



Students of colleges holding the books they won in the Biswa Shahitya Kendra's book reading competition at Shilpakala Academy yesterday.

PHOTO:
RASHED SHUMON

Move to step up

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detectives to intensify their efforts to catch war crimes accused Abdul Jabbar and Syed Md Hasan Ali, who are believed to be in Bangladesh.

The police were asked to work "intensely" with Interpol to know the whereabouts of convicted war criminal and expelled Jamaat-e-Islami member Abul Kalam Azad, also known as Bachchu Razakar.

On condemned fugitives Chowdhury Mueen Uddin and Ashrafuzzaman Khan, who are living in the UK and the USA, the cell decided to let the foreign ministry lead the work for bringing them back.

The cell also decided to seek cooperation of pro-liberation forces in the said countries to convince the authorities to deport the fugitives and the investigation agency of the tribunal would lead this.

The government on February 16 formed the eight-member cell comprising joint secretaries of the foreign and the home ministries, a deputy inspector general of police, representatives of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, the National Security Intelligence, and the prosecution and the investigation agency of the tribunals.

As the cell failed to hold its first

meeting, International Crimes Tribunal's investigation agency -- which proposed the formation of the cell -- on August 5, wrote to the home ministry to "immediately" arrange for a meeting.

About the delay, Kamal yesterday said, "Though it was the first formal meeting [of the cell], we held several casual meetings."

During yesterday's meeting, the representative of the prosecution was absent.

Sultan Mahmud Simon, the prosecution's representative to the cell, told The Daily Star, "I was not informed. I will check on Sunday, whether the prosecution received any invitation letter for the meeting."

Apart from the convicted fugitives Mueen Uddin, Ashraf and Azad, trial of a Faridpur BNP leader Zahid Hossain Khokon is being held at the International Crimes Tribunal-1. The case is awaiting verdict delivery and Khokon is believed to be in Sweden.

Tribunal-1 on August 14 framed charges against former Jatiya Party lawmaker Abdul Jabbar, who is also on the run, and accepted the charges brought against another fugitive Syed Md Hasan Ali, the alleged commander of the Razakar unit in Tarail of Kishoreganj.

PM's claim and the reality

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For example, if the government now wants to do away with Islam as state religion to uphold the spirit of secularism, it will not be able to do so as the article conferring on Islam the status of state religion is currently not amendable.

The government will also not be able to restore the proviso of Article 38, through which a ban was imposed on the use of religion for political purposes, to its original position.

Similarly, citizens' fundamental rights cannot get back the pre-eminent position as it was in the constitution in 1972. The 1972 constitution had imposed a ban on the state from making laws against any provision of the fundamental rights.

But a constitutional amendment in 1973 introduced the provision that parliament can enact laws against fundamental rights through amending the constitution.

The 15th amendment has made unamendable all the articles dealing with the fundamental principles of state policy and people's fundamental rights.

The Indian parliament amended the constitution in 2002 to make

education a fundamental right for citizens of India. The provision included in the constitution says the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the state may by law determine.

But the Bangladesh parliament cannot make education a fundamental right for citizens as the entire chapter of the constitution dealing with citizens' fundamental rights has been made unamendable.

Thus the 15th amendment also curtailed the constituent powers of present and future parliaments to amend the said 50 articles. Curtailing the powers of parliament is an attack on the powers of the people who elect parliament.

Interestingly, the government now wants to empower parliament by restoring its authority to remove a Supreme Court judge on grounds of misbehaviour or incapacity by amending the constitution, though the 15th amendment curtailed the House's powers to a large extent.

The AL-led government, when it last amended the constitution in 2011, also revealed its unwillingness to restore the spirit of the constitu-

Housewife faces

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Her husband Chaiwang Prue Marma, unemployed by choice, was allegedly involved in criminal activities.

When he needed money, he would force Nusang to go out and work. And if she declined, torture -- both physical and mental -- would befall her.

"On Thursday around 3:00pm, Chaiwang pressed me to go for work. When I refused, he started stabbing me indiscriminately with a kitchen knife and cut off my left wrist," said Nusang at the hospital.

Later locals caught Chaiwang and

gave him a beating when he tried to escape. He too was admitted to Bandarban Sadar Hospital.

Mong Prue Marma, a neighbour of the victim, said, Chaiwang was actually a Rakhine who had infiltrated into Bangladesh around 10 years ago and took "Marma" as his last name to avoid suspicion. A couple of years later, he married Nusang.

Doctors at the hospital yesterday said Nusang was in a stable condition.

Contacted, Md Omar Ali, officer-in-charge of Thanchi Police Station, said in the evening that no case had been filed and no arrest made.

Weaving dreams

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of Tk 60 takes the girls around three hours. After taking care of their household chores and studies, they can produce around 20 gamchhas or so a month, using the single handloom they have.

Even after toiling so hard, they are finding it impossible to collect the money necessary for continuing their studies in Dhaka.

"We already spent Tk 1,560 to buy admission forms and another Tk 11,000 for our enrolment at the UCC coaching centre in Jessore. We cannot afford to spend anymore," said Sharmin adding that Shahana has already given up coaching lessons to save bus fares that amount to Tk 800 a month for each.

"If we don't get financial assistance, we won't even be able to sit the admission tests which will be held in about a week," added Sharmin.

Moshiur Rahman, principal of Chaprail Abu Bakkar Biswas and Moksed Ali College, said the twins have upheld his college's prestige.

"I have very high hopes for the girls who deserve all the support from us," he said, beaming with pride.

Intajul Islam, now, has pinned all his hope on the benevolence of the well-to-do people of the country.

"I'd like to earnestly request the benevolent section of the society to extend their helping hands so that my daughters can continue their studies unhindered," he said.

Dhaka to open

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Sources at the Prime Minister's Office said the government was considering appointing Muhammad Mahfuzur Rahman, director general (America and Europe wings) of the foreign ministry, and Muhammad A Muhith, deputy chief of mission at the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington DC, as ambassadors to Poland and Denmark.

The government has also decided to set up new embassies to Afghanistan, Sudan and Sierra Leone and upgrade the Agartala visa office in the Indian state of Tripura to Deputy High Commission soon.

Last year, five embassies were opened in Mexico, Brazil, Lebanon, Mauritius and Portugal, and a deputy high commission in Mumbai, India.

With the opening of three more missions, the number of missions will come to 71 in 55 countries, official sources said.

Asked about the justification for

opening new missions, a high official at the ministry told The Daily Star that it became urgent for Bangladesh to open more diplomatic missions to serve the growing number of expatriate Bangladeshis, increase export and trade and establish political link with countries around the globe.

According to an official estimate, about seven million Bangladeshis are now living abroad and remit around \$15 billion a year.

Replying to a question, the official said there was a common perception that government spends a huge amount of money to run the foreign missions. But a number of missions, including those in the Middle Eastern countries, Malaysia, USA, UK, Italy and Singapore, earn a good amount of revenue and send foreign currencies to Bangladesh by providing consular services to people.

Illegal, harmful

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areas," said Qudrat-E-Ghani, deputy director (inputs) in the DAE's field service wing.

But the field officers never conduct any such drives, Ghani, who joined the DAE only a few months ago, told The Daily Star.

And this is how the markets are deluged with ripening agents.

Farmers get these chemicals easily from traders and use them excessively on fruits like mangoes, litchis, bananas, pineapples, melons and papayas; vegetables like tomatoes; and cash crops like sugarcane to quicken ripening and increase shelf life of the produce.

Experts say the process of fruit ripening is mainly accelerated by ethylene. The agents available in the market are basically different types of ethylene.

Besides ethylene or ethephon, calcium carbide is also widely used for ripening fruits.

When carbide comes in contact with moisture, it produces acetylene gas. Acetylene acts like ethylene and accelerates the ripening process, but is inadvisable because calcium carbide has carcinogenic (cancer-causing) properties.

The use of this chemical for ripening fruits is illegal in most countries.

A study titled "Effects of Using Chemicals and Hormones for Cultivation and Marketing of Vegetables and Bananas", conducted by National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Programme in 2009, revealed that around 74 percent of



banana wholesalers use different types of ripening agents.

Fruit traders use ripening agents openly. Various newspapers, including The Daily Star, have published photos where wholesalers were seen spraying chemicals on green mangoes.

A high official of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), however, has a different opinion on this issue.

Manirul Islam, director (nutrition) of the BARC, said ripening hormones were not harmful and that they were legal in many developed countries.

"Basically, the growth hormone and the ripening hormone come from the same chemical, and neither of them is

harmful. So I recommend that the government approve both," said Manirul.

If the government approves one, the other one should also get approval, he said.

The ripening agents are banned in India, Pakistan, Malaysia and several other countries, as they are harmful to health, experts said. Besides, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) grades ethephon as a poison.

However, as per Bangladesh Safe Food Ordinance (Amendment), 2005, not only ripening agents, but production and use of any harmful chemicals, including calcium carbide, formalin and ethephon are prohibited.

Asked how these ripening agents

were making their way into the market, the marketing manager of a top pesticide company said the chemicals were mainly imported from India and China, and local companies distributed these across the country.

"The traders know these chemicals are illegal. Still they are marketing these since there is a huge demand. If they don't do it, Indian products will be smuggled in," he said, requesting anonymity.

Sarowar Hossain, a mango grower from Chuadanga, said he had been using ripening agents for the last couple of years.

On a visit to Dhaka, he told The Daily Star, "The government only destroys our produce if we use chemicals, instead of making sure these [ripening agents] never get to the market."

Abul Kalam Azad, deputy director of the department of agriculture, Rajshahi division, said the authorities had advised the mango growers not to use ripening agents, as these were harmful and decreased the nutritional value of fruits. But the farmers paid little heed to their advice.

"Farmers use ethephon in tomatoes to hasten ripening. They are likely to use it when the season of tomatoes starts next November," said Saiful Islam, upazila agricultural officer of Godagari, Rajshahi.

Azad and Saiful are well aware that ripening hormones are illegal but none of them conducted any drives against those, as they were not told to do so.

Food cards

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buy items from the registered food shops inside the camps for a certain amount of money. The costs are borne by the WFP.

There are six food shops in the two refugee camps, said WFP officials.

Under the new system, the refugees will get eight more items -- potato, semolina, green leaf, dried fish, onion, garlic, chilli and turmeric. Earlier, each Rohingya family maintained a log to collect rice, pulses, sugar, salt and oil.

Each family will be allocated a Food Card and each member of the family will have over Tk 700 loaded on the card for a month.

Whenever a cardholder will produce the Food Card at a shop, the staff there will check the card with a machine for the balance amount in it.

Once the shopping is complete, the staff will adjust the amount from the card balance, said Jessica Staskiewicz, programme coordinator of WFP.

"I think we'll be able to ensure the food security and nutrition of the

refugees in a much better way with the new system which gives them choice and dignity," said Christa Rader, country representative of WFP in Bangladesh.

To prevent misuse of Food Cards, fingerprints of cardholders will be stored in a database and it will be verified during every purchase of commodities, she added.

Speaking at the card launching programme, Mesbah ul Alam, secretary to the disaster management and relief ministry, hoped the new system will help ensure nutrition of the refugees.

Officials of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Cox's Bazar district administration were present.

At the moment, there could be as many as 500,000 unregistered Rohingya refugees inside Bangladesh, according to estimates by the UNHCR. They are refugees fleeing sectarian conflict in the Myanmar state of Rakhine.

Barapukuria staff sued

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Commission," said Mahmudul Alam, officer-in-charge of Parbatipur police station.

A three-member probe team led by Md Sirajul Islam, general manager [Administration] of BCMCL found that at least 300 metric tonnes of coal was sold from the mine on May 16 and 17 with fake bank documents.

The probe team submitted a 100-

page report to Md Aminuzzaman, managing director of BCMCL, on September 4. It was formed on August 20 after BCMCL officials found disparity between coal sales and the balance statement of their bank in the annual financial report in early July. The gap amounted to Tk 27.60 lakh.

Later it was revealed that the coal was delivered to the company owned by Md Arafat Hossain against fake

bank documents which were received by Md Shakil Ahmed of BCMCL.

Sources at the coal mine said that at least 17 trucks were used to deliver the coal.

The report also found guilty four other officials of the company. However, the team members declined to disclose their names. In the report they recommended taking departmental action against the four.

"The report found Md Shakil

Ahmed guilty. It also found four other BCMCL officials involved in the corruption," said Md Sirajul Islam.

Other members of the probe team were Md Nuruzzaman Chowdhury, general manager [Surface Operation] and Md Saiful Islam, deputy general manager.

Sources at the BCMCL said more cases will be filed after the ACC finishes its investigation.