

KAMARUZZAMAN WAR CRIMES VERDICT SC set to start hearing review petition today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court is set to hold a hearing today on a review petition by war crimes convict Muhammad Kamaruzzaman against its verdict that upheld his death penalty.

The apex court is also scheduled today to start hearing on two other appeals filed by war crimes convicts -- Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojaheed and Salauddin Quader Chowdhury -- challenging their death penalties awarded by the International Crimes Tribunal.

Meanwhile, Kamaruzzaman, the senior assistant secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami, yesterday filed another petition with the SC seeking a four-week adjournment of hearing on his review petition.

Attorney General Mahbub Alam told The Daily Star that the adjournment petition was filed intentionally to delay the disposal of the review petition.

The petition was submitted to the SC yesterday, saying Kamaruzzaman's principal counsel Khandker Mahbub Hossain was "unable to conduct the hearing of the review petition due to his illness", defence lawyer Shishir Manir told The Daily Star.

Both the review and adjournment petitions have been enlisted in today's hearing list of a four-member

bench of the Appellate Division of the SC headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha.

On March 8, the Jamaat leader lodged a petition with the SC, seeking a four-week adjournment of hearing on the review petition.

Following his petition, the SC fixed April 1 (today) for holding its hearing.

Kamaruzzaman filed the review petition on March 5, praying to the SC to scrap his conviction and acquit him of the charges.

On February 19, the prison authorities read out the death warrant to him after the ICT-2 had issued it the same day.

On November 3 last year, the SC upheld his death penalty awarded by the tribunal on May 9 in 2013 for his wartime offences.

Kamaruzzaman submitted his appeal to the court, challenging the ICT judgement on June 6, 2013.

Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojaheed yesterday filed a petition with the SC, seeking a six-week adjournment of hearing his appeal on the grounds that his principal counsel Khandker Mahbub Hossain was "unable to take part in the hearing of the appeal due to his illness".

Both the appeal and adjournment petitions have been enlisted in today's hearing list of the apex court.



Jatka (Hilsa fry) seized from traders at the wholesale market in the capital's Karwan Bazar yesterday. Inset, a staff of fisheries department distributes jatkas among poor people there.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Root cause gill net

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The government has banned catching, transporting, stocking and selling of jatka fish (hilsa fry less than 10 inches long) for eight months, starting from November 1 to June 30, to increase the production of hilsa, the national fish that meets up around 13 percent of total fish production in the country.

"We would achieve more success if the government could stop illegal

production of gill nets used for catching jatka ... This would increase hilsa production manifolds," said a top official of the Department of Fisheries (DoF).

Around 2.25 lakh licensed fishermen out of around 5 lakh in 122 upazilas of 26 districts are getting 40kg rice a month during the ban under the government's compensation scheme.

But statistics show that jatka fishing has been increasing for the last couple

of years.

According to government data, 123.20 tonnes of jatka was seized in 2011-12, 122.79 tonnes in 2012-13, 198.56 in 2013-14 while a whopping 183.85 tonnes of hilsa fry was seized in the first four months of the season till February 2015.

The DoF official, who didn't want to be named, said: "Half of the [licensed] fishermen are still not included in the compensation programme ... This

could be a reason behind the recent rise in illegal jatka fishing."

During the early morning raid on Karwan Bazar fish market by the Rapid Action Battalion yesterday, 11 people were fined Tk 5,000 each for selling jatka.

Later, the seized fish were distributed to those living in the nearby slums and orphanages, Operations Officer Maruf Ahmed of the Rab-2 told The Daily Star.

Mamata peeved about Indian home boss's visit to Tin Bigha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

A controversy erupted yesterday over Indian home minister's visit to Tin Bigha bordering Bangladesh, with Mamata Banerjee questioning the motive behind the trip while BJP accused her of politicising a national security issue.

Mamata, the chief minister of West Bengal, said the Centre should have consulted the state government, and wondered whether it was a 'political visit' by Home Minister Rajnath Singh with BJP MPs.

Singh was accompanied by party MPSS Ahluwalia.

"Today [Tuesday], Union Home Minister Rajnath Singhji has visited Chhit-Mahal (Indo-Bangladesh enclaves) areas in Cooch Behar, along with BJP MPs. Is it an official visit or a political visit?" Mamata said on Facebook.

She said no prior discussion or consultation about the visit was made with the state government, though Chhit-Mahal and law and order fell within the jurisdiction of the state government.

"It is customary to have prior discussion in such cases with the state gov-

ernment. Even though I am now in North Bengal, with a prior programme, I have only received a fax message of his tour programme. I think in our federal structure, we must respect each other's jurisdiction," the chief minister said.

Asked why no West Bengal government official was present during his visit, Singh told reporters in Tin Bigha "it is a visit to the forward areas of the border which is being looked after by the BSF."

Seeking to downplay the issue, he said the district administration was fully cooperating with the BSF authorities during his tour.

BJP leader Sidharth Nath Singh, who is in-charge of party's affairs in West Bengal, refuted Mamata's claim, and said the home ministry had informed her office as well as that of the state Governor's on March 25 about Rajnath Singh's visit.

"All offices concerned were informed as per the protocol. The Chief Minister is again bringing politics into the matter of national security," he said.

Referring to the Burdwan blast, he said it was imperative for the home minister to visit these border areas.

Ministers don't care

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City Corporation, was also present at the meeting at the party chief's Dhanmondi office.

The election rules, however, do not permit this.

According to Article 14 (A) of the code of conduct for city corporation elections, "... ministers, state ministers, deputy ministers or anybody of their status cannot participate in election campaigns or electoral activities..."

"If any minister holds a meeting for a candidate, it is a violation of the electoral code of conduct," Election Commissioner Abdul Mobarak told The Daily Star on Monday.

Food Minister Qamrul Islam, who was present at Monday's meeting, argued that there was no violation of election rules as they didn't campaign for the party-backed candidates.

There was no press briefing after the Monday meeting but things were different yesterday.

Health Minister Mohammad Nasim held a press conference at the AL chief's office. It was aired on differ-

ent television channels. There, he openly spoke about campaign strategies for the city polls.

Nasim said the 14-party alliance will extend its support to single candidates for every mayoral or councillor race, reports BSS.

"We will take part in campaigns for the candidates who will have support from the leader of the 14-party alliance," said Nasim, also spokesperson for the combine.

Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Rashed Khan Menon and Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan were also present at the meeting.

Menon, also president of Workers Party of Bangladesh, too spoke about the elections at the briefing.

When this correspondent contacted him later, he claimed he did nothing against the electoral code of conduct.

"We did not campaign in favour of any candidate or any party in the meeting. We discussed overall political issues... and of course, the city election issue was discussed. But the election was not the main agenda of the meet-

ing," Menon said, insisting that their main focus was to draw up action plans to combat the ongoing violence by the BNP-Jamaat alliance.

In Chittagong, State Minister for Land Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed attended a meeting with the AL-led alliance leaders at a city hotel yesterday.

Journalists were not allowed to enter the venue. Emerging from the meeting, he told the press that they had talked about the city polls in the meeting.

But in the evening, he took a u-turn, and said: "We did not have any discussions on the city polls."

Moinuddin Khan Badal, executive president of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, a component of the 14-party combine, told the reporters that the alliance leaders at the meeting lent their full support to AL-blessed mayoral hopeful AJM Nasir.

Housing and Public Works Minister Engineer Mosharraf Hossain and State Minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Bir Bahadur too were present at the meeting.

Asked, Chief Election

Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad yesterday said, "... We have directed the returning officers to take necessary actions whenever they receive complaints of violation of the electoral code of conduct."

Rakib's predecessor ATM Shamsul Huda said the EC must take action if any minister conducts electoral campaigns or joins electoral activities for any candidate.

"When such violations of the code of conduct take place publicly, it can definitely be brought to the notice of the EC. However, if it happens indoors, it is difficult to notice," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

But if such incidents are reported in the media, these should be investigated by the commission, he viewed.

SCRUTINY STARTS TODAY

The returning officers today start scrutinising the nomination papers filed by mayoral and councillor candidates in the three city corporations. They will complete the scrutiny on Thursday and then announce the names of the eligible candidates.

What cops really know?

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He added that a "seven-member sleeper cell" had committed the murder. "We don't know how many, but some others outside the sleeper cell were also involved in it."

Oyasisur, 27, online activist and blogger, was hacked to death by three cleaver-wielding youths in the capital's Tejgaon Industrial area around 9:00am on Monday.

Of the three, Zikrullah and Ariful Islam were caught by people and handed over to police.

According to sources, Zikrullah is from Gajaria Kandi of Raipura upazila, Narsingdi. Son of madrasa teacher Maulana Mainuddin, he is the eldest of five brothers and two sisters.

Local police said there is no record of his arrest in Narsingdi. "We didn't find any record regarding Zikrullah's arrest here," said Azharul Islam Sarkar, officer-in-charge of Raipura Police Station, told this correspondent.

"However," he said, "We will investigate to find more about the boy."

Zikrullah got admitted to Hathazari madrasa in Chittagong two years back, locals and family members said, adding he was a good boy but "brainwashed" in the madrasa.

Hathazari madrasa is known as the headquarters of Hefajat-e-Islam, an Islamist organisation which took to the streets in the capital demanding hanging of "atheist bloggers" after Ahmed Rajib Haider was brutally

murdered in mid-February 2013.

Monirul Islam, who leads militancy investigations, said they were yet to be sure whether Zikrullah was a student of Hathazari madrasa.

It is now being investigated if the two suspects had links to any other attack though they told interrogators that this was their first mission.

The other detainee, Ariful Islam, is a student of Islamic law at Jamil Ulum Madrasa in Mirpur. He had been missing since he took two days' leave about three months ago, said the madrasa principal, Delwar Hossain.

"I cannot recall when Ariful got admitted. It could be last year," he said, adding police visited the madrasa to enquire about the student and took away some papers.

Meanwhile, the two were placed on an eight-day remand by a Dhaka court yesterday.

In the remand prayer, Mizanur Rahman, investigation officer of the Oyasisur murder case, said the arrested youths confessed to the killing.

"We need to interrogate them to learn about others involved in the killing," said Mizanur, officer-in-charge of Shilpanchal Police Station.

Following his appeal for a 10-day remand, the Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate's Court passed the order.

Zikrullah told the court that they killed Oyasisur and the main planner also took part in the attack but he managed to flee.

In a note with the remand prayer, the IO said the two suspects might have been involved in the Avijit

murder though they had denied it.

During a briefing at the DMP media centre, Monirul Islam said they are looking into whether the duo had any link with the February 26 killing of writer-blogger Avijit Roy.

The DMP official said police have no assessment or intelligence regarding any previous threat to Oyasisur, who often faced online backlash for his critical views about religion.

The arrestees know little about Facebook and blogs. Yet they killed Oyasisur believing that it was their "pious duty", he added.

Yesterday morning, Oyasisur was buried in his family graveyard in Uttar Hajipur village in Ramganj upazila in Laxmipur after namaz-e-janaza at a village mosque. Earlier, his body reached the village around 3:45am.

His father, Tipu Sultan, said he has nothing to say regarding the arrest and trial of the killers. "I can't get back my son even if I spend crores or cut off one of my fingers," he told The Daily Star over telephone.

Afsari Sultana, sister of Oyasisur, said even if his brother made any mistake, nobody has the right to kill him.

She said many stay alive even after committing serious crimes. "Who are they to sentence my brother to death?" she said while talking to BBC Bangla Service last night.

The UN, the US, France and International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) have condemned the brutal killing of Oyasisur.

Expats' kidnapper caught

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Following initiatives by the Bangladesh embassy in Tehran, the Iranian authorities deported him on Monday, CID Special Superintendent Mirza Abdullal Bahui told journalists at the agency's headquarters yesterday.

As part of its effort to bust the gang, a CID team visited Iran and the UAE in May last year. They gathered information on Nannu, and gave it to the Iranian police.

Nannu and his cohorts resorted to brutal means to compel the victims' family members to pay ransom. They confined the abductees, tied them up and beat them mercilessly.

Then they forced the victims to talk to their families back home over the phone and pay ransoms ranging from Tk 4-6 lakh.

Nannu and his gang abducted more than 100 Bangladeshi migrant workers, and took ransoms from the victims' families through their cohorts in Bangladesh using bKash and other methods for transferring money, said CID Additional Superintendent Raihan Uddin Khan.

Several cases were filed with Bangladesh police against Nannu and his gang members for kidnapping and torturing migrant workers for ransom.

Hearing about Nannu's arrest, one of his victims, Ruhul Amin, felt elated and said, "Alhamdulillah ... This is good news."

"Nannu and his accomplices kept me confined along with many other Bangladeshis, and tortured us in Iran in 2013," said Ruhul, who returned home after paying the gang ransom of Tk5 lakh.

Organised gangs of kidnappers came to the attention of police in September 2013 when the brother of

migrant worker Rafiqul Islam, abducted along with 29 fellow migrants in Iran in July that year, informed the law enforcement agencies about it.

The CID identified at least 10 gangs in Iran, and arrested their 14 members in Bangladesh in 2013.

"We have submitted charge sheets against 160 traffickers in 14 cases between 2013 and 2014," CID Special Superintendent Baqui told journalists.

Many such gangs are still active in Middle Eastern countries. They promise migrant workers jobs in Italy and Greece, and then kidnap them and force their families back home to pay ransom.

Their local members collect ransoms from the victims' families through bKash and other mobile money transfer systems, courier services and also bank accounts.

Last year, the CID arrested two bKash agents for their links with such gangs.

Talking to this correspondent, CID Additional Deputy Inspector General Shah Alam said these gangs use sea routes for transporting abducted workers to avoid getting detected.

"Our Bangladesh mission in Tehran informed us that around 2,000 migrants were trafficked and tortured by kidnappers," he said.

In many cases, these gangs didn't release the victims even after getting ransoms. The kidnappers fear that if freed, the victims might expose them.

"Once a gang receives ransom, it sells the victim to another group," said the CID official.

Quoting some rescued migrant workers, he said the camps, where the victims were held captive, were highly secured, making it almost impossible for them to escape.

POLLS CODE VIOLATION

Pro-BNP platform lodges complaints against AJM Nasir

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cg

Chattagram Unnayan Andolon, a platform of pro-BNP professionals, yesterday lodged complaints with the EC bringing allegation of violating electoral code of conduct against AL-backed mayoral aspirant AJM Nasir Uddin, CMP commissioner and ruling party minister Mosharraf Hossain.

On behalf of the platform, Abdul Wahab Kashemi submitted four complaints to the Election Commission (EC) office in Chittagong, said Prof Abul Kalam Azad, convener of Unnayan Andolon.

In one of his complaints, Kashemi alleged that Mosharraf at a programme in the city's Halishahar on March 29 promised to solve the water logging problem in a bid to attract support for Nasir from voters.

In another complaint, he mentioned that Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) Commissioner Abdul Jalil Mandal at a programme at Kalurghat on March 30 had urged the city dwellers to elect capable candidate.

Kashemi also lodged two more complaints with the EC against Nasir for inaugurating a campaign office at Bakalia and staging showdown during submission of nomination paper on March 29.

Contacted, Returning Officer Md Abdul Baten confirmed that they had received the complaints.

Chattagram Unnayan Andolon is backing M Manjur Alam Manju in the Chittagong City Corporation polls scheduled for April 28.