

Govt to revive black law?

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"I learnt about it from newspaper reports. The government may have taken an initiative in this regard but I don't know anything about it," Inu told The Daily Star at his parliament office yesterday.

Raising the issue in parliament session yesterday, a Jatiya Party lawmaker spoke against the reinstatement of the provision, fearing it could be used politically.

"We can't gag newspapers by restoring the provision," Pir Fazlur Rahman Mishab said on a point of order.

He said if any report was published against a ruling party leader, the declaration of the newspaper might be cancelled through the misuse of the power.

"Many used newspapers to instigate communal violence before the January 5 election. Still, it won't be wise to give back the deputy commissioners the authority to cancel declaration," the MP said and sought the intervention of the information minister over the matter.

He also noted that freedom of press is enshrined in the constitution.

Also yesterday, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) President

Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul said any such decision will send the bad signal worldwide that the government is trying to gag the media.

The reputation Bangladesh has earned through promulgating the Right to Information Act will also be at stake, he told The Daily Star over the phone.

Rather, he added, the "toothless" Bangladesh Press Council needs to be strengthened so that it can monitor the media and take measures in cases of a misuse of the freedom of the press.

Bulbul, who is chief executive officer and editor-in-chief of Boishakhi TV, regretted that a proposal to reform the press council had been gathering dust at the information ministry.

He severely criticised the DCs for their enthusiasm about getting back the power to cancel declarations of newspapers and said they themselves had given wholesale declarations on being persuaded by such lobbyists as ministers.

He also criticised the government for not taking any steps against those so-called newspaper houses not following wage board and other norms of



Two sacks of venison seized by police in the Sundarbans west division in April. Venison is not rare in the area as several groups of poachers are active there due to poor monitoring of forest officials.

PHOTO: COURTESY

10 killed as bus hits tree

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Most of the deceased were carrying their passports with them, aiming to travel to India through the border crossing at Benapole.

Mosharraf Hossain, officer-in-charge of Jhikorgachha Police Station, said six passengers, including a woman, died on the spot after the bus hit the tree at Godkhali around 6:30am.

They are Ronjon Pal, son of Dilip Pal of Nobabgonj, Jamal Uddin, 40, son of Bojilur Rahman of Demra, Biddiut Ghosh, 45, son of Basudev Ghosh of Goyalnagar lane in Dhaka, Mominuddin, son of Anwar Ali of Comilla and Nirmol Chandro Saha, 55, and his wife Hena Saha, 40, of Kishoreganj.

Soon after the accident, the injured were rushed to Jhikorgachha Upazila Health Complex and Jessore Medical College and Hospital.

Salam, 30, of Munshiganj, Prosenjit Pal, 34, son of Ronojit Pal of Shariatpur, and Romjan Ali, 35, of Dholaikhal in Dhaka, died from their injuries at the Jessore hospital.

Bus helper Abdul Momin, who hailed from Baliakandi in Rajbari, succumbed to his injuries at the health complex.

The impact left the front end of the bus smashed and its roof sheared off, the OC said, adding that the driver might have fallen asleep and lost control over the steering.

Mithun, the driver, was injured in the accident but escaped, Md Monir Hossain, a representative of Shohag, told The Daily Star over the telephone after visiting the spot.

"More passengers would have died if the driver had not gained his control over

the steering after hitting the tree and avoid hitting another," he said.

Rakib, one of the injured, told journalists in Jessore that after crossing the Paturia-Doulatdia ferry terminal, the bus picked up speed.

Some passengers forbade the driver not to overtake other buses while driving recklessly, but he ignored them.

Reshma Sharmin, assistant superintendent of Jessore police, confirmed the crash at Godkhali, around 10 kilometres off Benapole.

Among the injured, Jhontu, 35 of North Golapbag, Horidas Saha of Nobabgonj, Rakib, 30, Suman, 30, Joni Ghosh, 35, Ronojit Sarkar, 35, Gatali Ghosh, 45, Rubi, 30, Moyna, 35, and Walid, 30 of Bikrompur in Dhaka, are undergoing treatment at the Jessore hospital.

B'BARIA CRASH

Five people were killed when a Dhaka-bound truck from Sylhet collided head-on with a CNG-run auto-rickshaw on Dhaka-Sylhet highway in Sarail around 3:15pm, said Ali Arshad, OC of Sarail Police Station.

The deceased were passengers of the auto-rickshaw, he said. They are Mizan, 40, his wife Nilufa Begum, 29, their son Zubayer, 4, Mahfuz, 25, and his son Masum, 6. All of them hailed from Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila.

Police later seized the truck and detained its driver. Protesting the accident, locals put up barricades on the highway which disrupted communication on the route for at least half an hour, the OC added.

(Our correspondents in Jessore and Brahmanbaria contributed to this report)

Nur Hossain

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six-month imprisonment. He will have to serve the sentence before he could be extradited to Bangladesh, the official said.

The home ministry officials have already spoken to top police officers in Kolkata and they have given their approval to his extradition.

Nur Hossain is likely to be the first Bangladeshi to be deported from India since the signing of the extradition pact between the two countries in December last year.

He along with two other Bangladeshis was arrested in a Kolkata apartment on June 15 for not having valid documents required for entering India.

Meanwhile, a government-formed probe committee quizzed a former member of the Rapid Action Battalion, Maj Arif, one of the accused in the case, at the Dhaka Central Jail gate yesterday.

It was supposed to interrogate all the three former Rab officials, who had been suspended after being accused of

the murders, but could only interrogate one due to lack of time, Jail Superintendent Farman Ali told The Daily Star.

Two others -- Lt Col Tareque Sayeed Mohammad and Lt Commander MM Rana -- will be quizzed this morning, said a probe committee member.

He, however, declined to speak further about yesterday's interrogation.

Narayanganj City Corporation panel mayor Nazrul Islam along with his three aides and driver and senior lawyer Chandan Sarkar along with his driver were kidnapped in separate incidents from the Dhaka-Narayanganj link road on April 27.

Three days later, six bodies were found floating in the Shitalakkhya river. The other body was recovered from the river the following day.

Nazrul's father-in-law Shahidul Islam claimed that Nur Hossain and some others had given some Rab officials around Tk 6 crore bribe to kill Nazrul.

Funny forest guarding

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Chittagong and Cox's Bazar, have become dens of pirates and extremists.

Over the decades, encroachers have also grabbed a huge portion of the forest areas without facing any major challenge. As a result, the country's forests now cover less than 10 percent of the total land although government statistics show it to be 17 percent.

It is recommended that a country should have forests on one fourth of its landmass to maintain the natural equilibrium.

Though the government announced a target under the millennium development goal in 2008 to increase the country's forest coverage up to 20 percent by 2015, it's not going on well either.

"We won't be able to meet that target as we do not get adequate funds for tree plantations," said Yunus Ali, chief conservator of forests (CCF).

The forest department now gets only Tk 181 crore annual budget, most of which is spent on staff salary and utility bills, he said.

"The department gets only Tk 7 crore for tree plantation, which should be at least Tk 70 crore, excluding the maintenance cost."

According to Bangladesh Country Report of Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), at least five percent of the total forestland has been grabbed and converted into agricultural land in the last one decade.

While visiting the Lawachhara forest in Srimangal recently, this correspondent found a sorry state of

ILL-EQUIPPED FOREST GUARDS

Staff working	4,287
(including 1,254 boatmen)	
Approved number of staff	5,683
Vacant posts	1,396
Total arms	2,752
Arms out of order	303

- No formal arrangement for arms training
- No vehicles provided for forest guarding
- Boatmen carry arms in Sundarbans to guard forests

forest protection.

Only four staffs -- a forest guard, a boatman, a junior scout and a beat officer -- were deployed to protect the 12.15 square kilometer forest. Three out of their five firearms did not work. The only transport for this group of four was a 26-year-old 80CC motorcycle which can carry, if at all, a maximum of two persons.

The only car the forest rangers have is a decades-old jeep but there is no driver. So, local forest officials and members of the co-management committee have hired a driver with their own contributions.

"There are 18 villages around the Lawachhara forest and tree fellers can enter there from any directions carrying firearms," said Manirul Islam, beat officer of Lawachhara forest.

Three staffs and a few villagers deployed by the local forest co-management committee keep vigil at some points of the forest so that none can escape with truckloads of tree logs, said Manirul.

The forest department has 10,240 approved posts, of which 2,668 remains vacant. The vacancy in field level posts is alarmingly high -- 1,396 posts, including 632 of forest guards, are vacant.

It is high time the government did something to provide necessary manpower and logistic support. Otherwise, it will be very difficult to protect the remaining forests, said a top forest official, seeking anonymity.

CCF Yunus Ali, however, noted that they already had taken initiatives to train the staffs in phases and around 2,000 staffs would be recruited by next year.

However, a forest official said the training was informal as divisional forest officers request superintendents of police to teach some forest staff the use of firearms during their annual training at different police lines.

"It is not very effective," he said requesting not to be named.

"All the senior forest guards have become boss of a camp. So it is the boatmen who carry firearms in the Sundarbans. So it is really dangerous when a man supposed to row carries firearms without having any training," he added.

Too tragic to get over with

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During one such visit on June 20, he pointed at different spots in the room and said, "Here, Farzana [his daughter], her mother and my daughter-in-law used to produce handicrafts."

Born in a Bihari camp in Bogra, Yasin came to Dhaka around 34 years ago to earn a living. He used to live at his uncle's house at the Kurmitola camp. He married Baby Begum 27 years ago.

His two other daughters, who had been married off, came to the house on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat. One of them had a child.

They were also among the victims of his family.

In this saddest turn of his life, Yasin still manages to fight back tears. It is only because of his sixteen-year-old daughter Farzana, who suffered 17 percent burns and has been undergoing treatment at the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

"She [Farzana] is the only reason [for which] I am still alive. I want to get her back, cured," murmured the father, who has been living at a relative's

house in the camp following the incident.

A hairdresser at Gulshan in Dhaka, Yasin is facing some uncertainties as to whether his daughter will make it back to a normal life, whether she will have a burnt face and above all, how to tell her about what happened to her loved ones.

"I couldn't go to see her regularly as I don't have answers to her questions. She keeps asking me about her mother, her brothers and sisters and why they don't go to see her."

"I lied that they were also undergoing treatment at different hospitals like her," Yasin sighed.

Farzana often gets upset at seeing none, except her father, at the hospital, he said.

"One day she said, 'no one loves me, no one comes to see me'.... I can't see her writhing in pain any more," the father added.

Sometimes he bends to his daughter's insistence on talking to her mother and makes calls to one of his

female relatives, requesting her to play the mother for Farzana over the phone.

Looking back to his good days, Yasin said, "We were looking for a suitor to marry my Farzana off to him and we met some people to that end. Now I don't know what will happen."

Partha Sankar Paul, residential physician of the burn unit, said Farzana sustained inhalation injuries and deep burns in her face, back and hands.

"She needs to undergo some surgeries and so she may have to stay at the hospital for around three months," he told The Daily Star.

Visiting Farzana at the DMCH burn unit recently, one of the correspondents saw her screaming in pain.

After nurses had applied dressing to her wounds, her father was running a cotton swab with his inexperienced hands to blot her rose-red wounds.

Farzana shouted out, "You are not good at it. You are causing me more pain. Where is mother? Call her, she is good at it."

INDO-BANGLA MARITIME DISPUTE

Judgment delayed

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka has not yet received any official confirmation from the Arbitral Tribunal about the date of verdict in the Bay of Bengal Maritime Boundary Arbitration between Bangladesh and India.

The verdict in the maritime boundary dispute was due to have been announced last month.

According to the rules of procedure of the Hague-based UN Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), "the tribunal shall endeavour to render its Award within six months of the close of the proceedings."

The tribunal concluded its hearing on December 18, 2013 at the Peace Palace in The Hague.

Sources at the maritime affairs unit of the foreign ministry said the ministry and the Bangladesh embassy in the Netherlands were in close touch with the PCA.

But they had not received any information on the verdict from The Hague until yesterday.

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Tk 47 lakh snatched, man stabbed in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Muggers snatched around Tk 47 lakh after stabbing the owner of a money exchange agency in the capital's Niketan yesterday.

The incident took place around 9:30am when Saiful Hassan Sabuj, 30, proprietor of Loknath Money Exchange, was going to his business place in Gulshan-1 with his relative Nadim.

Saiful was driving a motorbike while Nadim was behind him carrying the money in a bag.

Two muggers obstructed them in front of the house No 4 on Road-6 and asked for the money, said Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Gulshan Police Station.

As they refused to give in, the muggers stabbed Saiful in the right hand and snatched away the bag from Nadim, added the OC.

The muggers then fled on a motorbike with a cohort who was waiting on the bike.

With minor injury, Saiful took primary treatment from a local clinic.

He later lodged a case with Gulshan Police Station.

Edn ministry

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It also claimed that the TIB didn't even contact any ministry official while conducting the study between June 2012 and May this year.

The TIB report titled "Private Universities: Challenges of good governance and way out" revealed that around Tk 1 crore to Tk 3 crore are exchanged for the approval for launching a private university and Tk 50,000 to Tk 2 lakh for getting nods for appointing vice chancellors, pro-vice chancellors and treasurers.

The ministry said private universities get temporary approval through proper procedures and on the basis of the UGC's recommendations.

It said the UGC and the university authorities carry out all administrative and academic activities, and the ministry is not directly linked to that.

In a separate statement, the UGC protested the TIB report, and said such "sweeping" remark by the graft watchdog is uncalled for.

It said the TIB "intentionally" published the report only to undermine the UGC and the education ministry.

The commission said the education ministry has the responsibility to handle the process of appointing VCs, pro-VCs and treasurers. "There is no involvement of the commission in the appointment process."

The UGC said it has already formed a three-member committee to investi-

27 Bangladeshis

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Several hundred of the Bangladeshis went on a work abstention on June 28 to protest the incident.

They, however, withdrew their programme the next day as the company and the Bangladesh embassy in Baghdad assured them of providing security.

"Our people were scared as the Iraqi police started coming to our places looking for Sunni rebels," said Hasan Ahmed, another returnee.

He said that around 300 Bangladeshis have already submitted their resignation letters to the company to return home.

Over 20,000 Bangladeshis are working in various sectors in Iraq, according to the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry.

Muhith trashes media reports

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He was talking to reporters at his office at the Economic Relations Division.

A number of analysts, however, find Muhith's comment confusing in the light of the related provision of the law that provides scope for legalising investments in purchase of flats without any question.

The finance minister's remark came two days after parliament passed the Finance Act 2014, repealing a provision that allowed unquestioned investments of black money in treasury bonds on payment of 10 percent tax on the invested money.

The Act came into effect yesterday.

"Only one law was there which permitted black money ... that I have cancelled," he said, adding that in case of the other two (investments in real estate and a 10 percent penalty on top of normal tax), fines are levied.

Speaking in parliament on June 28, the minister said, "These two provisions can be extended as they are necessary to ensure balance in the tax payment system. It can be mentioned that money obtained through terrorism and corruption cannot be shown to get the privilege."

He said the provision for unquestioned acceptance of investments in flats by paying a certain amount of tax is part of efforts to simplify the tax payment system.

In fiscal 2013-14, the government included a provision in the Income Tax Ordinance that provides scope for money holders to clear investments in purchase of flats without showing the source of the money.

They have to pay a certain amount of tax depending on locations, according to a circular of the National Board of Revenue.

The provision says, "Notwithstanding anything contained in this Ordinance, source of any sum invested by any person, in the construction or purchase of any residential building apartment, shall be deemed to have been explained if the assessee (taxpayers) pays, before the assessment for the relevant assessment year in which the investment is completed, tax at the following rate ..."

Analysts have questioned the efficacy of such a provision as taxmen will not raise any question about the invested money after getting a specific amount of tax against the construction or purchase of residential buildings and flats.

This means it will not be possible for taxmen to know whether or not the invested money has been earned through illegal means.

Asked about the provision, Muhith yesterday said taxmen might not

question the source of the money.

"It does not prohibit the income tax department from asking questions ... It is totally, utterly ... utterly useless question from the press," he said.

The minister, however, said the privilege given in the real estate sector didn't attract much investment.

Asked whether he still stuck to his stance that no scope was given for a whitening of black money, Muhith said, "Of course ... Of course. There is no concession for black money."

Mirza Azizul Islam, former adviser to a caretaker government, termed Muhith's statement "confusing".

"I have nothing to say," he said.

Things would be clear if Muhith's statement was matched against the relevant provision, said the former adviser.

"The provision that no question will be raised [about the source of money] is

immoral and unethical," he said.

Zaid Bakht, research director at Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said if no question is raised about the source of the money, it means that scope has been given to whiten black money.

"It does not seem to be a proper interpretation [from Muhith]," he said.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, demanded a clarification from Muhith.

"We want to believe what he said. But we will be happy to get an explanation on the provision for investments in the real estate sector, and whether the provision is contradictory or not and whether it will continue."

"Otherwise, we will assume that the government has created an arrangement, through which the real estate sector will go to the hands of people earning money