

KISHOREGANJ WAR CRIMES Fifth witness reveals Hasan-led torching of his house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A fifth prosecution witness yesterday stated how Razakars led by fugitive Syed Md Hasan Ali set fire to his house in Kishoreganj's Sachailpurbopara on April 27 during the 1971 Liberation War, just four days after he had left for combat training in India. The Pakistani occupation army and one of their auxiliary forces, Razakars, set up camps across Kishoreganj while he took part in the Liberation War in Sunamganj following a 28-day training with 10-12 locals, Nurul Haque alias Lal Miah said in his deposition before the three-member International Crimes Tribunal-1.

Returning to Kishoreganj's Tarail near the end of June 1971, he came to know that Moulana Moslehuddin's son had become president of Peace Committee of Kishoreganj Mahakuma and his son Hasan commander of Razakars of Tarail Thana.

Nurul said Hasan killed one Tofazzal Hossain Bhuiyan at Konabhawal village, 12 persons of Paulpara in Shimulhati village, two Hindus of

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Bigger dictator than me emerged

Says Ershad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad yesterday said bigger dictators than him emerged in the country after he was relinquished from power in 1990. The former president was addressing a cultural programme organised by Amra Surjamukhi at The Daily Star Centre in the capital where his son Eric presided.

Pointing to his position in society, Ershad said, "When the announcer uttered former president and army chief while inviting me for speech, I thought that she would call me a former dictator too."

"After my resignation, an era started that marks vengeful politics and killing—where politicians consider their opposition as enemy. I believe that my regime was better than these periods, that it was not an autocracy," said Ershad, also special envoy to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Since his resignation, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina have ruled the country most of the time, and both parties had JP as an ally at different times. Defending his fickleness in political speeches, Ershad said he always spoke meaningful words. "I am not a politician. I am a soldier. I can't talk like politicians. I always say which I really want to mean. The speeches of politicians have other meanings. Mine are unequivocal."

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Anti-clockwise from bottom left, five-century-old Bheluar Dighi fenced off by illegal structures, mostly shops, in Pahartali of Chittagong city. Some are concrete structures encroaching several feet into the huge pond which only three decades ago drew visitors for its spacious view. A thick bush of weeds off the north bank, another sign of railway authorities' negligence in protecting the historic waterbody. A concrete mosque encroaches on it from the north bank.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

SC clears way for tomorrow's NCCI polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday cleared the way for holding an election to Narsingdi Chamber of Commerce and Industries (NCCI) tomorrow.

Chamber judge of the apex court stayed for six weeks a High Court order that had halted the process for holding election to NCCI.

There is no legal bar to hold election to NCCI tomorrow following the SC order, AM Aminuddin, a lawyer for three candidates of the election, told The Daily Star.

Yesterday, Justice Md Imman Ali, chamber judge of the Appellate Division of the SC, passed the order after hearing a petition filed by three candidates seeking stay on the HC order.

The judge also asked them to file a leave to appeal petition with the SC against the HC order in the next six weeks.

Following a writ petition, the HC on December 14 stayed the process for holding election to NCCI for the next three months.

The HC also issued a rule upon the authorities concerned to explain why the candidatures of three voters of NCCI should not be cancelled, as they are also

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Grabbers gobbling Bheluar Dighi destroying allures

MINHAJ UDDIN, Ctg

In the 1980s, people had a full view of Bheluar Dighi from all four sides from a distance. Its panoramic beauty drew visitors from far-flung places. Three decades later, only one bank is free.

In violation of law, small shops were built one after another surrounding the five-century-old pond. Bangladesh Railway (East Zone), its custodian, however, is blasé.

"Its beauty has been snatched," said Belal Uddin, an expatriate in Saudi Arabia, who grew up frolicking around the pond, now sprawling over 13.58 acres of land in Pahartali of Chittagong city. "Now it

is hard to call to mind its past allures."

Rakib Hasan, a university student, said it could no longer be called Bhelua Sundori's Dighi (Sundori means beautiful). "The beauty is lost."

The legend goes that Bhelua, the charming wife of Chand Shawdagar, a rich businessman living somewhere on the east bank of the Jamuna river, was once abducted to Chittagong by a merchant smitten with her. As punishment, then ruler of Gaud executed the abductor and dug the dighi in place of his house compound in 1519-1533.

The story is written in Hamidullah Khan's "Ahadisul

Kawanin", dubbed the first book on Chittagong's history.

Originally, Bheluar Dighi was much larger.

"Now all but the west bank are occupied by illegal structures," said Nasiruddin Mahmud, a dweller of Pahartali. "It was completely free in the early 1980s."

Abdul Bari, railway divisional estate officer, said the government acquired the pond in 1897 for Assam Bengal Railway, which built houses for its staff on the east bank. In 1980s, the authorities leased out the south and east banks to shop owners, he said.

In a recent visit, this correspondent saw scores of tin and brick

shops, some of which encroached several feet into the pond.

Recognising the illegal occupation, Bari said that as per the lease agreement, the shops and the banks must be at least 20 feet apart.

The railway authorities did not lease out the north bank but a brick mosque was built well inside the pond and construction of several shops followed.

On condition of anonymity, a Pahartali businessman said the encroachers had connections to some railway high-ups, and thus enjoying impunity.

Abul Kalam, 70, a resident, said such a huge pond could not be built

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Dhanmondi to get Indian visa centre

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Indian High Commission in Dhaka will open another Indian Visa Application Centre (IVAC) at House No 24, Road No 2 in the capital's Dhanmondi on January 1.

The State Bank of India (SBI) as the agent of the commission will accept all categories of visa applications and deliver visas, said a press release yesterday.

It will receive the applications from 8:00am to 1:00pm and deliver visas from 3:00pm to 6:00pm.

Such facilities are now available in Gulshan, Motijheel, Chittagong, Sylhet, Khulna and Rajshahi.

From January 1, visa applicants will have to pay Tk 600 at the IVACs in Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi and Tk 700 in Sylhet and Khulna.

A special counter for medical emergency visas is available at IVAC, Gulshan. Medical emergency visa applications may be deposited on a walk-in basis.

From January 1, applicants will have to scan and upload their photographs in the designated space provided in the online application forms.



Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad addresses a cultural programme organised by Amra Surjamukhi at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

CROSS-BORDER ELECTRICITY TRADE South Asian energy regulators finalise plan

UNB, Dhaka

South Asian energy regulators in a two-day meeting that concluded in Dhaka yesterday finalised a plan to promote cross-border electricity trade and agreed to remove the regulatory barriers in this regard.

"We had a very successful meeting, and all the regulators finalised a plan of action to address regulatory issues to enhance cross-border electricity trade," said Chairman of Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission AR Khan.

He was briefing journalists on the proceedings of the meeting at a hotel in the capital.

The first-ever "Council of Saarc Energy Regulators" meeting was hosted by the commission.

The Saarc Secretariat extended its full support by sending its Director Mohammad Ibrahim Ghafoori to the conference.

Participants from all eight Saarc nations - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the

Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka -- discussed different issues, particularly a decision of the last Saarc meeting in Kathmandu to enhance cross-border electricity trade.

AR Khan said the Saarc region has a huge potential to generate electricity, and its energy consumption is the lowest in the world.

"So, we discussed how the Saarc nations can easily buy electricity from each other through cross-border trade," he added.

The meeting adopted a nine-point resolution, including sharing of knowledge, experiences and expertise among the officials of the Saarc nations and recommendations for forming a regional energy regulatory body under a Saarc umbrella.

AR Khan said the decisions and resolutions of the meeting will be put forward to the governments of the member countries through the Saarc Secretariat.

"These will take final shape after endorsement by the Saarc nations," he added.

4 more cases filed against Tarique

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Command Council and its Chittagong unit organised rallies and formed human chains before the Dhaka and Chittagong press clubs respectively.

They also submitted memorandums in this regard to the deputy commissioners.

Awami League's United Kingdom unit leaders, at a press conference in a Sylhet city restaurant, declared Tarique "persona non grata" in Bangladesh and the UK, saying he was not mentally sound and was an enemy of the nation.

The elder son of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, addressing a programme BNP's London unit organised in East

London on December 15 marking Victory Day, said Bangabandhu was a "big Razakar for having banned the Awami League himself dubbing it as a party of thieves."

Early this month, Tarique termed Bangabandhu a "Pakbandhu" (friend of Pakistan) for which he is facing an arrest warrant from another Dhaka court.

Metropolitan Magistrate in Dhaka Md Mahbubur Rahman issued one warrant in a case filed by Jubo League leader of Dhaka (north) unit Monir Hossain Mollah and asked the Paltan Police Station officer-in-charge to submit a progress report by January 22

next year.

Senior Judicial Magistrate Towhidul Islam in Dinajpur issued another in a case filed by Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University unit Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) President Arun Kanti.

Advocate Babul Akter filed one with the Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court of Madaripur.

The last was filed by Chittagong's Chandanaish upazila BCL leader Mizanur Rahman with the court of Chittagong District Judicial Magistrate Farjana Yasmin who issued the summons.

Road crashes

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A man was killed and two others were injured when a potato-laden truck overturned in Birganj upazila of Dinajpur on Sunday night, said our Dinajpur correspondent.

The deceased was Md Faruk Hossain, 25, of the upazila, said police.

The injured are undergoing treatment at Dinajpur Medical College Hospital. The trio was travelling on the back of truck.

In Moulvibazar, an unidentified man died and eight others were injured on Sunday when two auto-rickshaws collided head-on in Srimangal upazila of the district, reports our Moulvibazar correspondent.



Fortis Escorts Heart Institute in collaboration with AFC Health Ltd recently inaugurated a cardiac institute in Khulna. Present at the function, among others, were Dr Ashok Seth, chairman of Fortis Escorts Heart Institute and of Cardiology Council, Fortis Group of Hospitals, and Dr Masihur Rahman, economic affairs adviser to the prime minister.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

JS body blames negligence, inaction

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School, Bonoful Government Primary School, Abdul Mannan Government Primary School and Khalilur Rahman Government Primary School.

Jahangir said they found many high schools which had taken temporary permission to start academic activities on

primary schools' compounds grabbing classrooms and lands while on some kitchen markets, shops and slums grew up.

"We will recommend setting up such a (land related) division... (and) a hardline stance on evicting influential individuals occupying the lands," he said.

They would also suggest providing

legal assistance to schools facing complexities and demarcating through a government surveyor lands occupied by high schools, he said.

Jahangir said their visits would continue and, once complete, they would submit a report to the standing committee as soon as possible.