

Bangladesh envoy meets Mamata today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Deputy High Commissioner in Kolkata Abida Islam is scheduled to meet West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banarjee this afternoon.

Foreign Ministry officials said the meeting is purely a farewell courtesy call as Abida is coming back to Dhaka shortly, and it has no link with the ongoing media reports relating to a fund scam.

The meeting comes amid media reports in India and Bangladesh that a Trinamool Congress lawmaker and Saradha gave money to Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami.

Indian media on Friday reported that the WB chief minister summoned the Bangladesh envoy, but the report was later proved false.

Bangladesh foreign ministry instantly clarified the matter, saying the Indian media reports in this regard was not based on fact. It said upon request from the deputy high commissioner, the West Bengal chief minister gave time for the courtesy call.

Meanwhile, The Times of India in a fresh report yesterday said intelligence agencies now claimed they had sufficient evidence that Saradha funds were used by fundamentalist outfits in Bangladesh against the Awami League before the general elections in Bangladesh.

This has got the centre worried as it doesn't want ties with the Sheikh Hasina government to suffer due to this. The Bangladesh prime minister is already under pressure over the Teesta water sharing issue, said the report headlined "Did Saradha cash fund extremists in Bangladesh?"

The transfer of funds was allegedly facilitated by Trinamool Congress MP Ahmad Hasan Imran, a former general secretary of the banned Students' Islamic Movement of India.

While Hasan has vehemently denied these allegations, the ruling BJP has made this an issue.

5 govt officials

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ministry that is empowered to take legal actions against them," he said. Besides, the ministry would conduct a massive scrutiny to identify those who obtained the war hero certificates through forgery, though their names were neither in the Bangladesh government's "Red Book" or the Indian government's list of those who had been trained there.

And then a new list of freedom fighters would be published on March 26, the Independence Day, and the war heroes would be provided identity cards, the minister said.

The move comes amid widespread allegations of forgery in obtaining freedom fighter certificates.

The government earlier revoked the war hero certificates of 182 government officials on the same ground.

It was also decided in the meeting that a freedom fighter, who is not in either of the aforementioned lists, can enjoy financial and other facilities but on the condition that they would have to return all the benefits if their certificates were found to be fake, sources said.

The ACC on September 8 sent a probe report to the Liberation War Affairs and the public administration ministries recommending that the war hero certificates of the five bureaucrats be revoked and legal steps taken against them.

The anti-graft watchdog also found former state minister for Liberation War Affairs AB Tajul Islam had abused his powers to illegally issue freedom fighters' certificates to the five.

On August 10, the public administration ministry decided to take actions against the fraudsters, who obtained war hero certificates through forged documents.

In November 2012, the Awami League-led government extended the retirement age of freedom fighters from 59 years to 60. Following this, many public servants resorted to fraudulence to get freedom fighters' certificates to have their service tenure extended.

Around 11,150 people obtained the war hero certificates in the last five years. Besides, 1.02 lakh applications for obtaining the certificates are pending with the ministry.

Two lakh new

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During the updating of the electoral roll, those who are eligible but have failed to get themselves registered will also be able to become new voters by going to their respective voters' registration centres, they added.

Currently, there are over 41 lakh voters in the capital, Asaduzzaman Arzu, EC director (public relations), told The Daily Star yesterday.

The EC on May 15 started the electoral roll updating programme across the country and would continue till November 15. More than 30 lakh new voters have so far been registered, while the existing number of voters is around 9.19 crore.

Too many cooks

LAWS	MAXIMUM PUNISHMENT
Safe Food Act 2013	Four years in jail or Tk 8 lakh fine or both
Special Powers Act 1974	Death sentence or jail for life
Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution Ordinance, 1985	Four years in jail or Tk one lakh fine or both
Consumers Rights Protection Act 2009	Three years in jail or Tk two lakh fine or both
Pesticides Ordinance 1971	Tk one lakh fine and in default of payment, two years in jail
Animal and Animal Products Quarantine Act 2005	Two years in jail or Tk 10,000 fine or both
Animal Disease Act 2005	Two years in jail or Tk 10,000 fine or both
Animal Slaughter and Meat Control Act 2011	One year in jail or Tk 25,000 fine or both
Fish Feed and Animal Feed Act 2010	One year in jail or Tk 50,000 fine or both
Marine Fisheries Ordinance 1983	Three years in jail or Tk one lakh fine or both
Fish and Fish Products (Inspection and Quality Control) Ordinance 1983	Six months in jail or Tk 5000 fine or both
Protection and Conservation of Fish Act 1950	Five years in jail and Tk 10,000 fine

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"There are more laws than required but none is properly implemented," said Manzill Murshid, a Supreme Court lawyer and president of Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh.

Many of the government officials working on food safety are corrupt, observed Humayun Kabir Bhuiyan, general secretary of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh.

Whenever the association or the media raise the contamination issue, the authorities blame it on the shortage of manpower assigned to monitor the market, he said.

"But the existing workforce is not working sincerely either."

They often keep mum under pressure from influential businessmen or in exchange for bribes, Humayun alleged.

In the wake of reports on rampant use of harmful chemicals, additives and ripening agents, the government in October last year enacted a law replacing the age-old Pure Food Ordinance, 1959 to bring all food safety issues under one umbrella.

The Safe Food Act (Nirapad Khaddyo Ain) 2013 provides for the formation of a unified authority styled National Pure Food Authority that will work in coordination with different ministries concerned to address all issues and complaints relating to adulteration and hygiene. But the government has yet to issue a gazette notification.

Food Minister Qamrul Islam has recently said it will take at least a year for the law to be in force.

An authority will have to be formed, an office set up and some rules framed to enforce the act, which involves 12 or 13 ministries, and so it will take long, he added.

His ministry has already prepared a draft of the rules for the law and sent it to the law ministry for vetting.

The government will implement the law as in India and Malaysia, so that it becomes meaningful in checking food adulteration in Bangladesh, Qamrul said.

Former food minister Abdur Razzaque, however, has different views.

"We had prepared rules for the implementation of the law with consent from the prime minister. I don't know why so much time is needed," he told The Daily Star.

The latest act is very much comprehensive and effective, and no other law is necessary for ensuring safe food if it comes into effect, Razzaque said.

Overcrowding

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passengers and went to Kathalbari to take more, he said.

Though the master was supposed to steer the vessel towards north-west direction along the left side of the river, he picked the turbulent mid stream ignoring weather alerts, he added.

One may recall that a Sukani, an assistant to the master, was in charge of the vessel's wheel and a greaser, an assistant to the engine driver, was in charge of the engine room of Pinak-6. According to the rules, the launch required a certified third class master and an engine driver for navigation.

There are allegations that the probe was carried out in such a way that would spare the liability of the shipping department official, who issued illegal temporary permits time and again to the vessel to ply in violation of the shipping laws, said sources.

When this correspondent brought this to the attention of probe body head Nur-ur-Rahman, all he said was, "I will not make any comment."

The committee also held the faulty design of the vessel and gross anomalies in procuring necessary documents as responsible for the tragedy, said another member.

Nearly ten people, including an official of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), the vessel's

The law has a provision for five years' jail and a Tk 10 lakh fine as maximum punishment.

Advocate Syed Mohidul Kabir, who moved a writ petition before the HC, seeking its directive on the government to issue a gazette notification to enforce the act, said the government was not enforcing the law just to protect the interest of some vested quarters.

It should not take more than a few days to make the law effective, he added.

Asked how food adulteration is to be dealt with until the law takes effect, the food minister said the existing laws would cover that.

However, people have seen nothing but some sporadic actions, mainly anti-adulteration drives, conducted by the commerce and industries ministries and the city corporations.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police launched a drive in June against "chemical-laced fruits". It set up eight checkpoints around the capital to check the entry of formalin-tainted fruits into the capital only for a few days.

But there has not been a clear road map to food safety, said Syed Mahbul Alam, secretary of Paribesh Bachao Andolan.

"It [the government] seems insincere in dealing with the matter."

Explaining his point, Mahbul Alam said the city corporations were responsible for checking food adulteration. "But they don't even have a cell where someone can lodge complaints about adulteration."

Against this backdrop, consumers are not left with much choice.

"We don't want to see how many laws are there to prevent adulteration. We only want safe food and the government has to ensure it. We don't want to give our kids poisonous food," said Saiful Alam, a resident of Gulshan.

Humayun Kabir Bhuiyan of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh said public awareness is imperative.

People should refrain from buying fruits and other food items that can be avoided in daily consumption, and that would create pressure on unscrupulous businessmen, he said.

Campaigns against food adulteration may be carried out across the country and leaflets warning people of health impacts may be distributed to pressurise the government into taking up the matter seriously, Humayun said.

current owner Bakkar Siddique and his son Omar Faruque Limon, former owner Moniruzzaman Khokon (he is still the owner in the records), Sukani Golam Nabi, greaser Sabdar Hossain, vessel's designer and three terminal lessees have been held responsible for the capsizing, he said.

The fitness certificate of Pinak-6 expired on 30th April. Mirza Saifur Rahman, surveyor of the Department of Shipping (DOS), then issued temporary fitness certificates to the vessel three times.

DOS Director General Commodore M Zakiur Rahman Bhuiyan told The Daily Star that Saifur had been withdrawn as gross anomalies occurred in the process of issuing the temporary permits.

However, Captain Jasim Uddin, chief engineer and surveyor of the DOS and who was the member secretary of the probe committee, said, "Allowing water vessels to ply on temporary permits is in practice, though not lawful... but it is not an important issue."

But another member of the committee said that the marine court summoned Saifur on August 27 regarding the alleged anomalies and issued an order against issuing such permits in future.

Fifty-eight bodies were recovered after the Pinak-6 capsized while 62 people are still missing and feared dead.

No plan to make it mandatory

Tofail tells JS about formalin testing kit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has no plan to make it mandatory to keep "Digital Formaldehyde Meters" at all shops to examine formalin levels in fruits due to high price of the machine, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed told parliament last night.

Replying to lawmakers' queries, Tofail said the National Consumers Rights Directorate was supposed to oversee all markets in the country to ensure formalin-free seasonal fruits.

"To this end, drives are conducted at 15 to 16 markets every day when seasonal fruits hit the markets," he said.

"This [DFM] machine is imported from the USA and is the only tool that can determine the presence of formalin in fruits through PPM method. But the machine is very expensive and costs around Tk 1.25 lakh each."

A large number of people are engaged in sales of fruits and most of them cannot afford to buy such a costly machine.

Replying to another query, Tofail informed the House that the government had taken various measures to stop misuse of formalin, including steps to enact a law.

5 hurt in clash

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Around 700 illegal shacks, including shops, were demolished. The bulldozer was brought to a halt near an office of Chhatra League and another office of Bangladesh Muktijoddha Forum along the rail track.

A group of BCL leaders and activists talked to Railway Divisional Estate Officer Nurunnabi Kabir, who led the drive. Kabir gave them around 35 minutes to remove their office.

The Muktijoddha Forum office remained untouched.

Asked why the offices were not demolished, Kabir said the team would knock down the offices too. However, he and his team did not do so in the drive yesterday.

Local people protested the drive and stood in front of the bulldozer after it damaged the front side of a female madrasa. The team in the face of protest stopped demolishing it further and moved ahead to pull down illegal structures at Malibagh.

The drive will be continued, railway officials said. More than 100 members of Bangladesh Railway, railway police, RNB and labours took part in the drive yesterday.

Questions

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Narayananji, however, claimed that a group of people introducing themselves as DB personnel had picked him up from his home at Dania in Kadamtali around 3:00am and killed him in a planned way.

"There are some complaints against Tarek and we are taking him for interrogation," his father Abu Jafar Sikder quoted one of reported DB men as saying.

Jafar said he waited in front of the DB office on Minto Road since morning, and in the evening, an unidentified man asked him to go to the local police station to lodge a general diary.

When he went to Kadamtoli Police Station, police told him to go to Dhaka Medical College Hospital to search for his son.

Asked whether Kadamtoli police had any information about Tarek, OC Abdus Salam said DB police had told them over the phone that a man from Dania was killed in a gunfight at Mugdah that morning, and the body was at the DMC morgue.

Jafar identified the body of his son around 7:30pm. The body bore marks of bullet injuries in the chest and back.

It also had some marks of torture, hospital sources said.

"My son is not accused in any case or general diary. He worked at the garment factory for two years and we were trying to send him to Malaysia," the father said.

The officers-in-charge of Kadamtoli and Shyampur police stations last night confirmed that Tarek was not accused in any case filed with the stations.

Omar Faroque, officer-in-charge of Mugdah Police Station, said DB officials had informed them of a man having been shot in a gunfight between a DB team and criminals at Green Model Town around 9:00am.

He was declared dead after Mugdah police took him to the hospital around 11:00am.

The OC said he did not have any information about the DB team.

The Daily Star failed to reach any DB official for comments.

8 charges pressed

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registrar's office around 2:30pm. Of the accused, Latif and Akram were arrested on June 10 and June 20 respectively, while Sirajul, who went into hiding after issuance of a warrant of arrest by the tribunal, was arrested on July 21.

On August 25, the investigation agency of the international crimes tribunals submitted the final probe report to the Chief Prosecutor's Office of the international crimes tribunals.

ASP Helal Uddin, the investigation officer, began the probe on May 21, 2013.

PROBE FINDINGS

Of the eight charges, four have been brought against Sirajul alone for killing around 666 people, two against all of them for killing 47 people and two against Khan Akram and Abdul Latif for converting 200 Hindus and killing a person.

According to the probe report, Sirajul on May 13, 1971 was involved in the killing of 40-50 Hindus at Ranjitpur in the district. Their houses were also plundered.

On May 21, 1971, an armed group killed around 600 to 700 Hindus when several thousand Hindus gathered at Kalimandir in Dakra of Rampal of the district in order to go to refugee camps in India.

Nineteen civilians of Besorgati and Kandapara under Bagerhat Sadar were detained, tortured and killed on June 18, 1971. Sirajul is found to have been involved in the killings, the probe report reads.

AZHAR'S CASE

The defence of Jamaat leader ATM

Azharul Islam have meanwhile completed placing closing arguments before the three-member tribunal-1.

The defence yesterday told the tribunal that the prosecution had failed to prove the charges brought against Azharul on his alleged involvement in crimes against humanity.

Pointing out the prosecution's arguments where they claimed that minor inconsistencies could have occurred as the incident was taken place more than four decades ago, defence counsel Shishir Manir argued that major discrepancies were found in the testimony of witnesses.

He quoted testimony of a rape victim, who gave different versions regarding the duration of her pregnancy while being tortured at Rangpur Town Hall Torture Camp.

Earlier, the prosecution claimed that Rangpur Town Hall was used as a torture camp and prayed to the tribunal to take the matter into their judicial notice when the tribunal found the evidence produced by prosecution insufficient.

Shishir argued that among the three judges, only the chairman of the tribunal had knowledge of Rangpur Town Hall Torture Camp, which means the use of Rangpur Town Hall as a torture camp is not a matter of common knowledge and could not be taken into judicial notice.

Azharul faces six charges for his alleged involvement in crimes against humanity and genocide. He was produced before the tribunal yesterday.

Wedding photo

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tower, had pinned the photo to his office cubicle, but did not expect to see it again after the terror attack in 2001.

But every September, Elizabeth Stringer Keefe has posted image of the six people at a wedding online to try and reunite it with its owner.

She was finally successful after her tweet was re-posted 35,000 times and after Mahe saw it he sent Stringer Keefe a message on LinkedIn.

"Attention wonderful world: ALL SIX PEOPLE ARE ALIVE AND WELL AND I HAVE JUST SPOKEN TO ONE OF THEM!!!!!!!!!!!!!! #Happyending #911photo," Keefe tweeted on Sunday.

Mahe is pictured in the background of the photo, taken at a friend's wedding in Aspen - he was on his way to work when the attack occurred.

The pair talked for the first time over the phone and hope to meet up soon.

Mahe told ABC News: "On 9/11 I saw the worst of humanity, (but) on 9/12 I saw the best of humanity."

"Elizabeth [Stringer Keefe] is 100

percent 9/12."

"The story is Elizabeth, the story is persistence and trying to help someone she didn't even know," said Mahe, who now lives in Colorado with his wife and children.

The photo came into Ms Stringer Keefe's possession back in October of 2001, when a friend who uncovered it in some of the rubble near the sight passed it off to her, and asked that she do something meaningful with it.

"There's so much beauty and happiness in the photo, and whatever relationship it had to 9/11, I wanted to care for it until I could return it to its owner," said Stringer Keefe, who is an assistant professor at Lesley University.

Mahe also contacted Christine Loreda, the bride in the photograph, who said she felt the photo was a "great memento of resilience."

"I think it's nice to know that people out there care so much for strangers," Mrs Loreda said.

"It gives me confidence in human-

JP turmoil intensifies

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parliamentary party meeting. Mujibul Haque Chunnun claimed the party was united under the leadership of Ershad and Raushan.

"There is no division or conflict in the party."

Asked why Ershad, Bablu and others were not present in the parliamentary party meeting, he said it was their personal decision. Replying to a query about the separate meeting, he claimed to have been unaware of it.

The feud between loyalists of Ershad and his wife Raushan took a turn for the worse following his unilateral decision on Tuesday to relieve Ranga and Tajul of the presidium posts.

Ershad made the sudden move following recent anti-Ershad statement from Ranga and Tajul regarding debates over quitting the cabinet and backing Kazi Feroz Rashid as the deputy leader of the opposition.

In the JP parliamentary party meeting on September 9, Ranga and Tajul lambasted Ershad for his statement that JP leaders should quit the cabinet to play a stronger role as the main opposi-

tion in parliament.

During discussions with his loyal MPs, Ershad expressed his grievances saying why they would attend the party's parliamentary meeting when they were not invited, JP sources said.

But during the briefing, Chunnun said all JP MPs, including the party chief, were invited to the meeting.

A JP MP, who was present at the Ershad-led meeting, told The Daily Star, "During discussions with us, Ershad also said he cannot join the meeting where Ranga is present."

According to Chunnun, the JP parliamentary party yesterday decided to remain in the cabinet until further decision and requested Ershad to withdraw his decision about Ranga and Tajul forgiving their mistakes.

He added they would brief the press about the party stance on the 16th amendment bill seeking restoration of parliament's power to impeach judges after the Jatiya Sangsad committee on law ministry submits its scrutiny report to the House.

But the JS body already had placed the report in parliament on the day.

Amendments hurt judiciary

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democratic and balanced.

The fourth amendment in January 1975 curtailed the parliament's authority, empowering instead the president to remove SC judges.

On this change, the report said it was done to keep consistency with the change of the government system.

Through the fourth amendment, the country switched to the presidential form of government, discarding parliamentary democracy.

Article 96 was again amended through unconstitutional means in 1979 during Gen Ziaur Rahman's military rule.

In fact, Zia modified the article in 1978 through a martial law order and introduced the Supreme Judicial Council to remove SC judges, by curtailing the president's powers.

The Fifth Amendment in 1979 validated this change along with all other amendments to the constitution made by Zia through martial law orders and all activities of the martial law regime since August 15, 1975.

The committee termed "ill-motivated" the two other modifications to the article brought by the seventh and the 14th amendments in 1986 and 2004 by JP and BNP-led governments.

Through the seventh amendment, the retirement age of SC judges was

increased to 65 from 62 and the 14th amendment raised it to 67.

The 2004 amendment, the committee said, was aimed at making a particular individual the head of the caretaker government at the end of 2006, which led to the declaration of emergency rule (on January 11, 2007), hampering the constitutional process.

The committee, however, defended the proposed changes to the article to empower parliament to remove SC judges, despite growing controversies over the move.

"This amendment was proposed to return to the spirit of the constitution of 1972. I want to firmly say that there is no political motive behind it," said Suranjit Sengupta, chief of the parliamentary body, in the report.

The committee recommended the House pass the amendment bill by scrapping the preamble of the bill and the statement of the law minister attached to the copies of the original bill.

It said the preamble of the bill included irrelevant information about the previous amendments, which may create confusion.

The committee also found irrelevant facts in the law minister's statement and rewrote it.

Officials in the parliament secretariat said the bill might be passed on September 17.