

PARK RENTED OUT FOR URS HC order defied

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Public Works Department (PWD) in a violation of a High Court order and relevant laws has rented out the lone public park in the city's Farmgate to hold an extravagant religious congregation (Urs).

The PWD upon recommendation of the local executive engineer and the superintendent engineer has rented out Anwara Park for February 13-14 depriving local residents of a breathing space in a densely built up area in exchange of Tk 20,000 as rent.

The organisers of the Urs, however, virtually took over the entire park 10 days ago by fixing hundreds of bamboos to erect enormous marques, four grand archways and a regal stage to deliver sermon to the devotees who are expected to turn up in thousands from the capital and elsewhere.

The entire area along with marques and archways has been extravagantly illuminated for several days. Until yesterday, a total of 101 cows, 20 goats, 13 buffalos and 11 camels were seen lined up on Indira Road to be slaughtered for feast.

Shahsufi Hazrat Jakir Shah, Pir [a spiritual guru] of Kutub Bagh Darbar Sharif, is holding the Urs that begins today.

"This is the only open space in this neighbourhood and occupying it for two weeks will just deprive us of our breathing space," said Rahela Begum, an elderly

resident of nearby Indira Road.

Md Kabir Ahmed Bhuiyan, PWD chief engineer, said: "We have rented out only the west end of the park, not the whole of it."

The laws on conservation of playground, park, open space and wetland categorically prohibit alteration, renting and leasing out of those spaces for uses other than what they are designated for.

Moreover, an HC bench in May 2003 issued a rule upon the government to ensure proper maintenance and protection of playgrounds and open spaces in line with the laws.

Asked about the laws, Bhuiyan said, "The local officials did not present the legal issue to me."

He said he had already instructed the local executive engineer and the superintendent engineer to inform the police of the illegal occupancy of the park with two-day permission.

Asked why they had recommended for the permission, Superintending Engineer Abdul Momin Chowdhury said, "The Parliament Secretariat and Dhaka Metropolitan Police gave clearance to the Urs and we also considered the religious sentiment."

Rafiqul Islam, the then superintendent engineer in January 2012, said they would not rent out open public space anymore.

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The organisers of a religious congregation virtually took over the entire park at Farmgate 10 days ago to erect enormous marques, four arches and a regal stage for delivering sermons. The Public Works Department violating a High Court order rented out Anwara Park for holding the extravagant religious congregation.

PHOTO: STAR

A long way to go, still

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though to make public the status and final outcomes of union registration applications of individual garment units, as stipulated in the action plan.

Moreover, there have been reports in recent weeks of termination of union leaders' employment contracts in some 16 garment factories.

The US administration had called for appointment of 200 factory inspectors by December last year. So far, 42 have been recruited, according to Mujibul Haque Chunnu, state minister for labour and employment.

The government, however, has started inspecting the 3,500-odd garment factories for structural building and fire safety, as per the action plan.

The Obama administration demanded punitive actions for violations of building and fire

safety rules, but the government is yet to act in this regard.

The GSP roadmap also suggested creating a publicly accessible database of all garment factories, in which information relating to labour and fire and building inspections could be found.

Establishment of an effective complaint mechanism through which workers can report on violations of fire and building safety and labour rights confidentially was recommended, together with setting up of more fire stations in garment factory dense areas and an independent and neutral factory inspection system.

None of these mechanisms are yet to be put in place, though. However, the government has allowed re-registration of the NGOs -- Bangladesh Centre for Women Solidarity and Social Activities for the Environment --

and withdrawn cases against labour leaders Babul Akter and Kolpana Akter. But it has not been able to find the murderers of labour leader Aminul Islam, who was found dead in April 2012, although a notice was placed in the print media seeking information from the public about the culprits.

It has also started training the industrial police on labour laws and workers' rights, as asked by the Obama administration.

The US government also called for a separate law for workers inside the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) that permits them to hold demonstrations to realise their demands. So far, the government has only managed to form a committee in this regard.

Another requirement of the US government was safeguarding the interest of the workers in the shrimp sector. Any visible action

in this connection is yet to be seen.

Alonzo Glenn Suson, country director of Solidarity Centre of American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organisation (AFL-CIO) in Bangladesh, said too little progress has been made regarding the action plan, seven months on.

"Yes, the government has made some good progresses. The next step is the implementation. The progresses are just plans, not the implementation. As of today, it is not enough."

Meanwhile, Eric Biel, acting associate deputy undersecretary for international affairs at the US Department of Labour, on Wednesday said the US government had already conveyed its dissatisfaction over the progress regarding the action plan.

"Bangladesh had not made sufficient progress to date under the action plan to warrant rein-

statement of GSP benefits," he added.

But Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed remains defiant that the government is adequately proceeding with the roadmap. "Bangladesh has made substantial progresses in fulfilling 13 of the 16 conditions tagged by the US authorities," he said on Monday.

Yesterday, the minister said the government was working to fulfil all the 16 conditions for revival of the GSP facilities within March 30.

The government will then send a report to the GSP authority by April 15, said Tofail, who held an inter-ministerial meeting on the action plan, the ministry said in a statement.

"If the decision isn't taken on political grounds, we'll get back the GSP," he told journalists after the meeting, reports UNB.

EXPATRIATES IN MALAYSIA Deal signed for 5 lakh MRPs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday signed a deal with a Bangladeshi consortium to provide machine readable passports (MRPs) to around five lakh expatriates in Malaysia within a year.

Under the contract, the consortium of dataedge and ipeople will set up eight regional enrolment centres in Malaysia within the next three months to collect data from the expatriates. The information along with their photos and finger prints will be sent to the passport office in Dhaka's Agargaon. The passport office will then print the MRPs and send them to the regional service centres run by the consortium in Malaysia for distribution.

Director General of the Department of Immigration and Passport (DIP) Abdul Mabud and Syed Ahsan Habib, on behalf of the dataedge-ipeople consortium, signed the deal at Rupashi Bangla Hotel in the capital.

The helpline of the enrolment centres will remain open for 24 hours, enabling the expatriates to fix their appointments

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Potato woes for farmers

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Dinajpur

Potato growers in Joypurhat yesterday blocked a highway for two hours, putting potatoes on the street to demand fair price for their produce.

Farmers of Dinajpur and Joypurhat had been agitating at the end of January last month since the potato price had dropped due to political unrest and absence of traders.

Potato is being sold for Tk 1 to 1.5 a kg now, while it was Tk 1.5 to 2 a week ago.

Several hundred farmers took to the streets around

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Farmers dump potatoes on the highway at Satmatha in Rangpur yesterday demanding fair price for their produce.

Here comes Falgun

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measure, it is heritage, the roots of our culture, that we recall. Pahela Falgun is therefore that essential link which binds us together, from generation to generation, from one phase of history to another. It is our continuum, the bonding which keeps Bangalees going, everywhere.

This morning, good cheer will drown the mundane around us. Women will wrap around themselves the raiment of spring. And men will bring alive, through their attire, the melody that underlines Falgun. The desolation of winter will have been left behind. In our gardens, in the wilderness that is our pristine woods, all across this land, it will be the varied hues of spring that will take over. Little girls, innocence throbbing in their souls, will ask to be dressed in sarees.

In the cumulative memories of their grandmothers, lost youth will ring a bell, to inform them that youth is never lost, that it comes alive every time Pahela Falgun returns to our courtyards. Little

boys will, as always, leap in joy. Only this time, they will leap in the air in the knowledge that they share the beauty of a day with their parents, with their ageing grandparents.

The skies are beautiful in Falgun; and the warming sun rises from the depths of cosmic distance to inform us that new leaves will sprout on the branches of the trees, that new buds will blossom into the flowers we have known since we were babies in our mothers' laps.

On this new dawn of a new Falgun, it will be time to remember old and yet undying, relevant poetry. Rabindranath and Nazrul and Jibanananda and indeed an entire pantheon of poets will come visiting, to sing ancient paeans to life and living.

Spring bears tidings of the good and the charming and the seductive. This morning, on Pahela Falgun, we are, once again, willing to be seduced by the temptations spring brings in its wake. We are ready to be in love, again.

AL for partisan

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all the elections to local bodies should be held in a partisan manner. The meeting backed her proposal.

She said the Dhaka city AL unit will be split into two and the committees will be named soon after completion of conferences at thana, ward and union levels.

The PM also hinted at holding the long overdue elections to Dhaka city corporations.

She informed her party colleagues that Bangladesh is going to make a Guinness World Record by singing the national anthem with participation of the highest number of people. The event will be organised at the National Parade Ground on the Independence Day (March 26).

Some three lakh people will sing simultaneously at the programme to be hosted jointly by the Bangladesh Army and the cultural affairs ministry. India currently holds the record in this category.

The AL chief also talked about a media report stating that the USA would not provide any more training to the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members. "We need not to be trained by those who gun down one terrorist while capturing two," an AL leader quoted Hasina as saying.

Seven organising secretaries of the AL presented reports on recent party activities to the meeting. AL organising secretary for Khulna division BM Mojammel Huq alleged that the party could not pick single candidate for the upazila chairman post in many places due to interference by party lawmakers.

Hasina asked the organising secretaries to make their best efforts to ensure win for party

3 jailed for life

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Muradpur in Chittagong on his way to the KEPZ on April 11, 2004.

AKM Emtajul Islam, former site engineer of the KEPZ, filed an attempt to murder case with Panchlaish Police Station the same day.

Thirteen days later, Rabbani succumbed to his injuries at Bumrunggrad Hospital in Bangkok and the case then turned into a murder case.

According to the case records, Rabbani was killed following a conflict between him and a few of his colleagues at the KEPZ over his

appointment as its MD, and termination of two employees of the KEPZ before and after his appointment.

After his appointment, Rabbani started an investigation into the allegations of corruption and irregularities brought against the two terminated employees.

A Chittagong court in April, 2005 handed down five years' imprisonment to Abu Naser and Humayun Kabir, life-term imprisonment to Selim, Mohammad Hashim and Abdul Malik Sohel, and acquitted Md Saiful Islam alias Bilal Saiful in the case.

The same year, the convicts appealed to the HC against the verdict while the government filed two revision petitions seeking death penalty for the accused.

Hashim had already been acquitted earlier by the HC while Sohel was acquitted yesterday.

Delivering the short verdict yesterday, the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Akram Hossain Chowdhury asked the lower court to conduct a retrial of Saiful in light of the High Court observations that would be made in the full text of the judgement and sent to the court soon.

The bench also directed Saiful to surrender to the lower court during the retrial.

After the verdict, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told The Daily Star that he had expected death penalty for the convicts.

Whether the government would file an appeal with the Supreme Court seeking death sentences for the accused would be decided after receiving the full text of the verdict, he added.

Md Mansurul Hoque Chowdhury, one of the defence lawyers, said his clients would take the decision on filing an appeal

ECT can erase

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them to do so.

Dutch researchers have discovered electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) can be used to erase memories.

They say this discovery could eventually lead to new treatments for conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, the BBC reports.

Researchers at Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands used ECT to target specific memories in a bid to disrupt them.

They studied patients who were already receiving ECT for depression. These people were shown two picture cards each of which told an unpleasant story.

They were then shown one of the cards again a week later and just before being given ECT -- this reactivated their memory of that story.

The day after the therapy, the researchers discovered that the patients had forgotten the story they had just seen while they remembered the other one perfectly.

One patient, Jannetje Brussaard-Nieuwenhuizen, told the BBC: "I don't remember, just that they showed me something but I don't remember that it was that card."

The researchers think the discovery could lead to a new treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder or that it could be used to erase depressive recollections.

However, they accept that their study was carried out on artificial memories and that real ones might be harder to erase.

EC finally gets those on web

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Awami League might be displeased by the move.

The EC had made public the affidavits of lawmaker aspirants before the January 5 parliamentary polls. Many newspapers ran reports on the affidavits that some AL lawmaker hopefuls amassed huge wealth in last five years.

Embarrassed by the revelations on the AL candidates, a party delegation had met the chief election commissioner just a few

days before the January 5 polls and requested him to stop disclosing the wealth statements of the MP aspirants.

Following the meeting, technical fault was reported with the EC's website and surfers could not access the wealth reports for several days.

However, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad yesterday told newsmen that the EC had no intention to hide the affidavits from the voters.

"The affidavits are already available with the field level offices [returning officers]. It will also be available on the website," he added.

Meanwhile, The Daily Star's correspondents in Bogra, Rangpur and Jhenaidah reported that affidavits were not displayed in the notice boards in the offices of the returning officers. But officials said anyone could collect copies of affidavits from them.

TECHNICAL GLITCH PERSISTS
Yesterday, The Daily Star faced difficulties accessing the affidavits of the candidates of January 5 polls on the EC website.

A deputy secretary at the EC secretariat said surfers could not access some pages of the website for the last few days. EC's Systems Manager Rafiqul Hoque said there might be some temporary technical problems with the website, which would be looked into immediately.