

Mojaheed, SQ Chy get time

SC to hear on Apr 28 their appeals against war crimes tribunal verdicts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday fixed April 28 for starting hearing on appeals filed by convicted war criminals Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed and Salauddin Quader Chowdhury challenging their capital punishment.

A four-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha fixed the date following a time prayer moved by Khandker Mahbub Hossain, a defence counsel for the appellants.

He prayed to the apex court to start hearing on the appeals at the end of May, saying they would remain busy due to polls to the city corporations and Bangladesh Bar Council scheduled for April 28 and May 20 respectively.

Attorney General Mahbub Alam, who was present during the proceeding, did not oppose the time prayer.

The appeals by Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Mojaheed and BNP standing committee member Salauddin Quader Chowdhury were included on the hearing list of the SC yesterday along with their separate adjournment petitions for passing orders.

The International Crimes Tribunal-2 on July 17, 2013 found Mojaheed

guilty of five out of seven charges brought against him. The tribunal sentenced him to death on three charges, jailed him for life in one and sentenced him to five years in prison on another charge.

The 67-year-old Jamaat leader, who was the top leader of Al-Badr, the Pakistani army's auxiliary force, was found guilty of murders, persecutions and detaining people. The convicted war criminal filed the appeal with the SC on August 12 the same year seeking acquittal of all charges.

On October 1, 2013, the ICT-1 found Salauddin guilty on nine of 23 charges of crimes against humanity and genocide committed during the country's Liberation War in 1971. The tribunal sentenced him to death for four charges, 20 years in jail for three charges and five years in jail for two other charges.

Salauddin was the only sitting member of parliament to have been convicted of war crimes and condemned to hang. The BNP leader on October 29, 2013 appealed to the SC against the verdict seeking acquittal.

The apex court has already disposed of appeals in three war crimes cases, while nine cases including those of Mojaheed and Salauddin are still pending with it.



BNP-backed DNCC mayor candidate Tabith Awal flashes "V" as does Afroza Abbas, wife of party-endorsed DSCC mayor aspirant Mirza Abbas, while BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia sits between them. Khaleda during a programme on Pahela Baishakh in front of the party head office in Nayapaltan asked people to vote for Tabith and Abbas.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BNP

Road crashes kill 11

CITY DESK

Countrywide road accidents killed 11 people and injured 17 others yesterday and Tuesday.

In Mymensingh, Mafiz Uddin, 55, of Achim Gopalpur village died when a truck ran him over in Achim area of Phulbaria upazila on Tuesday.

In Sylhet city, three people died and three others were injured when a bus rammed into an auto-rickshaw on Sylhet-Sunamganj highway at Balaura yesterday.

The identity of the deceased could

not be known.

In Gaibandha Mominul Islam, 32 of Sarderepara village died and six people were injured when a rickshaw van fell into a roadside ditch after a bus hit it at Simultola on Gaibandha-Sadullapur road yesterday.

In Comilla, two people died and another was injured when a pick-up van hit a motorcycle in Amirabad village of Daudkandi upazila on Tuesday.

The deceased were Nirob, 27, and Parvej Mia, 22, of Ramnagar village.

In Narshingdi, two people died and four others were injured when a bus

turned turtle on Dhaka-Sylhet highway in Itkhola area of Sherpur upazila yesterday.

The deceased were Ayena Akther, 18, and Monir Hossen, 20.

In Bagerhat, Maharul Islam Rochi, 16, of Bagerhat municipality died and two others were injured when a bus hit a motorcycle on Bagerhat-Khulna road in Khankashorif area on Tuesday.

In Narayanganj Sadar, Ajit, 30, of Nitaiganj died and his co-rider was injured when a bus hit a motorcycle on Dhaka-Chittagong road in Jolkuri area of Shiddhirganj on Tuesday.

Refrain from wholesale criticism

FROM PAGE 1

The government has targeted 2021 as it marks the golden jubilee of the independence, she said, adding, "By this time we want to make Bangladesh a middle income country."

The present government has only three years and nine months time in hand. There are lots of work to be done within a very short time. All development work should be taken to a particular stage before the next general election slated for 2019, she told her audience.

The PM said her government was confronting many obstacles created by the anti-liberation forces as it had started the trial of war criminals.

After the brutal killing of Bangabandhu, the country virtually went under the control of anti-liberation forces.

She said, "The work we have started, including the trial of war criminals, must be completed. Two verdicts have been implemented and we hope that we would be able to complete others defying all obstacles."

Terming honesty the main strength of her government, the PM said a vested quarter had tried to tarnish the country's image over the Padma Bridge issue. "We have accepted the challenge and decided to construct the bridge with our own resources."

Extending her New Year's greetings to everybody, Hasina said a vested quarter was out to brand this celebration as a culture of the Hindus. But they forgot that it was the Mughal Emperor Akbar who first introduced

the celebration of Bangla New Year, which was fit for the culture, custom and heritage of the Bangalees of the subcontinent.

She reminded that in 1993, the then government prevented people from celebrating the Bangla New Year and Shatabdi Baran programmes at Suhrawardy Udyan due to lack of knowledge about how the celebration had begun.

"We had to fight with the then government to celebrate Pahela Baishakh," she said.

"Pahela Baishakh is an indigenous culture which combines every people irrespective of their religion, cast and creed," Hasina said, adding that people of every religion celebrate the event with festivity while they remain busy with ritual during religious festivals.

The government is extending administrative and financial support to every upazila to celebrate the Pahela Baishakh, she said, adding that there was no logic to stop the practices of culture and literature on religious hypothesis.

Welcoming the spontaneous participation of people of all walks of life in Pahela Baishakh celebrations, Hasina said the government had undertaken foolproof security measures at the programmes.

Talking about the political situation, the PM said, "The country would have developed faster if we had not experienced vandalism in the name of political movement of the BNP and Jamaat."

Pointing out her government's

liberal policy on the mass media, she said her government after assuming power in 1996 allowed private television channel with an aim to invigorate the sector.

"Now as many as 41 private television channels are on air where our talented artists, poets, technicians have found jobs contributing to enrich our art, culture and the media," she said.

Hasina criticised some international human rights organisations for their stance against the death penalty of war criminals of Bangladesh.

"It's a 'complex philosophy' that human rights organisations speak for the violators of the human rights and remain silent about the human rights of the victims."

She also said the death penalty was not prohibited in the world. But they cried against the execution of the verdict against the people responsible for war crimes in Bangladesh.

"In that case how relatives of the victims would get justice for the killings of their near and dear," she asked?

About the fairness of January 5, 2014, elections, the PM said many countries even the USA had records of electing many candidates unopposed. There were also records of below 40 percent turnouts.

Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu, Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University AAMS Arefin Siddique, noted academician Anisuzzaman, eminent writer Selina Hossain, Editor of the daily Samakal Golam Sarwar, among others, attended the function.

Outrage over sex assault

FROM PAGE 1

assault took place on the campus on Tuesday. He also claimed police did not allow any outsider in the campus area.

He said a female student had gone to the TSC area along with her friend when a group of students "teased" her and another group protested the incident.

"Our force present there charged batons and dispersed the students," he said. "We still do not know the identity of the female student and no one registered any complaint with us, but we are trying to find out the student."

He also said the police were scrutinising footage of the CCTV cameras installed in the campus area. "It would take us some time since the recorded footage is around 48 hours long."

DMP installed around 19 CCTV cameras in the Shahbagh area with three to four cameras positioned right around the spot, said Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station.

WITNESS ACCOUNT

Contradicting the DMP commissioner, witnesses gave a vivid description of the assault.

Liton Nandi, president of Bangladesh Chhatra Union's DU unit, said a group of youths tore off almost the whole of a 25-year-old woman's clothes in front of the Suhrawardy Udyan gate.

"As soon as we rescued her, we saw several youths assault another woman in front of her husband and child. We came under attack as we tried to stop them," he told The Daily Star.

The attack left Nandi's right arm broken. Another activist of the party, Amit Dey, said law enforcers played the role of bystanders.

"When we sought help from a few policemen standing 20 yards from the spot, they said that the area was beyond their jurisdiction," said Amit who also came under attack by the youths and had his fingers fractured.

Amit along with five of his fellow activists had tried to save a group of women aged between 25-30 years from the rowdy youths.

"The youths were divided into three groups and each group had 10-12 of them. People everywhere around were blowing vuvuzela so loudly that nobody could hear the victims' cry for help," he said, adding thousands of people were milling around the area, making it difficult for them to prevent the attackers.

They rescued a 10-year-old minor girl from the spot.

"Her dress was torn. I was shocked to see there were bite marks on her

body. She was seriously injured," he said. "The girl came with her elder brother and mother. Her brother was beaten by one group while another took the mother away."

Masudur Rahman, another Chhatra Union activist, said they could not recognise anybody due to the lack of light at dusk.

Amit and Masud said their group caught five of the offenders and handed them over to the police. When they inquired about them two hours later, police told them that all of them had been released. Of the five, two were DU students.

Contacted, Sirajul Islam, said when they went to the place after hearing about the incident, they did not find anyone involved in the assault.

"None came to us with any complaint [of sexual harassment]," he said.

RESPONSE OF UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES

DU acting proctor Prof Amzad said most of the people visiting the campus on the day were not students of the university.

Prof Amzad said they had several meetings with law enforcers over the security measures on the campus, but the security arrangement was not fully made as per the plan.

According to the plan, police were supposed to close the Suhrawardy Udyan gate opposite the Raju Sculpture after 4:00pm on Tuesday to stop influx of outsiders in TSC area through the park, but they did not do that, said Prof Amzad.

He also said there was a plan that police would set up check points to bar entry of vehicles of outsiders to the campus from 4pm on April 13 till the morning of April 15, but they did not follow it properly.

He however said as the place where the incident took place was under CCTV coverage, the culprits would hopefully be arrested and punished.

PROTESTS

A barrage of protests poured in social media centring the incident. Leaders and activists of Bangladesh Chhatra Union, Pragatishil Chhatra Jote, Samajtantrik Chhatra Front, Bangladesh Chhatra Federation and Biplobi Chhatra Moitri brought out processions demanding exemplary punishment of the culprits who harassed the women.

Several students, seeking anonymity, said they informed the university authorities about the incident. Meanwhile, the pro-Awami League student body yesterday suspended Najmul for his involvement in anti disciplinary activities. BCL central Office Secretary Sheikh Rasel in a press statement confirmed the suspension of Najmul.

always find it easy to escape punishment.

"Women are not allowed to go outside and even are tortured at home. Where should they go?" she said.

Lucky Akter, general secretary of Chhatra Union central committee, in her facebook post wrote on Tuesday: "The barbaric incident that took place on Tuesday in front of Suhrawardy gate was much worse than many acts of barbarity that had happened before."

Expressing grave concern over the incident, rights body Ain O Salish Kendra demanded the government take strict punitive action against the perpetrators through proper investigation.

In a statement, it said a citizen's freedom of movement and freedom of assembly are protected under article-36 and article-37 of our constitution.

"We think that unacceptable behaviour towards women when they were taking part in a traditional festival and the law enforcement agency's inaction to take preventive measures [in this regard] go against our constitutional safeguard," the statement reads.

BCL ACTIVISTS HARASS JNU STUDENTS

Jagannath University students beat three activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League of the university unit for harassing female students on a university bus Tuesday afternoon.

The BCL activists later assaulted Rashid Al Rohan, a student of the university who works for Bangla Tribune, for taking their photos. They also deleted some of the pictures he took.

The incident occurred in the city's Chankharpool area when two double-decker buses of the university were heading towards Mirpur from the university.

Students said BCL activists Najmul, Alauddin and Chanchal were harassing female students on the first bus. Other students then beat them up and shoved them off the bus.

Rohan, who was on the next bus, said he took some pictures of the incident from the upper deck of the bus.

He said the trio then got on the bus he was in and asked him why he had taken their pictures. A scuffle broke out between them and the BCL leaders grabbed the camera and deleted some of the pictures.

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BNP stumbles yet again

FROM PAGE 1

fresh blow for the BNP, and has forced the party to shelve some of its plans to counter the campaign of mayor candidates backed by archrival Awami League.

On advice of party chief Khaleda Zia, Adarsha Dhaka Andolon, a platform of pro-BNP professionals, postponed its programme scheduled for yesterday in the city, as the party high command was uncertain about the outcomes of Abbas' bail petitions, sources said.

Khaleda, who at a Pahela Baishakh event in the city sought vote for Abbas and Dhaka north mayor aspirant Tabith Awal, was expected to formally introduce the party's mayor and councillor candidates from the platform's programme.

The BNP chief had also plans to start electioneering for the party's mayor aspirants, party sources said.

"We were waiting for Abbas' bail so that the BNP chief could introduce our two mayor candidates together. For this, the programme has been postponed twice," said Moudud Ahmed, a BNP standing committee member.

"After today's [yesterday's] court order, we will have to wait for the final

decision on his bail pleas," he said.

The BNP faced troubles in Dhaka North City Corporation as well after its mayor contender Abdul Awal Mintoo was disqualified from running for procedural anomalies in his nomination paper.

Mintoo had launched a legal battle, but lost.

Then on April 9, Khaleda endorsed Tabith Awal, Mintoo's son, as the party's mayor contender in Dhaka north. Tabith launched campaign on April 10, three days after his rivals did.

When the BNP was fighting to get itself out of trouble in Dhaka north, things looked way better for the party in the south. Two of its candidates -- Abbas and another leader Abdus Salam -- were declared valid candidates.

Later, the BNP endorsed Abbas and Salam quit the race.

But faced with 60 cases, Abbas has been hiding since January 6 to avoid arrest and has kept from the campaign trail. On his behalf, his lawyers completed some formalities, including filing the nomination paper, attending the scrutiny and allocation of polls symbol.

His wife, Afroza Abbas, launched

campaign on April 8, a day after the formal electioneering began.

Abbas, who secured bails in 57 cases, filed three petitions on Sunday with the High Court seeking bail in three cases -- two over vandalism and arson and another over corruption.

On Monday, the HC bench dropped from its hearing list the petition in the graft case, in which he is facing an arrest order.

It said there was a specific bench for hearing and disposing of petitions over corruption cases.

On the same day, however, the court asked Attorney General Mahbub Alam to take steps so that Abbas is not harassed or arrested in the other two cases until its orders, which came yesterday.

But the orders brought no relief for Abbas and his party.

"Problems are not leaving our mayoral hopefuls from the very beginning of the city corporation elections in the capital. We are lagging behind in the campaign trail," said Moudud.

But, he added, his party would run in the polls no matter how many impediments the government and law enforcers create.

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