

# Classes, exams must go on

UGC asks all universities to stay open during hartal, blockade

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The University Grants Commission has asked all public and private universities to take regular classes and hold examinations amid hartals and ongoing indefinite blockade enforced by BNP-led 20-party alliance.

"All universities should continue with their academic activities at their own initiatives and reduce session jam," said UGC Chairman AK Azad Chowdhury after a meeting with the vice-chancellors of all public and private universities yesterday.

The chief of the UGC, the statutory apex body for higher education, has also advised using weekly and public holidays to make up for the backlogs in the academic calendar caused by the political turmoil.

The UGC held the meeting following a High Court directive that ordered the authorities concerned to take measures to keep all the education institutions across the country open during shutdowns.

The blockade that rolled into 55 straight days coupled with almost continuous hartals has heavily affected higher education with most of the universities failing to take classes.

Earlier on Saturday, the Association of Private Universities of Bangladesh announced that they would carry on their academic activities from Sunday.

Most of the VCs attending yester-

day's meeting agreed to take classes and hold exams amid hartals and blockade, but some of them expressed concern over security matters and sought assistance from law-enforcement agencies.

Dhaka University VC Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique said hartals and blockade were ruining the future of the students who want to attend their classes.

Mentioning that the classes and exams were on at DU, he said, "Yet there always remains a risk."

Prof Abdus Sattar, VC of Jessore Science and Technology University, said the office of his university had been open, but they only give classes on holidays.

"I can take risk of my own life but not of my students," he observed.

Khulna University VC Prof Mohammad Faequzzaman said they could not take normal classes as many students lived off campus for whom the authorities could not provide transport services.

University of Development Alternative VC Prof Emajuddin Ahmed said they usually did not miss the classes in this situation. If missed, they take additional classes, he added.

Bangladesh Agricultural University VC Prof Rafiqul Haque proposed to enact a law to ban hartal.

Currently, around seven lakh students are studying at 115 public and private universities except the National University and the Open University.

# Work starts

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sacrificing animals]. We told them not to do so. But they did not listen to us," said a senior official, preferring anonymity.

"Finally, we had to allow them, but we also ensured that the animals were slaughtered according to Islamic laws," he said, adding that no Bangladeshi senior officials of the project joined the programme on "religious" ground.

"We have started test piling as per our schedule of work," Padma Bridge Project Director Shafiqul Islam told The Daily Star over the phone. The test piling would be completed by March and the load test would be conducted soon, he added.

The pillars of the bridge would go as

deep as 120 metres, the deepest of any bridge in the world, and 2,500-tonne pile-drivers would hammer them in.

The concrete pillars are being built in China, Singapore and Germany. A total of 300 pillars will be used in the bridge.

The 6.15km-long two-tier Padma Bridge with provision for vehicles running above and trains below would be built with concrete and steel.

The construction work of the bridge is progressing despite the countrywide blockade and hartal, said the project director, adding that the construction materials are now being carried through river routes instead of road.

The project director also hoped that the construction of the bridge would be completed by 2018.



A group of wildlife experts spotted a greater hooped-lark at a char of the Jamuna at Kazipur in Sirajganj last month. It was never sighted in Bangladesh before, said a release of the International Union Conservation of Nature (IUCN) issued yesterday. It is a breeding resident of arid, desert and semi-desert regions of North Africa, through the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

PHOTO COURTESY: ASHIS KUMAR DATTA

# No case ends in verdict

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Charge sheets of cases under this law must be submitted within 60 days from the date of filing. And the trial, in Sessions Judge's Court, must be completed in 360 days from the day it opens. But neither the police nor the court can finish the job within the stipulated time. The law is mum on such failures.

Lawyers dealing the cases blame investigating officers' apathy for the slow progress. They say trial should not take more than six months given these cases have only eight to ten witnesses.

"But the investigating officers show little interest to produce witnesses during hearing. So, the court shifts the dates," said one lawyer, preferring anonymity.

Gold smuggling in the country has seen an alarming rise over the last two years. Detectives say transnational syndicates are using Bangladesh as a route to smuggle gold into India.

Almost every week in the past two years, customs officials seized smuggled gold at Dhaka and Chittagong airports.

The highest volume of seizure took place at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, where at least 120 incidents of gold haul happened in the last one year alone. During the period, customs officials and law enforcers seized more than 1,000kg gold worth around Tk 450 crore from various airports and other places.

Most of those arrested over the

smuggling are carriers, who work as mediums. They know only two persons -- the one who hands him the consignment, an air ticket and some money and the person receiving the package, investigators say.

Often, the carters do not know what they are carrying or even the names of the two persons he deals with. So when they get caught, they cannot give any important information to police about the smugglers. Eventually, they come out of jail with the syndicates remaining always out of reach.

Only recently, detectives arrested a few big shots directly involved with gold smuggling, and got some names of local and international smugglers from them.

Asked, an investigator at the Airport Police Station said none of the cases was settled as the accused and their patrons managed to have the hearing dates deferred on different pleas. Sometimes, prosecution lawyers also submit time petitions.

Shah Alam, officer-in-charge of the station, said it often took time to find witnesses and enough evidence, causing delay in the trial.

The airport police are investigating around 70 percent of the total cases while detectives the rest.

Alam said they pressed charges in a number of cases and hoped to see some of the smugglers get punished.

## DEPARTMENTAL CASES

Police cases apart, customs officials file departmental cases under when they recover abandoned gold. The probe, done by customs officials, aims to track down the smugglers.

In the last one year, customs officials in Dhaka filed around 30 departmental cases over the recovery of about 100kg gold, said Joint Commissioner of Customs Kazi Muhammad Ziauddin.

In Chittagong, customs officials seized 268kg gold in the first seven months of last year in 136 incidents, over which the department filed 14 police cases against 122 departmental ones.

In some cases, customs officials hand over the gold to its claimer after collecting tax and a nominal fine under the customs law and NBR rules, sources said.

A section of unscrupulous customs officials enter underhand dealings for the handover, an allegation customs officials refute.

Sometimes powerful syndicate members make government high-ups call customs officials to yield the gold to its claimer, an investigator said.

Moinul Khan, director general of customs intelligence unit of National Board of Revenue (NBR), said his unit seized 722kg smuggled gold in 71 incidents in the last 18 months. They filed 70 cases against 92 people in

these connections.

Only one incident in which 43kg gold was recovered recently is under departmental probe.

Asked if there was any link between departmental cases and rewards for officials, he said there was no scope of getting reward until the case is disposed of.

Under customs rules, officials concerned get cash reward worth 10 percent of the recovered gold.

"We are driven by our responsibility. We know gold and currency smuggling has indirect relations with other crimes. The seizure of such huge volume of gold indicates we are working tirelessly," the NBR official said.

He cited an example of a case filed in 1996 over seizure of gold worth about Tk 2 crore. He claimed he was yet to be rewarded for the seizure.

Joint Commissioner of customs Kazi Muhammad Ziauddin said, "We do not work for reward. I was posted at the [Dhaka] airport customs six months ago, I got no reward."

A police official said the customs took one and a half years to file a police case over the recovery of 124kg gold on July 24, 2013.

"Considering the volume, a police case should have been filed. A criminal investigation should have been done by skilled police officials to find out the culprits," he said.



This is a river and still people cross it on foot. The Teesta in Gaibandha has been reduced to a mere stream following drastic fall of water level.

PHOTO: STAR

# Cops now can search office

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"It is necessary to carry out a search in the Gulshan office to seize the devices and arrest the suspects," he told the court.

Nurul Alam, assistant commissioner of Gulshan zone of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, last night said they received the warrant from the court.

Supreme Court Bar Association President Khandker Mahub Hossain, also adviser to the BNP chief, yesterday demanded that the authorities ensure the presence of Khaleda's lawyers during the search.

"We fear those who will go to carry out search may take grenades, bombs or firearms with them. Therefore, those who will go there to carry out the search must be thoroughly checked by neutral individuals," he said at a press conference in his chamber.

He termed the search warrant "politically motivated".

The latest development comes at a time when the country is going through a political turmoil. The BNP-led alliance launched a non-stop blockade on January 6 and called a series of shutdowns to put pressure on the government for an early parliamentary election under a caretaker

government.

As the opposition's agitation turned violent, ministers and leaders of the Awami League-led alliance accused Khaleda of instigating violence. They also demanded her arrest.

Yesterday's search warrant came four days after issuance of arrest warrants by another Dhaka court against BNP chief Khaleda for skipping court hearings on four consecutive dates in the Zia Orphanage Trust and Zia Charitable Trust graft cases.

## NO CONFIDENCE IN JUDGE

Khaleda's counsel yesterday placed two petitions before the High Court, expressing no-confidence in a trial court judge, who is dealing with Zia Orphanage and Zia Charitable Trust graft cases.

Khaleda filed the petitions on January 28, expressing her apprehension that she would not get justice from Abu Ahmed Jamadar of the Special Judge Court-3, as he had not allowed her prayer for adjourning the case proceedings.

Barrister AM Mahub Uddin Khokon on behalf of Khaleda placed the petitions before an HC bench for hearing yesterday.

The bench told the lawyer that it would hold hearing on the petitions

later on.

In the petitions, Khaleda prayed to the HC to direct the government to transfer the corruption cases to the court of another judge.

Judge Jamadar was appointed to the court on December 18 last year. He replaced Judge Bashudev Roy, who had been holding trial of the cases since the charges were framed against Khaleda on March 19 last year.

The next hearing of the two graft cases is scheduled for March 4.

The BNP chief is unlikely to appear before the trial court on that day, said staff in Khaleda's Gulshan office.

They said they fear if Khaleda Zia left her office, she might not be allowed to return to the office. She was determined to stay at her office until the movement took its final shape, they added.

## POLICE WITHDRAWN

A seven-member team of police deployed at Khaleda's Gulshan-2 home was withdrawn around 9:00pm yesterday.

Assistant Sub-Inspector Zahirul Islam, a member of the team, told The Daily Star that their high-ups around 8:00pm had asked them to go back to Rajarbagh Police Lines.

# Govt wants FBI assistance

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in a statement said Washington was ready to assist the investigation into the brutal killing of Avijit, a Bangladeshi-born American citizen, if sought.

"We, of course, will provide consular assistance as is appropriate. We also stand ready to assist in the investigation, if asked," Psaki added.

Earlier, officials of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as well as the Interpol came to Dhaka to assist local law enforcers in probing incidents like August 21 grenade blast, Kibria killing and attack on the then UK high commissioner Anwar Chowdhury.

Yesterday, the slain blogger's wife Bonya was shifted to a cabin from the intensive care unit (ICU) of Square Hospital yesterday.

She was not able to remember anything about that night's incident, said her father-in-law Prof Ajoy Roy. "Doctors said she was improving gradually,"

he told The Daily Star.

Three cops were posted outside the cabin for her security.

Till last night, none was arrested and no breakthrough made in the murder case.

DMP's Deputy Commissioner Masudur Rahman said several teams were working to arrest the culprits. "We are trying to unearth the motive behind the killing."

However, investigation officer of the case, DB Inspector Fazlur Rahman claimed yesterday that he was yet to get the case documents.

On Saturday afternoon, a police team collected footage of close-circuit cameras installed by the Bangla Academy for the book fair.

According to a senior DMP official, investigators already have descriptions of those who hacked the couple. Police were trying to verify the details by examining the clips.

"We suspect that the killers had

been following the victim since he was in the book fair," the official added, wishing not to be quoted.

On Saturday night, Avijit's family members filed a general diary with the Ramna Police Station in connection with the death threat issued against Prof Ajoy soon after his son's killing.

Meanwhile, a three-member inquiry committee has been formed to see whether there was any police negligence when the attack took place, said Monirul Islam, joint commissioner of DB.

Also yesterday, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) expressed deep concern over the killing of Avijit and demanded trial of the killers.

Terming Avijit a humanitarian writer, the NHRC said this was an attack on the freedom of expression and it tarnished the country's image before the whole world.

# Seized gold goes

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Even if the BB governor wishes to visit the vault, he has to see the security checks through, added the official.

Once the agencies confiscate illegal gold at an airport or any other place, they contact the central bank which then fixes a date for receiving the gold.

On that day, the seized gold is taken to the BB vault in the capital's Motijheel under police escort. Designated staffs of the bank then test the yellow metal to determine its purity, and measure its weight.

If a case is filed over the seizure, the gold is not added to the reserves until the lawsuit is disposed of, Kazi Saidur Rahman, general manager of Bangladesh Bank, told The Daily Star recently.

The bullion that meets international standards is added to the foreign currency reserves after the BB

deposits with the state exchequer the money equivalent to the bullion's market price, he said.

When it comes to gold ornaments, the central bank sells those through open tenders and then deposits the money in the exchequer, added Saidur.

Another BB official said the quantity of seized gold ornaments is very small compared to the bullion.

Only when the amount reaches at least 20 kg, the BB arranges an auction in which anyone can take part. The last auction was held in 2007, added the official.

There are allegations that a section of unscrupulous Customs officials and law enforcers sometimes show only a portion of a consignment of the seized gold in official documents, and embezzle the rest.

One such example is the March 13 incident last year when a gang of smugglers, chased by a police team,

left 235 gold bars abandoned in a car in the capital's Banasree.

Rampura police searched the vehicle and recorded seizure of only 70 gold bars.

The truth began to unravel when Samir Biswas, the driver of the car, along with alleged smuggler Jahid Hossain went to Rampura Police Station to get back their abandoned car four days after the incident.

As police arrested the duo, Samir claimed there were a total of 235 gold bars in the car, not 70.

Detectives arrested Sub-Inspector Manjurul Islam, and constables Wahiduzzaman and Akash Chowdhury of Rampura Police Station, and their source Rony for their involvement in embezzling the bullion.

The DB police later seized 149 gold bars raiding the houses of the arrestees and their relatives in Gazipur, Bogra and Narayanganj.