

India's SC allows Mumbai dance bars to reopen

AFP, New Delhi

India's top court yesterday overturned a ban on dance bars in the city of Mumbai, allowing hundreds of premises which employed women to dance and entertain customers to reopen. The ruling upheld a 2006 judgement by the Bombay High Court, which said the ban instituted by the Maharashtra state government a year earlier violated the constitutional right to earn a living. The decision comes amid concerns over "moral policing" in Mumbai, India's financial capital and the home of Bollywood, where police in recent years have enforced a series of strict measures. The regulations include early closing hours for night-clubs, excessive red tape, outdated rules on overcrowding and an increase in the minimum age limit to buy beer from 18 to 21. Supreme Court judges Altamas Kabir and S.S. Nijjar said they agreed with the high court's decision "that struck down the 2005 amendment in the Bombay Police Act whereby closing down dance bars in the city of Mumbai".

Joy, family

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Working at Information Technology in the US, the grandson of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman will participate in some social and political programmes during this time, he added.

Silence

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The party speaks against the verdict, it may draw public wrath. And if the party speaks in favour of the verdict, it will annoy the Jamaat, a key component of the BNP-led 18-party alliance.

This has put the party in a dilemma in giving any reaction, although the party has earlier spoken against the trial and demanded the release of Jamaat leaders detained on war crimes charges.

"The situation has changed a lot. Right now, it is very difficult to speak against such a verdict. Therefore, remaining silent is the best policy for us now," a BNP policymaker told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

Another policymaker said he was confused about the party's stance on the matter. The party secretary general, who acts as the party's spokesman, is away from the country. So he is unable to give the BNP's reaction.

Besides, party policymakers did not sit to review the situation and decide on its stance, he added.

"So, I am refraining from making any comment on the issue," he added, preferring anonymity.

Lt Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman, a member of the BNP's standing committee, however, preferred to talk about law and order following the verdict.

"It is the government's responsibility to maintain peace and order," he added.

The BNP had earlier extended moral support to the Jamaat's hartal, but it did not do so in the case of the shutdowns on Monday, Tuesday and today.

However, party lawmakers refrained from joining parliamentary proceedings on Monday and yesterday.

Contacted, party lawmaker Moudud Ahmed said they felt insecure to move during hartal. "So we did not join parliamentary proceedings."

Asked whether they had refrained from joining the House as part of their support to the hartal, he said: "We feel insecure during hartals."

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in parliament yesterday accused the BNP of extending support to the Jamaat's hartal by refraining from joining the House session yesterday and on Monday.

Inactive grassroots caused debacle

Hasina blames organisational failure in city polls

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the Awami League-backed mayoral candidates lost in the recent city corporation polls because of the inactivity of party grassroots and overconfidence of the candidates about their victory. "Our candidate in Gazipur City Corporation has been defeated as our grassroots leaders and workers did not work for him. In Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet city corporations our candidates were overconfident about winning the polls," Hasina said at a meeting of the AL Parliamentary Party (ALPP) at the Gono Bhaban. Hasina, also president of the AL, asked party lawmakers not to be too confident about victory in the next parliamentary election,

according to meeting sources.

The PM, however, added that the opposition had no reason to be upbeat about winning the general election.

Party lawmakers urged Hasina to resolve internal feuds at grassroots level to avert debacle in the national election.

Hasina said she would look into the matter and directed party lawmakers to maintain good relations with the grassroots leaders to get party nomination for the election, due between October and January.

"I have reports from the grassroots about your popularity and activities. Nominations would be given based on your performance and recommendations from the grassroots," she was quoted by a meeting source as saying.

Hasina asked the lawmakers to work for the party-nominated candidates in the election. Otherwise, they would face consequences.

Lawmakers who spoke at the meeting include Syed Ashraf Islam, Musharraf Hossain, Ekabbar Hossain, Gazi Golam Dastogir, Shamsul Haque Chowdhury, Syed Mohsin Ali and Fazilatunnesa Indira.

The prime minister said the next general election in the country would be held as in other democracies in the world. Her party would accept whoever people vote to power.

Without mentioning any name, the premier alleged that some vested quarters were out to malign politicians and political parties and called upon people to remain alert about this.



Supporters of Pakistan's Islamic political party Jamaat-e-Islami pray as they demonstrate yesterday in Karachi against the verdict of a Bangladeshi court against Ghulam Azam, former chief of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami. PHOTO: GULF TIMES

Greece faces fresh general strike

AFP, Athens

A general strike gripped Greece yesterday for the fourth time this year as unions railed at fresh austerity measures the government is imposing in order to keep receiving EU-IMF loans.

The strike halted trains and shut down public services across the country, kept hospital services to a minimum and disrupted a dozen domestic flights.

Crucially for the country's tourism season, however, ferry services to the Greek islands were unaffected.

Thousands of protesters gathered ahead of rallies to be held later in the day, with 16,000 demonstrators coming out in Athens and 7,000 in Thessaloniki, according to police.

Unions called the latest one-day national mobilisation in protest at a new bill that implements fresh reforms, including the re-deployment of thousands of civil servants.

"Workers are continuing

the struggle to put a final end to these exterminating policies that lead the economy to ever-deepening recession," the main Greek union GSEE said.

Municipal employees, who are going to be affected by the new measures, have been on strike since Monday.

The new bill, which parliament will start debating on Tuesday and is due to be voted on Wednesday, is needed in order for Greece to start receiving 6.8 billion euros (\$8.9 billion) of fresh aid that eurozone finance ministers agreed to release at a meeting last week.

Under the terms of its international bailouts, Greece has had to reform its bloated civil service, which has been hit by sweeping pay and pension cuts over the past three years.

If the bill passes as expected on Wednesday night, 4,200 civil servants -- teachers, school wardens and municipal police who are to be integrated into the national force -- will be

placed under so-called redeployment.

They will receive 75 percent of their salary for an eight-month period, at the end of which, if they have not accepted a transfer to some other administrative department, they risk losing their jobs.

GSEE called the bill a "tombstone" for Greek workers.

Under the terms of its latest EU-IMF bailout deal agreed in 2012, Greece is expected to axe 4,000 state jobs and redeploy 25,000 civil servants overall by the end of the year.

Part of the layoffs quota came last month when the government shut down state broadcaster ERT, sacking over 2,600 staff.

The shock move nearly brought down the coalition government of conservative Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, who saw one of his allies defect and is now governing with a reduced five-seat majority in parliament.

Judges at life risk

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Hasina said, adding that court should decide on the punishment. She then went on to describe the role of military ruler Ziaur Rahman in politically rehabilitating listed war criminals like Shah Aziz and Abdul Alim.

She added Khaleda Zia made Matiur Rahman Nizami and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed ministers in her 2001-2006 government. "It would not have taken 42 years to hold the trial had people strongly protested Zia's move to bring back the war criminals," Hasina said.

She also blasted BNP chief Khaleda Zia and her party MPs for not attending the House session for the last two days.

The prime minister said the opposition MPs were

absent from parliament to extend their support for the hartal called by the Jamaat. This demonstrates the opposition leader's support for the war criminals.

Hasina also blasted Hefajate Islam chief for his derogatory comment about women. She called upon Khaleda to work for women's rights, cutting her ties with Hefajate leader Shah Ahmed Shafi.

Earlier, Rashed Khan Menon, chief of Workers Party, a component of AL-led alliance, expressed his frustration over the verdict in Ghulam Azam's case. He said the AL was happy, but the verdict raised questions in public mind.

The budget session was prorogued yesterday after 24 sittings.

Yunus Centre

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in a statement. "There are important implications of the prime minister's comments for the country and personally for Prof Yunus, which would create wrong impressions about him in the minds of people. We are protesting these comments for this reason."

The protest came nearly a week after the prime minister raised some allegations about Prof Yunus during a meeting with party leaders, lawmakers and ministers at Gono Bhaban on July 11.

The prime minister alleged that the Norwegian state-run telecommunication company Telenor had lobbied for Prof Yunus and given a huge sum to the Clinton Foundation so that he got the Nobel Prize.

"These comments are damaging for the country. There should be enough evidence to prove these comments. Otherwise it will create serious negative impact on our relations with two friendly countries," it said.

Refuting Hasina's claim of a diversion of Grameen Bank funds, the statement said Prof Yunus did not divert funds from Grameen Bank to any other organisations that he had set up.

"He does not have any personal institutions, so there should be no question of diverting the money to personal institutions."

Grameen Shakti and 47 other associated organisations established by Prof Yunus are all legally independent companies, according to Yunus Centre.

The statement also termed completely false Hasina's comment that Prof Yunus had set up Yunus Centre with Grameen Bank's money, and that his brothers and relatives made money from the bank's associated institutions.

"Grameen Bank has never given any money to Yunus Centre. Yunus Centre runs entirely on Professor Yunus' own earnings."

"None of Professor Yunus' brothers are involved in any way with the Grameen-named institutions. No other relative of Professor Yunus is connected in any way with institutions carrying the Grameen name."

(Full statement on page 7)

Govt

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The government is already paying each judge of the international crimes tribunals (ICT 1, 2) an additional 70 percent of their monthly salaries as risk allowance.

Earlier in June 2011, the HC had ordered the government to implement the recommendations of a parliamentary sub-committee for hiking salaries and allowances of judges of the appellate and HC divisions of the SC.

The sub-committee had recommended Tk1.52 lakh for the chief justice, Tk1.20 lakh for an Appellate Division judge, and Tk1.08 lakh for an HC judge as salaries and other privileges per month.

Later that year, the SC had stayed the HC verdict following a government petition. It also asked the government to file an appeal with it against the HC verdict upon getting its full text.

Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent could not reach Finance Secretary Fazle Kabir over the phone for his comments on the issue.

BASIC Bank

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The MoU said BASIC Bank has to maintain its required capital and finance by December its capital deficit which stood at Tk 128 crore in March.

Besides, the bank's classified loans have to be brought down to 5 percent, which stood at 9.36 percent on March 30.

Bangladesh Bank asked BASIC Bank to sign the MoU last month but the bank's high-ups tried to delay its signing.

The BB last week gave an ultimatum that if BASIC Bank authorities didn't sign the deal by July 17, it would take punitive action against the officials responsible for the delay.

Witness gives hearsay

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September 2 in 1971.

Qayum, also Salauddin's cousin, yesterday spent more than two and a half hours corroborating the testimony of second defence witness Nizam Ahmed, who is a friend of both the witness and the accused.

He gave voluble testimony with unnecessary stories and the tribunal at one stage expressed discontent over the defence for wasting time.

Qayum said he, Nizam and Salauddin used to go to Notre Dame College and Dhaka University and had taken part in the mass movement in 1969.

He added on the evening of March 25, 1971 Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's press secretary Aminul Haque Badsha went to Hotel Intercontinental to give a press release.

The witness said he had also gone to the hotel with Badsha.

Around 10:30pm that day Pakistani occupational army ordered them not to leave the hotel, he added. As a result, Qayum along with his friend Nizam got stuck there until March 27, he said.

The witness said he and Nizam had taken refuge in the house of a Swedish family in Dhanmondi the following day. Sheikh

Kamal, son of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, had also taken shelter in that house, he added.

Qayum said he had stayed with the Swedish family until March 31, 1971.

The defence witness claimed during his stay with the Swedes he had picked up Salauddin from his Dhanmondi house and driven him to Tejgaon International Airport for Karachi.

He claimed that he, Salman F Rahman and Nizam had gone to Karachi on April 8, 1971.

Qayum added he had gone out to look for a house for his family two days later. "When I returned, I heard Salauddin had come to Salman's house. I could not meet him."

He said he had learned that Salauddin had also met one of his [Qayum's] brothers-in-law in Pakistan.

Following the deposition, prosecutor Sultan Mahmud Simon cross-examined the witness.

In reply to a question, Qayum said he had no knowledge if Salauddin's father Fazlul Quader Chowdhury had supported the six-point demands.

The proceeding of the case was adjourned until today when the prosecution would continue cross-examining the defence witness.

Ghulam Azam

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told The Daily Star yesterday that as per jail code, Ghulam Azam has to wear the uniform since he has been convicted.

"He will have to return his clothes brought from home," Farman said, adding, "He started serving his jail sentence from yesterday [Monday]."

Ghulam Azam, 91, had been enjoying his stay in the prison cell of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University on health grounds since the tribunal ordered him to be detained on January 11 last year.

He has the privilege of having homemade food sent to him and his family members can visit him once every 15 days.

In the last 18 months, he went to court from the prison cell and was returned to the hospital after court proceedings were over.

Prison official Farman explained that it did not matter whether a prisoner was an accused or a convict. He said a stay in the hospital prison cell depended on the health condition of the prisoner.

He said hospital authorities always allowed Ghulam Azam to appear before the court but they never released him from the hospital, which could have enabled them to take him to Dhaka Central Jail.

Even on the judgment delivery day, the BSMMU's doctor concerned issued a certificate that said, "This

patient is fit for going to the court in wheel chair and by ambulance."

Ghulam Azam is being treated by Prof ABM Abdullah, dean of BSMMU's medicine department. He said due to old age, Ghulam Azam was physically weak and he had some old-age related complications.

Prof Abdullah said the hospital authorities would form a medical board for a further review of Ghulam Azam's health condition and they would then decide whether the convict should be in hospital or in jail.

He said they would definitely not send Ghulam Azam to jail before Ramadan ends as the convict feels weaker when he is fasting.

International Crimes Tribunal-1 on Monday sentenced the former Jamaat-e-Islami ameer to 90 years in prison for his superior responsibility in committing crimes against humanity and genocide during the Liberation War.

The lenient sentencing of Ghulam Azam in the much-awaited verdict has frustrated many justice seekers in the country. People, including eminent citizens, in newspapers, on television channels and on social media sites expressed disappointment over the verdict.

The judges of the tribunal had said Ghulam Azam deserved the death penalty but they gave him prison terms considering his age and health.

Kerry heads for ME with peace move

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State John Kerry headed to Jordan Monday on his sixth trip to the region as he tries to push Israelis and Palestinians back to peace talks.

In Amman, Kerry will meet a delegation from the Arab League and Jordanian leaders, a top US official said.

Since he took office on February 1, the US top diplomat has made a search for a long-elusive Middle East peace deal one of the top priorities of his tenure.

But US officials were quick to downplay hopes that his return to the region signalled that an announcement was pending on a resumption of the talks, which have stalled since September 2010.

They even could not immediately confirm whether he would meet with top Palestinian or Israeli leaders.

A Palestinian official told AFP that Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas will

meet Kerry in Jordan.

"It is expected that (Palestinian) president Abbas and Kerry will meet in Amman," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity. "We are waiting to see what new ideas Kerry will bring with him after his last tour of the region," he added.

But State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the full details of the trip were not yet finalized.

"Secretary of State John Kerry will travel to Amman, Jordan, departing this afternoon," Psaki told reporters.

He would meet on Wednesday with Jordanian leaders, including King Abdullah and Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh, as well as Arab League officials to "provide an update on Middle East peace," she said.

They would also discuss the political upheaval in Egypt and the conflict in Syria, and it was expected that Egypt, a key member of the Arab League, would send someone to the talks in Amman.

280 examinees

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Talking to The Daily Star, a number of candidates said they were shocked to see their names dropped from the list.

Around 30 of such candidates yesterday submitted an application to the PSC chairman, senior secretary of the public administration ministry and the Chittagong hill tracts ministry, urging them to consider the issue.

On July 8, the PSC published the results of the preliminary test based on the quota system, with 12,033 candidates qualifying for the written test.

But the results triggered widespread protests among the unsuccessful candidates who said the application of the quota system in the preliminary phase had deprived them.

Joined by students, the candidates in Dhaka and elsewhere took to the streets last week. The PSC announcement to review the results in no time failed to pacify the protesters. The demonstrations turned violent the next day.

On July 14, the commission published the reviewed results, with a list of a record 46,250 successful candidates, almost four times higher than the previous number.

PSC Chairman AT Ahmmedul Huq Choudhury and Exam Controller (Cadre) AYM Nesar Uddin told the media that the new list included the first successful examinees.

An examinee from Dhaka University said, wishing anonymity, "We don't know what has actually happened. The new list does not have my name although the first one did."

She said it was hard to believe that the revised list did not have her name even though she had answered 64 questions correctly.

The PSC chairman had told different dailies that the revised results only took in 34,217 more examinees, said another candidate, from Bandarban. "If it is so then where are the 280 of us?"

He went on, "When and where the commission wants to apply the quota system is up to it. We just want to know why the revised results ran counter to what the PSC had said."

PSC exam controller Nesar Uddin, who had confirmed the inclusion of the earlier examinees to this correspondent, did not pick up the phone despite repeated calls.

The revision of the results may have found them not getting the required marks, the PSC chairman told The Daily Star by phone, refusing to elaborate on this.

Asked about the announcement of including the earlier candidates, he, however, said, "It is completely false. I don't know who said such a thing."

Shark kills girl near Indian Ocean beach

AP, Paris

Authorities on the island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean say a teenage girl was killed by a shark as she snorkelled just a few meters (yards) from the shore.

While the French island has seen occasional attacks on surfers farther out from shore, attacks on swimmers close to shore are exceedingly rare.

The regional administration for Reunion said Tuesday that the attack occurred Monday in a cove with no lifeguard at Saint-Paul, on the northwest side of the island. Reunion is east of Madagascar off the East African coast.

In a statement, the administration said the girl lived on the French mainland but was vacationing on Reunion. She was swimming with another girl who was not harmed.

Authorities warned swimmers to exercise the greatest caution in the area.