

Funeral ground at Hatiya grabbed

MD NURUL AMIN, Noakhali

A historical resting place for the dead on Noakhali district's Hatiya Island, unique for containing a graveyard and a cremation ground side-by-side, might soon become a distant memory as land grabbers are slowly devouring it amidst the apparent nonchalance of the authorities concerned.

In the last three months some 30 illegal tin-shed and concrete structures have crept up on nearly one third of the 34-decimal land beside Sagoria Bazar of Burir Char union. It is the only public funeral ground in the area.

Noakhali Zonal Settlement Office records show it was registered some 50 years back as public property to be maintained and supervised by the deputy commissioner. Of the area, 20 decimals were allotted for burials and the rest for cremation services.

Locals of all beliefs have a great deal of reverence for the grounds which they say contain the bodies of several generations of important local and religious figures.

"One of the buildings is on top of my maternal grandfather, my father and my elder brother," lamented a local sexagenarian, Kartik Chandra

Das.

Concerned about Sonali Bank's plans to lease space in that building, Das sent letters to senior bank officials in Dhaka, Chittagong and Comilla on April 14, as well as to the local branch manager.

He requested Sonali Bank to respect the government's land demarcation and not open a branch there. He has, however, received no response. The Sonali Bank branch on the cremation ground looks set to open next month.

The Daily Star managed to contact one person who had erected several of the structures. He categorically claimed that he had built those on his ancestral land.

The records are wrong, he added, saying that he had in this regard filed a case, being heard at Noakhali District Judge's Court.

On behalf of the local community, resident Reja Ali Mobarak submitted a complaint to the deputy commissioner of Noakhali on June 18 who forwarded it to Md Mamun, Hatiya's assistant commissioner (land).

Mamun told The Daily Star that he had immediately afterwards sent a surveyor to the site to get the real picture.

On being asked what the findings

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Land grabbers occupy a state-owned graveyard and crematorium in Hatiya of Noakhali and even built a two-storey building, inset, on graves.

PHOTO: STAR

MOULVIBAZAR STADIUM

No sports, it's wedding time

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The Moulvibazar stadium has been decked up for hosting the wedding of Awami League minister Syed Mohsin Ali's daughter.

Five huge pandals now stand at different corners of the stadium to host some 15,000 wedding guests today. Many places of the lush green stadium have been dug up for putting up the pandals.

The grand preparation was made for the marriage ceremony of Social Welfare Minister Mohsin Ali's daughter, Syeda Sanjida Sharmin Sanju.

Groom Mosharraf Patwari, originally from Laxmipur, lives at Shyamoli in the capital with his family.

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New political alliance in the offing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A new political alliance is likely to emerge in the country soon on the basis of some common political programmes.

It has not been named yet but it will project itself as an alternative political force to the ruling Awami League and the opposition BNP.

To this end, leaders of four left political parties -- Gono Forum, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Rob) and Samajtantrik Dal of Bangladesh - Nagorik Oikya, a citizens' platform, and a few noted politicians met yesterday at the chamber of Gono

Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain.

The meeting chaired by Dr Kamal decided that political parties, social organisations and individuals could join the alliance to be formed on the basis of an 11-point political

programme stipulating that free and fair elections must be held and the country must function as per the principles of the 1972 constitution.

Dr Kamal announced the programme on August 21 on the founding anniversary of Gono Forum. Yesterday, all participants of the meeting agreed to it.

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Communications ministry renamed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of Communications has been renamed the Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges.

The ministry's Roads Division too now becomes the Road Transport and Highways Division. The Bridges Division's name will remain the same.

The public administration ministry yesterday issued a gazette notification in this regard. On Monday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina approved a proposal to rename the ministry.

According to sources in the ministry, the name of the ministry has been changed to avoid confusion and complexities arising at the international level for its having the name of the Ministry of Communications. However, there will be no changes in

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Padma corruption probe laid to rest

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that all suspects, including Abul Hossain, would be under close scrutiny, and none would be spared if found involved.

In a letter to the ACC in 2013, the WB external panel of experts said, "The panel considered that the evidence suggested a criminal conspiracy that included the former minister of communications as the most senior official personally involved."

"His name and the indication of payment of 4% were subsequently included in a list of people that were to receive compensation for their alleged involvement in the conspiracy," it said.

"The ultimate award of the contract likely required his [Syed Abul Hossain] approval. He met with SNC Lavalin [the firm that was awarded the consultancy job for the project] management at the request of the former secretary which

was likely in furtherance of the negotiations for an illegal payment.

"The Panel considered that in order to achieve a complete and fair investigation, the former minister of communications should be named in the FIR [First Information Report] and placed under investigation," read the letter.

ACC Commissioner Shahabuddin, however, found the WB's stance intentional.

"To be very frank, we did not have [further] information [from the WB]. So, something was there....," he told journalists at the ACC headquarters.

On December 17, 2012, the commission filed the Padma bridge graft conspiracy case with Banani Police Station, accusing ex-Bridges Division secretary Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, Superintendent Engineer of Bangladesh Bridge Authority Kazi Mohammad

Ferdous, Executive Engineer of Roads and Highways Department Reaz Ahmed Zaber, and former local agent of SNC Lavalin Mohammad Mostofa and its ex-officials Mohammad Ismail, Ramesh Shah and Kevin Wales.

The ACC, however, didn't include the names of Abul Hossain and Abul Hasan Chowdhury in the corruption case.

The commission had then said the duo's alleged involvement in the corruption conspiracy would be examined during the investigation in the case.

When journalists yesterday asked Badiuzzaman why the ACC filed the case if it didn't have enough information to support the case, he said the ACC lodged the lawsuit based on preliminary information provided by the WB.

Shahabuddin said the commission

had hoped the WB and Canadian authorities would provide it with detailed information, but the ACC didn't get further information from the WB.

Asked why the commission closed its probe while the Canadian court is yet to deliver its verdict, he said, "We have obtained some transcripts from the Canadian court. They don't contain any information that can prove a conspiracy to bribe."

About the diary of Ramesh who allegedly mentioned that Abul Hossain, Mosharraf and others were to be given bribes, he said it was not a diary but a notepad seized by the Canadian police.

According to the case statement, Mosharraf dissolved the evaluation committee four times between January and June 2010 in efforts to award the consultancy job to the company of his choice.

In violation of the WB's Consulting Services Manual 2006, he became the head of the fourth evaluation committee. The manual states that all members of such a committee should have 10 years' experience in the relevant field, which the secretary lacked.

He along with the six accused hatched the conspiracy, says the case statement. They provided SNC Lavalin with secret information regarding the tender and finally managed to award the job to SNC Lavalin.

Abul Hossain held several meetings with SNC Lavalin officials, which were arranged by Abul Hasan.

On June 29, 2012, the WB cancelled its \$1.2 billion funding for the bridge project, saying it had proof of a "corruption conspiracy" involving Bangladeshi officials, executives of a Canadian firm and some individuals.

Tender late this month

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power project. It would suggest countries from which coal could be imported or if the power company purchased a coal mine in Indonesia or any other coal exporting country.

The contact for construction of the Rampal power plant was expected to be awarded by January to February next year, said Kamrakar.

After the Bangladesh-India Friendship company was formed in 2012, it was thought that the EPC contract would be awarded by early 2014, with the target to begin commercial power generation from 2017.

The Indian National Thermal Power Company (NTPC) and the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) hold equal stakes in this joint venture company.

Located 14 kilometres northwest of the Sundarbans and four kilometres from the declared ecologically critical area (ECA), selection of the Rampal site for the plant drew huge flak from the public. The government has been defending its selection saying the plant

would not affect the world's biggest mangrove forest.

An environment impact assessment (EIA) for the project prepared by the Centre for Environment and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS) was approved by the environment ministry last year.

The plant would use surface water from the Passur river so that the project does not affect underground water table.

It also includes residential and social facilities, water treatment plant, sub-station, jetty, coal handling system and coal silo, ash handling and disposal facilities, and switchyard, including sub-station. The project area spreads on more than 1,834 acres of land, all of which has been acquired.

As per a government decision, for every kilowatt power sale from this plant, the Rampal locality would get Tk 0.03. This roughly totals Tk 27 crore or more a year. This fund would be used for building roads, hospitals and other infrastructure in Rampal.

Other than fears of emission of harm-

ful chemicals from the plant, experts say transport of imported coal through the Passur river would also harm the forest environment. Akram Point of the Sundarbans, where the Passur is two to three kilometres wide, would serve as the anchor point for mother vessels of the imported coal.

The plant would need 3.2 million tonnes of coal a year. Imported coal on 80,000-tonne capacity ships would anchor at Akram Point. From there, lighter ships would load coal containers with maximum 10,000-tonne capacity and transport it to the power plant's jetty on the Passur. In other words, several smaller vessels carrying coal would ply the river every day all the year round.

When the coal would be loaded on lighter vessels from mother vessels, some coal dust is likely to spread in the river and the adjacent forest. Although it might look insignificant on a day-to-day basis operation, in the long run it would pollute the river.

That would affect the adjacent mangrove forest, according to geologists.

HC asks

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Nurnobi, a patient with stomach ache from Lakshmipur, killed himself by jumping from the eighth floor of a DMCH building on Tuesday to get rid of the anguish as he allegedly did not receive treatment from the hospital, according to a report published in The Daily Star yesterday.

In response to a writ petition, the HC yesterday ordered the health secretary and the DMCH director to submit a report before it within two weeks on the steps taken against the persons responsible for the failure and negligence over the incident.

The court issued a rule upon them to explain in two weeks as to why they should not be directed to give adequate compensation to Nurnobi's family.

In the rule, the court also asked the two to come up with an answer as to why their failure and negligence to provide medical treatment to Nurnobi should not be declared illegal.

It also ordered the authorities con-

cerned to explain why they should not be directed to ensure proper treatment to patients at all government hospitals across the country, Deputy Attorney General Biswojit Roy told The Daily Star.

The HC bench of Justice Quazi Reza-Ul Hoque and Justice Abu Taher Md Saifur Rahman came up the order and rule after hearing the writ petition filed by rights organisation Ain O Salsih Kendra on the basis of The Daily Star report under the headline "Uncared for, patient takes his life".

Advocates ZI Khan Panna, AM Aminuddin and Abantee Nurul moved the petition.

ZI Khan told the court that the authorities concerned had failed to provide treatment to Nurnobi, and their failure and negligence had prompted him to commit suicide to get relief from the excruciating pain.

He prayed to the HC to pass necessary orders against the persons responsible for the incident.

Rivals resume talks

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for two weeks -- leaving it strewn with rubbish and human waste -- and to occupy the roads instead.

"We won't leave the place till we change the system," Qadri said.

Some of the pressure on Sharif eased on Tuesday after opposition parties in parliament backed him to continue, and after a senior PTI member said Khan had acted on the army's direction, damaging the movement's credibility.

Parliament called a second emergency session on Wednesday, with senior PTI leader Shah Mehmood Qureshi saying the party was willing to resume talks with the government in the presence of a cross-party team.

"We are ready to negotiate, ready to solve the matter, ready to break the silence. Imran Khan hasn't done all this for himself or Tehreek-e-Insaf, he has done it for the better future of Pakistan," Qureshi said.

Khan's party wants Sharif to step down for at least 30 days so that an impartial probe can be conducted into last year's election. Both local and foreign observers rated the vote as relatively fair and credible.

A source close to the talks told AFP: "All other matters have been

resolved but the main issue is still on table, which is Nawaz Sharif's resignation.

"We are trying to sort out a middle way out of it," he added.

The military has issued a series of public advisories to the government in recent days on how the crisis should be tackled, leading to criticism that it is interfering.

Analysts and government figures have said the army may be using the crisis to its advantage to try to assert its dominance over the Sharif government.

Sharif served two terms as prime minister in the 1990s before being ousted in a 1999 coup. He won an election last year but has been at odds with the army since returning to office in Pakistan's first democratic transition of power.

He annoyed the generals by calling for better ties with old rival India as well as resisting an army plan for an offensive against Pakistani Taliban insurgents. The army has long jealously protected main foreign relations and security as its areas of responsibility.

The treason trial of a former army chief and president, Pervez Musharraf, who launched the 1999 coup, has also angered the military.