to death on November 11, 1971.

The defence had completed cross-examination of the witness before the tribunal adjourned the proceeding until June 2.

Hartal today

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district correspondents.

In the capital, at least six vehicles were set ablaze.

In Chashara of Narayanganj, activists of Jubo Dal, the pro-BNP youth wing, clashed with police in the afternoon, leaving at least five people injured.

In Chittagong, police cordoned the main opposition party's city office at Nasimon Bhaban when party men tried to bring out a torch procession in support of today's hartal.

BNP activists hurled four crude bombs when police tried to halt the procession, police said.

Police fired several tear-gas shells to disperse the BNP men, said Mohiuddin Selim, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station. Two BNP activists were detained from the spot.

With today's one, the BNP-Jamaat alliance would have enforced 30 country-wide daylong hartals in the last five months, in addition to a couple of dozens in different districts.

One study shows 15 days of these shutdown cost the economy \$3 billion, the money that could finance the construction of Padma bridge. The costs do not take into account the killing of people and the damage done to public and private property.

According to another study, each day's hartal causes a loss of around \$200 million. The estimated annual average cost of hartals is between 3 percent and 4 percent of the country's \$110 billion gross domestic product (GDP).

The two studies were done by the UNDP and the International Chamber of Commerce Bangladesh.

The issue of Tarique Rahman, BNP chief Khaleda Zia's elder son, came to the fore after a court on

Saturday gave permission to the Anti-Corruption Commission to issue arrest warrant for him through the Interpol and bring him back to put on trial for "money laundering".

BNP's local units have already enforced daylong hartals on Sunday and Monday in nine districts protesting the court order.

This month, Jamaat has enforced two daylong hartals across the country while today's is the fourth by the 18-party alliance.

Australia

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shown by the fact that it ranks among the top countries in a large number of topics in the Better Life Index," the OECD said on its website.

More than 73% of Australia's 23 million people aged 15 to 64 hold a paid job, which is above the OECD average.

Life expectancy at birth is also higher, at almost 82 years.

Australia's economy has posted more than two decades of straight growth due to demand for its natural resources.

The nation also managed to sidestep the worst of the financial crisis and was the only major developed nation to avoid the global recession in 2009.

The country's economic strength has been reflected in the Australian dollar, which is currently trading close to 30-year highs.

However, the government is starting to see challenges to growth as the mining boom tapers off, including rising unemployment.

Another challenge they face is a widening income gap. According to the OECD, the top 20% of Australia's population earn six times more than the bottom 20%.

Tk 1,600cr

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for the Padma bridge project on graft allegations, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) also disengaged from financing around \$1.1 billion in the project.

Consequently, the government has allocated the highest amount to a single project in the next fiscal year's development programme, with the aim of starting the project work before it leaves office.

The allocation to the Padma bridge makes up about 45 percent of the total allocation to the transport sector as a whole.

Officials of the planning and the finance ministries said they have kept the foreign-funds component in the bridge's financing plan in the hope of getting back funds from the ADB and Jica.

However, the Indian government's \$200 million grant to Bangladesh will not be used in the Padma bridge project, the officials said. The amount will be spent particularly on roads to facilitate transit to the biggest neighbouring country.

US F-15 crashes in Japan, pilot ejects safely

AFP, Tokyo

An American F-15 fighter crashed into the sea after its pilot ejected from his plane off Japan's southernmost Okinawa prefecture yesterday, the US Air Force said.

"A Kadena-based F-15 aircraft developed a problem that ultimately resulted in the pilot ejecting from the aircraft over the Pacific Ocean approximately 70 miles (110 kilometres) east of Okinawa," the air force said, referring to the hub of American air power in the Pacific.

Price double

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Citing an example, he said about 10,000 acres of forest department land in Gazipur had been recorded against the names of individuals.

The report says forests account for 17 percent of the country's total land. Only 9.77 percent of land is entirely covered by forests while about 4.45 percent are in the hands of land grabbers. Deputy commissioners have been lax in taking measures to recover the occupied forestland.

According to Bangladesh Environment Protection Act, 1995, no industrial unit can be set up on any forestland or close to it without a no objection certificate from the Directorate of Environment (DoE).

Of the 299 industries in Bhawal National Garden, only 24 got clearances from the DoE. And at least 161 industries there release hazardous waste, causing harm to the forest's biodiversity.

Meeting Sources said Khaleda in exchange for the candidacy withdrawal may speak in her rallies for the release of the top Jamaat leaders now facing war crimes trials. BNP may also extend support to Jamaat's own agitation programmes.

The BNP-led alliance wants to win the city corporation polls to use the victory to encourage its leaders and activists more in realising the demand for installation of a non-party election-time government.

"In Monday's meeting, the alliance formed four teams to monitor, coordinate and assist their favoured candidates in four city corporations," Hamdullah Al Mehedi, secretary general of Bangladesh Labour Party, a component of the opposition alliance, said yesterday.

Each of the teams, comprised of one representative from all the parties in the alliance, would be led by a BNP central leader, he added.

Defence concludes

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1971.

The defence counsel said 12th prosecution witness Chitta Ranjan Saha was a "hearsay witness", as he did not see Mojaheed rather heard that he had gone to Faridpur to form Peace Committee.

During his arguments regarding Peace Committee, an auxiliary force to Pakistani army, counsel Kabir said Mojaheed's father had also been a member of Peace Committee.

He said Chitta in the first part of his testimony had said he saw eight to 10 bodies including that of his brother's on their yard, but in the last part of his testimony, the witness had said that he saw all the bodies at Shree Angan, a place 60 to 70 yards from their home.

The court said the witness might have made mistake regarding the place after 42 years but it does not mean that the incident had not happened.

Members of the Peace Committee and Al-Badr and Biharis killed at least 10 people at Bakchar on May 13, 1971, the day Mojaheed and other Peace Committee leaders held a meeting there, Chitta had testified.

The court asked whether the defence during the cross-examination could discredit Chitta's statement that Mojaheed took part in the meeting with Peace Committee leaders.

Kabir did not give a direct answer to that, but said Chitta had not seen Mojaheed rather heard about the incident.

Another defence counsel Mizanur Rahman said Bakchar incident had not been mentioned in any book related to the Liberation War in Faridpur.

At that, the court asked if the defence could disprove during the cross-examination that the incident had happened. "It [incident] might not be in the books," added the court.

Regarding 13th prosecution witness Sakti Saha, Kabir said the investigation officer had testified that

Sakti lived in India and came to Bangladesh occasionally. But Sakti said he lived in Bangladesh and had been to India thrice.

He did not even have an Indian passport, said Kabir.

"Does his illegal travelling to India dispute that his father was not killed? Does it mean that the incident did not happen?" the court asked.

The investigation officer had spent only 28 hours and five minutes to investigate the case, although, he took 14 months to complete the probe, said Kabir, adding, "The IO did not investigate properly."

Wrapping up his submission, Kabir said his client was a minister from 2001 to 2006 and no allegation of corruption was raised against him. He appealed to the court to consider the matter while pronouncing verdict.

At that time, Mojaheed, who was standing in the dock, was crying, and one of his sons asked him to sit down, which he did. His wife, daughter and sons, who were in the courtroom, were also crying.

Seven Afghan police killed by their dinner guests

AFP, Kandahar

Suspected Taliban militants killed seven police in southern Afghanistan after persuading the officers to invite them into their checkpoint for dinner, officials said yesterday.

A total of 14 Afghan police and soldiers have died over the last two days as Taliban insurgents increase attacks as part of their annual "spring offensive" launched last month.

The two attackers fled the police checkpoint after shooting the seven men in the province of Kandahar, a hotbed of the militant campaign that targets Afghan security forces and officials as well as US-led foreign forces.

He stated that even a police probe report said Shamim was tortured in custody.

An investigation by The Daily Star also found that the allegation of torture was true.

Fighting Graft

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violations," nor does it preclude possible criminal charges.

It comes after the World Bank last month banned SNC-Lavalin from its projects over former executives' alleged high-level bribery in a Bangladesh bridge project and "misconduct" in a rural electrification project in Cambodia.

Other investigations have linked the company to alleged crimes in Algeria, Canada, Libya, Mexico and Tunisia.

In February, Canadian police issued a warrant for the arrest of a former hospital director and Canadian spy agency watchdog for allegedly accepting payments from SNC-Lavalin in the awarding of a Montreal hospital construction contract.

Two former SNC-Lavalin vice presidents have also been linked to an

Father appeals

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Sonargaon, who appeared in master's examination, died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital while in police custody on May 22.

His family alleged that he was picked up by Sonargaon police on May 14, confined in the residential quarters of Inspector Arup on the premises of the police station and was tortured brutally for bribe before he was produced in a Narayanganj court to make confessional statement in a four-murder case.

The victim's father also prayed to the court to order the police to accept the first information report about torture on his son.

The police officials had tortured Shamim instead of producing him before a magistrate within 24 hours of arrest, which was a violation of his fundamental right, the petitioner mentioned.

He stated that even a police probe report said Shamim was tortured in custody.

An investigation by The Daily Star also found that the allegation of torture was true.

Rare show

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Talukder Abdul Khaleque, Saadi Gaddafi, the son of ex-dictator Moamer Gaddafi, into Mexico with false documents at the height of pro-democracy protests in Libya in 2011, and of bribery in connection with projects in Libya.

SNC-Lavalin's former president was sacked in March 2012 after 23 years with the company amid accusations that he allowed mysterious payments by a former executive now in a Swiss jail facing money-laundering charges.

The former president Pierre Duhaime himself also faces fraud charges in connection with the bid to build the Montreal hospital.

In reply to voters' queries, Talukder Abdul Khaleque said if he is elected, he would free the KCC area from corruption; ensure smooth supply of safe drinking water and better sanitation and conservancy management.

Khaleque, blessed by the 14-party alliance, also promised to complete the Khulna Wasa project, construct roads, free canals from illegal occupiers and remove water logging from city streets.

Moniruzzaman Mony, supported by BNP-led 18-party alliance, said he would make all-out efforts for the development of drainage system and roads and making the city free of extortion, if voters elect him.

Shafiqul Islam Modhu, backed by Jatiyo Party (Ershad), said, if he is elected, he would turn Khulna into a modern city and would continue to ensure all civic facilities.

All the three mayoral candidates also pledged to digitalise the Khulna Development Authority, aiming to ensure better services for city dwellers.

Sheikh Ashrafuzzaman, president of the coordination committee, presided over the programme.

Deadline

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Monsur also said some top officials of Titas Gas had been involved in providing gas connections to households and industries during the ban period.

"We're looking into the matter," he said.

Mohammad Shah Alam, officer-in-charge of Ramna Police Station, said police could not find out who hurled the bombs and from where.

"Their involvement was learnt during my initial investigation. A further investigation will be conducted. If they are found guilty, administrative steps will be taken against them."

Biden in Trinidad on LatAm, Caribbean swing

AFP, Port-of-Spain

US Vice President Joe Biden arrived in Trinidad and Tobago Monday where he was to meet with other regional leaders on his 20-hour visit to the island nation.

The US Vice President and his wife Dr. Jill Biden arrived at the Piarco International Airport at 8:25pm on Monday along with an entourage of 150 people.