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Buck stops at SC

Disposal of appeals against war crime verdicts taking longer than expected

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK and ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Uncertainty looms large over the appeals piling up one after another with the Supreme Court in the war crimes cases.

An amendment in February to the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act-1973, making a provision for disposing of appeals against the sentences in 60 days, raised the hope that the SC would quickly deliver the judgments.

But the hope died down when the law minister and legal experts made it clear that disposing of the appeals in 60 days was merely a directive; it was not mandatory.

The two war crimes tribunals have delivered verdicts in six war crimes cases since January this year. So far judgments in three cases have been challenged at the SC but none has yet been disposed of.

Of the six, one was against Abul Kalam Azad, also known as Bachchu Razakar. As the former Jamaat man has remained fugitive and was tried and convicted in absentia, he did not have any right to appeal.

Azad was awarded the death sentence on January 21 for crimes against humanity and other wartime crimes during the Liberation War in 1971. He is still absconding.

Following this case, five more judgments have been delivered in five war crimes cases and those trials were held in the presence of the accused and all of them were found guilty.

Of the convicted five, three have already filed appeals with the Appellate Division.

Counsels of the other two said they would file appeals. They have time because the verdicts were pronounced a few days ago.

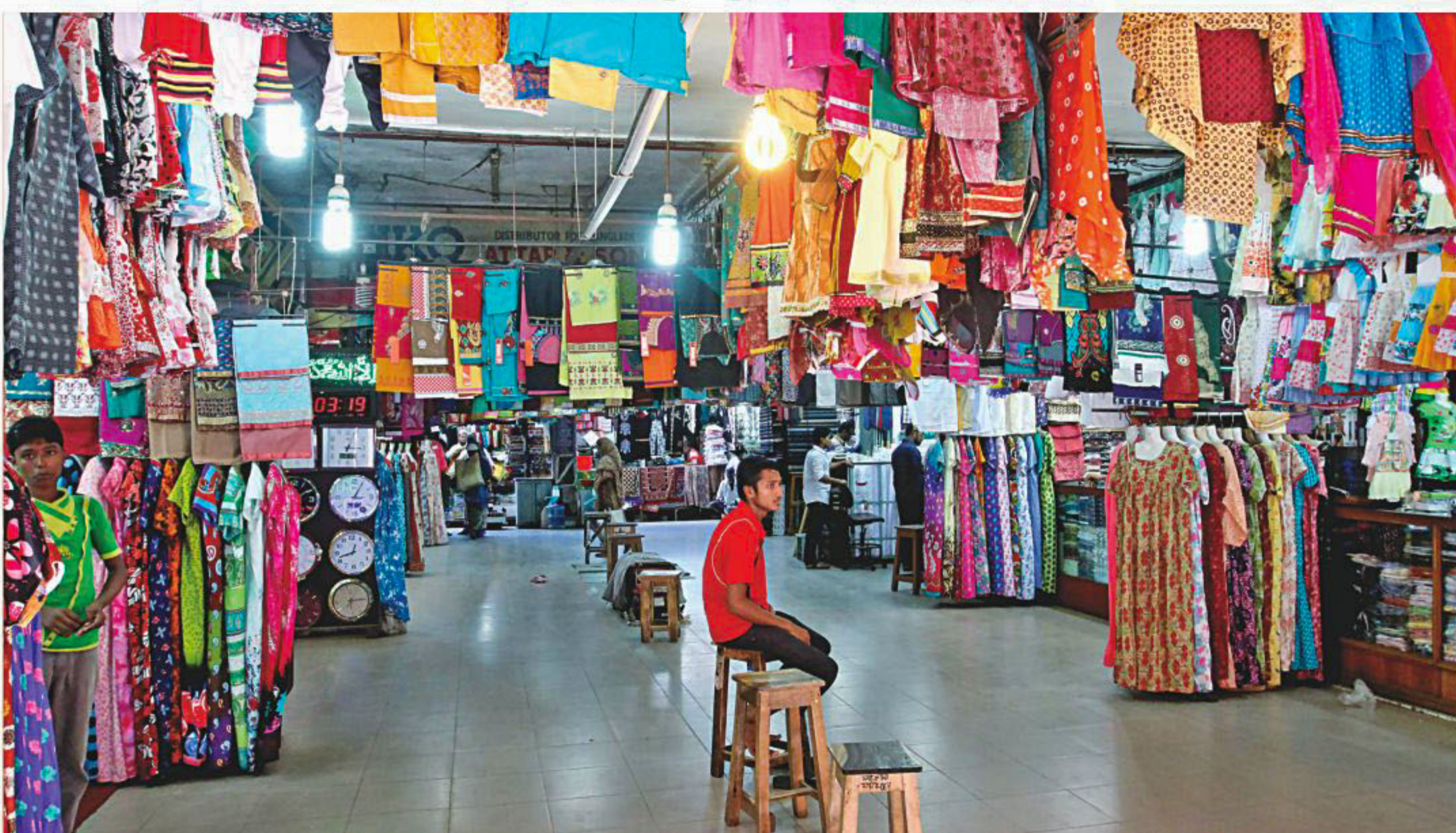
One case was against former Jamaat-e-Islami ameer Ghulam Azam and the other against incumbent Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed.

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 on Sunday gave Ghulam a total of 90 years in jail on five different charges, considering his old age and health, instead of the death sentence which the judges said he deserved for his heinous crimes.

Ghulam has till August 14 to file an appeal.

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HIT HARD BY HARTAL



Masjid Market in the capital's Baitul Mukarram sees a handful of buyers yesterday because of the dawn-to-dusk hartal enforced by the Jamaat-e-Islami. Other shops and malls in Dhaka had similar experiences.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Modified brinjal sees opposition

REAZ AHMAD

Campaigners against genetic modification (GM) of foods yesterday vehemently opposed any move to release -- Bt Brinjal -- the country's first GM crop.

They feared that introduction of GM crop would cause loss of agricultural biodiversity, and Bt Brinjal would phase out the home-grown traditional brinjal varieties.

Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute

(Bari) applied to the National Technical Committee for Crop Biotechnology on Monday seeking release of Bt Brinjal next month.

Four days into the move, Ubiniq, a national green group, and two of its associate organisations -- Nayakrishi Andolon and Ubiniq Shashthya Andolon -- formed two human chains in front of Bari and the deputy commissioner's office in Gazipur yesterday.

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Think of economy

Businesses urge parties to refrain from hartal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The business community yesterday urged the political parties and other organisations to refrain from calling hartals during the month of Ramadan in the interests of businesses ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Businesses, especially the small and retail sellers, are crumbling under the weight of back-to-back strikes, as the pre-Eid season brings in most their sales, said FBCCI President Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed.

He was addressing a press conference

on "Hartal and Economy" at the office of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) in the capital.

The sales of businesses reliant on Eid seasons have already plunged due to political unrest, hartals and the attendant vandalism. "The retail businesses in the clothing industry suffer the most," he observed.

Although the shopkeepers have opened their outlets during the strikes, the turnout of customers was very low. This shows that

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Fed up, people defy shutdown

STAR REPORT

Enraged by the previous three consecutive strikes during this Ramadan, people yesterday defied Jamaat-e-Islami-sponsored countrywide hartal and came out on streets to do their routine work.

Almost all businesses and offices were open and a large number of motorised vehicles plied across Dhaka streets during the hartal hours.

However, a few stray incidents of vandalism, arson and explosion of crude bombs were reported from different parts

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People are catching fish from a wetland at Mirpur Beri Badh in the capital using monofilament synthetic nylon net, widely known as current jal. Even very young fishes cannot slip through this type of small-mesh nets that are banned across the country. Inset, a fisherman with his catch. The photos has been taken recently.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ



AL, BNP fail to save minorities

Observes London seminar

STAR REPORT

Members of British and European parliaments at a seminar in London expressed grievances saying that ruling Awami League and main opposition BNP had failed to protect the minority communities of the country.

UK House of Lords organised the seminar "Bangladesh Democracy and Human Rights" on Wednesday where two high-profile delegations from the AL and BNP took part, reports our London correspondent Ansar Ahmed Ullah.

In response to allegations raised by the members of House of Lords, House of Commons and European Parliament, both the AL and BNP delegations disowned their failure to protect the religious minorities.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's adviser HT Imam and BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir led their sides.

Lord Avebury, vice chair of the Parliamentary Human Rights Group and chairman of International Bangladesh Foundation, chaired the seminar while Anne Main MP, chairman of All Party Parliamentary Group on Bangladesh

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This is why we tried to kill you

Taliban letter accuses Malala of smear campaign



THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

A senior member of the Pakistani Taliban has written an open letter to Malala Yousafzai -- the teenager shot in the head as she rode home on a school bus -- expressing regret that he didn't warn her before the attack, but claiming that she was targeted for maligning the insurgents.

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Mass promotion in administration

Upgradation due, post not available

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday elevated 345 deputy secretaries to the rank of joint secretary in a large scale promotion in the civil administration.

The promotion was due but was made against no vacant posts. As many as 625 joint secretaries are already serving against the approved 250 posts. So, the newly promoted officials are not likely to get new posting.

Of the promoted officials, 60 were from the 1984 batch, 121 from the 1985 batch and 115 from the 1986 batch of Bangladesh Civil Service. Some left out officials of previous batches have also got their posts elevated.

The public administration ministry issued an order of promotion for 326 officials. The rest officials are on lien or on leave and their order would be issued once they report to their respective offices.

The Superior Selection Board headed by Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Mosharrar Hossain Bhuiyan had earlier evaluated performance of around 600 aspirants from different BCS batches.

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