

Korean EPZ in trouble

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Without having the land deed, YoungOne could not offer them any plot.

Now the land ministry has begun the process for getting back the land on the grounds that YoungOne had not been able to set up industries there, ministry sources said.

"We can't give them so much land when they failed to develop it in so many years," said Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, state minister for land and lawmaker from the area.

"How much land will be given to the company and how much will be taken back is now under discussion. The transfer deed will be issued after that," he told The Daily Star recently.

He alleged KEPZ officials were "doing things wilfully" and the Korean company was trying to expand the area by cutting hills.

"As per the lease," Saifuzzaman went on, "they are supposed to avoid mosques, graveyards and schools in the area of the KEPZ but they are not following the rules. They prevent locals from burying the dead and from using walkways. You can't go for development fighting with locals."

He also said, "I am the local lawmaker plus state minister for land but I haven't seen them come to me and discuss the issues."

Other foreign investors were looking for land to set up industries, said the state minister, indicating that part of the KEPZ site could be allocated to them.

In recent days, the government has been promising Japanese and Chinese investors land and other facilities.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the ground-breaking of KEPZ on October 31, 1999, had pledged full support for the zone.

But the company faced hurdles at every step, from getting the environmental clearance to electricity and water supply. It got operational licence eight years after the ground-breaking.

The environmental clearance was issued after 10 years, in 2009, and that too was cancelled three years later and then given back after five months.

The Department of Environment (DoE) had cancelled the clearance in March 2012, alleging the KEPZ was cutting hills and damaging the environment. The certificate was returned once the allegation was found untrue.

But a case filed in this connection against KEPZ officials is yet to be withdrawn.

"We were supposed to get 160 megawatts of electricity in phases and 80 million cubic feet of gas a day. We got only 14 megawatts and no gas supply whatsoever as of today," KEPZ Managing Director Mohammad Hasan Nasir told this correspondent.

About 84MW electricity from a 100MW power plant built for the KEPZ is being supplied to others. There were no telephone connections and fresh water supply, the MD said.

The authorities concerned cut off electricity supply in 2012, forcing the KEPZ to run its factories on diesel generators. The supply was restored after more than a year following an order from the Supreme Court.

"If you don't provide us with the basic utility services and create obstacles to developing the land, you can't accuse us of having failed. Rather, we started production two years into the ground-breaking and we are setting up factories against all odds."

On the land being taken back, Nasir said the government could do it by force but it would be unethical and illegal. "It will seriously affect foreign investor confidence," he said, adding the KEPZ authorities would go to court and, if necessary, to an international tribunal for justice.

"Now our main concern is not development and investment but legal battles to protect the KEPZ land from being taken over," said the MD, who and some other officials and employees of KEPZ are facing over a dozen cases, including two attempted murder cases.

Many in Chittagong believe some local ruling AL leaders and businessmen were behind the troubles the KEPZ was facing. The land has become very lucrative after development. There is also an indirect pressure on the KEPZ to let go of a part of the land, they added.

The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) is another agency to cause the KEPZ trouble. It gave fund to Boirag union parishad to illegally develop an earthen road inside the zone last year.

As police took no action, the KEPZ authorities went to the court. The Chittagong DC visited the spot asking both sides to keep the road as it was. But nothing could stop developing the road.

Despite all these difficulties, the Korean company has developed a substantial area by turning the barren hillocks into a productive industrial area spending \$250 million. It constructed 21km of roads, housing for investors and officials, 17 lakes and planted 1.6 million trees.

YoungOne set up seven shoe and garment factories creating jobs for 6,000 locals. Four more factories would start operations by December.

Once fully operational, the KEPZ would employ 3.5 lakh people.

It has plans to set up a school, a residential university, a business development park and an IT park and a hospital but land-related complications are delaying those.

YoungOne, which started working in Bangladesh in 1980, has industries in Dhaka and Chittagong EPZs with 60,000 workers. It has operations in 12 other countries.

During the ground-breaking, Hasina hoped that YoungOne would be able to showcase KEPZ as a model for private sector industrial development in Bangladesh. The KEPZ officials said it would be possible only if



Even though the graveyard is way behind, locals of Anwara in Chittagong set up a barbed-wire fence and placed a sign on a tree claiming the land inside the KEPZ to be part of the graveyard. Inset, A school built inside the EPZ puts temporary pillars to show that it is outside the EPZ.

PHOTO: STAR

Campaign continues

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develop the land in the last 16 years.

The Chittagong DC is backing the state minister with sweeping comments against the KEPZ authorities.

The local body chairmen and members are working to prove that the position of state minister and local administration was correct.

Some leading businessmen as well as politicians of ruling Awami League and BNP are fuelling the situation from behind the scene in the hope of getting plots once the government takes back part of the KEPZ land, sources said.

Former Chittagong mayor and city AL president ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury at a public meeting on September 2 said some 200 factories could be set up on KEPZ land.

But the authorities were busy making casino and golf course, he said and vowed to foil such attempts.

A week after joining, DC Mesbah Uddin of Chittagong told a meeting on law and order on August 13 that only two-and-a-half factories were

built in the KEPZ. He said should be given such vast land.

Mesbah also claimed the prime minister was annoyed with the KEPZ.

The DC, carrying on the anti-KEPZ stance of his predecessor, told The Daily Star recently, "The government is a little unhappy with the KEPZ as it failed to develop the area in 16 years."

"I have learnt that locals cannot use the graveyards and bury the dead there," he said, claiming that he had unofficially visited the KEPZ twice and found just one factory running.

There are a number of designated graveyards on the KEPZ land. But many dead were buried on fresh land at the site.

"Whenever we ask them not to bury their dead on new land, locals attack us with sticks and sharp weapons," said Muktadir Islam, manager (security) of KEPZ.

During a recent visit to the KEPZ set up on 2,492 acres of land, The Daily Star reporters found graves on

fresh land inside its area. There was no sign of the KEPZ developing the land near the graves.

But it was seen locals had uprooted several boundary pillars of the graveyards and set up those well inside the KEPZ area to make that land look like a new graveyard. They were also cutting hills and taking away sand from the KEPZ land.

The authorities have filed at least a dozen cases with Karnaphuli Police Station this year alone against the burying of the dead on their land.

Hardly any day passes without any untoward incident centring the KEPZ. Theft, snatching, illegal intrusion, vandalising KEPZ vehicles and even kidnapping its employees have been common occurrences.

A bloody clash took place on August 6 over the burial of a dead. Locals filed a murder case with the police accusing Muktadir and KEPZ Managing Director Mohammad Hasan Nasir.

As many as 39 complaints, cases and general diaries (GD) were filed

with the police in connection with forcibly burying the dead, unauthorised intrusion and theft of sand.

Boirag Union Parishad Chairman Nawab Ali, once a worker of the KEPZ and now a contractor, is at the centre of fomenting trouble. He is directly instigating locals against the KEPZ over burial, walkways and a playground. Boirag's vice-chairman Badoni Member and Uthman Union Parishad Chairman Didarul Alam are also blamed for the situation.

Denying the allegation, Nawab blames the EPZ authorities for not allowing locals to bury the dead in the graveyards. "The KEPZ claims that the graveyards are under its jurisdiction and that the villagers should not have access to those," said Nawab, a former employee of the KEPZ.

The KEPZ authorities said they had filed a dozen complaints with the DC office asking the latter to mark the graveyard.

The DC said a meeting between the KEPZ and locals would be convened soon to solve the problems.

Split in small parties

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parties to pledge that they would stay with the combine.

"During the meeting, Fakhrul Islam Alamgir wanted to know if any of the component parties had any discontent," said the secretary general of a party in the alliance.

Fakhrul also called upon the alliance leaders not to allow themselves to be swayed by any quarters, added the leader who attended the meeting.

The components are falling apart at a time when the BNP-led combine is preparing to wage an anti-government, first since its utter failure in resisting the January 5 election boycotted by the alliance.

BNP policymakers, however, blame the government for the intra-alliance friction.

To foil the combine's planned movement, the government with the help of intelligence agencies is trying to create a rift among the top alliance leaders,

they alleged.

But some insiders said there indeed are some "issues" that are making the small partners in the alliance aggrieved.

BNP's negligence towards others, taking decision arbitrarily, failure in the previous anti-government movement, lack of coordination in the alliance and frustration over the slow progress of the planned movement are causing fissures inside the combine, according to the sources.

Some Islamic parties in the alliance are also dissatisfied at the inclusion of a faction of Shamyabadi Dal, a left leaning party, in the coalition.

A number of alliance leaders told The Daily Star over the past few months that "lucrative offers" from the government side had been made to them for quitting the BNP-led camp.

Yesterday, leader of the NDP faction Alamgir Mazumder demanded that

Khaleda announce movement on pro-people issues, clear BNP's stance on religion-based politics and the unsettled disputes with India, and mount pressure on India to resolve water-sharing issue.

"Otherwise, the NDP will quit the BNP-led alliance," he said at a press conference at a city hotel yesterday.

Alamgir, who was NDP's secretary general, also claimed the party presidium members on September 12 expelled NDP chairman Golam Mortaza, and made him acting chairman and Ali Nur Rahman acting secretary general.

Contacted, Golam Mortaza rejected the claim and said it's actually Alamgir who had been expelled from the NDP on Friday night for his anti-party activities.

"The NDP is with the 20-party alliance and will be so in the days ahead," he asserted.

SIBLINGS' SUICIDE Frustrations turn fatal

JAMIL MAHMOUD

The Green Day number "Wake me up when September ends" was his favourite. He loved to sing this song to his mother with an acoustic guitar every now and then.

"Summer has come and passed/the innocent can never last/wake me up when September ends," Jayasree Zaman, mother of Alim, recalls the first three lines of the song.

However, Muhammad bin Alim, the 14-year-old ninth-grader, will not wake up from his eternal sleep even after September ends.

Alim and his 18-year-old sister Chirasree, an A-level student, committed suicide by hanging themselves at their residence in the capital's Uttara on Monday.

"Who will sing me the song now? How can I hear that innocent voice again?" cried Jayasree while recalling fond memories of her children. She does not know if she will be able to live a normal life ever again.

The teenage siblings were found hanging from window grills in their respective rooms with their feet touching the floor. Their flat is on the fourth floor of a 10-storey building.

Sources at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue, where autopsies of their bodies were performed, said they committed suicide.

Alim was a student at the Belmont International School while Chirasree was preparing for sitting her A-level exams privately. The latter was accorded a reception from The Daily Star last year for her brilliant result in O-level.

The siblings were very sensitive and had a higher sense of self-esteem, said Jayasree. Both of them were caring about her and they often used to blame their father Alimul Haque, who had abandoned them seven years back, for their recent hardships,

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Lawyers to boycott

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at all bar associations today to press home their demand.

AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon, a member of the bar council, nominated by pro-BNP lawyers, proposed the programmes which was later approved by the meeting by voice votes at the auditorium of Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA).

However, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam, ex-officio chairman of the council, a statutory autonomous body, disapproved the decision of court boycott claiming that it was beyond the jurisdiction of the bar council.

Rejecting all calls for soliciting public opinion and bringing some changes to the bill, parliament on Wednesday unanimously passed the 16th constitutional amendment bill, empowering itself to remove Supreme Court judges for misbehaviour and incapacity.

Announcing the agitation programmes, Mahbub Uddin, also the secretary of SCBA, said the amendment must be abolished for upholding the freedom and dignity of the judiciary.

Khandaker Mahbub Hossain, vice-chairman of the council, said the government passed the "sudden amendment" at a time when the acceptability of parliament is "under question."

"If the impeachment power is given to parliament, the judges of the higher judiciary [Supreme Court] will turn into chess pieces of politics.... Judges won't be able to discharge their duties independently due to political pressure," added Mahbub, also the SCBA president.

The council demanded the government set specific rules for appointment of judges to the High Court and set up a separate secretariat for lower courts immediately "to save courts from the control of the law ministry".

It also asked the government to

take immediate steps for a fresh and neutral national election to form an "elected democratic government."

Speaking at the meeting, around 30 representatives from different bar associations denounced the latest constitutional amendment by the House and sought bar council's directives to have the amendment scrapped.

"The government had an ulterior motive for amending the constitution.... It will be dangerous for the judiciary. There is no option but to waging a movement to cancel it," said Aftab Uddin Ahmed, president of Bogra Bar Association.

Tania Amir, a member of the council, however, apparently disapproved the council's stance and resolution on the constitutional amendment.

"Simple cancellation of the amendment will not solve the problem," observed Tania, one of three members of the council elected from Sammitito Ainjibi Shamannay Parishad, a pro-Awami League forum. The rest of the 11 members are from the pro-BNP panel.

"We've to discuss the freedom of judiciary and also its accountability. That's why we have to find the right solution [to the issue]," she mentioned.

She left the auditorium just before the resolution was adopted by the meeting.

Bar council members AJ Mohammad Ali, Sanaullah Miah and Golam Mostafa Khan spoke, among others.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told The Daily Star last night that Mahbub Hossain, as the vice-chairman of the bar council, has been "abusing his power for political motives".

The council is to regulate enrolment of lawyers, and monitor their professional conducts and manner, but boycotting courts does not fall

6 suspects held

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During primary interrogation, they confessed to their involvement in the killing, the Rab official said.

The arrestees told the media that they wanted to kill Kala Chand, the plaintiff in the murder case, in order to reoccupy the railway land which Kala Chand snatched from their possession. But they shot dead three people and injured one as they could not find him.

On August 28, a group of 21 assailants gunned down three people and injured another at a house in Sonalibagh of Moghbazar.

The dead were Ranu Akhter Brishti, 28, Munna, 20, and Billal Hossain, 25. The injured was Hridoy, brother of Ranu.

The case was filed by Ranu's brother Kala Chand against 15 named persons including Shah Alam alias Kailla Babu and six anonymous people.

Eighteen days into the murder,

Kailla Babu, the main accused in the triple murder case, was shot dead in a gunfight with detectives in Dhaka.

The arrestees are cadres of top terrorist Zishan group and accused in several cases with different police stations in the capital, Rab officials said.

At the Rab office, the arrestees narrated how they got involved in the killing.

Around 2:00pm on August 28, Saifullah Siam, one of the detainees, met Kailla Babu on Rampura bridge and decided to kill Kala Chand along with his sister in order to grab the Railway land.

Later in the evening, Siam carried a bag with three machetes and met Kailla Babu at Hatirjheel. Kailla Babu also had two pistols with him at that time.

Later, the duo met Ramzan, Rubel, Shafin and Al-Amin near Banasree area

as per planning and headed for Sonalibagh. Maruf joined them at the entrance of an alley in Sonalibagh.

They found Billal, Munna and Hridoy under a tin-shed in the alley and seized around 15 yaba tablets and 10 bottles of phensidyl from their possession. After a while, Kailla Babu, Ramzan and Siam opened fire on Billal, Munna and Hridoy. The criminals then went to Ranu's house situated at the first floor of a tin-shed building.

Rab claimed that Kailla Babu promised to give Siam Tk 2.50 lakh for the killing but did not do so. As a result, Siam tried to kill Kailla Babu and also wanted to take control of the area.

Asked if Kala Chand would also be arrested as he was allegedly involved in criminal activities, the Rab media wing director said they were looking into this and would take actions accordingly.