



Police inspect the Kathgora Bazar branch of Bangladesh Commerce Bank while people crowd outside after a bloody bank heist yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

HC hearing on Abbas bail plea now on Apr 27

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday deferred until April 27 the hearing on a bail petition of Mirza Abbas, BNP-blessed mayoral candidate of Dhaka South City Corporation, in a corruption case.

An HC bench of Justice Md Moinal Islam Chowdhury and Justice JBM Hassan fixed the date after Abbas' lawyer Zainul Abedin filed a time petition with the court.

In the petition, Zainul told the court that they were waiting for Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha's decision on the split orders by another HC bench issued on two bail pleas of Abbas.

On April 15, the HC bench of Justice Qamrul Islam Siddique and Justice Gobinda Chandra Tagore passed the orders in two vandalism and arson cases.

On March 6 last year, the Anti-

Corruption Commission filed the graft case with Shahbagh Police Station against BNP leader Alamgir Kabir and three others on charge of causing a loss of around Tk 15.52 crore to the government by allocating land to journalists.

Abbas' name was included in the case's charge sheet later, said sources.

The mayor hopeful lodged the bail plea with the HC on April 12, apprehending that he might be arrested in the graft case.

On April 16, the HC bench led by Justice Moinal accepted the petition and fixed yesterday for the hearing.

Abbas, BNP's Dhaka city convener, currently stands accused in at least 60 cases. He is also facing an arrest warrant issued in a case filed by the ACC.

The BNP leader is contesting for the mayoral post in the DSCC polls scheduled for April 28.

Three killed in Somalia blast

AFP, Mogadishu

Three people were killed and six wounded in a car bomb blast outside a popular restaurant in the centre of the Somali capital Mogadishu yesterday, police said.

The attack is the latest in a string of bombings in the war-torn Horn of Africa nation, where Al-Qaeda-affiliated Shebab Islamists are fighting to topple the government.

"There are at least three dead, and six others have been injured," police officer Ahmed Warhere told AFP.

"A vehicle loaded with explosives was parked outside the restaurant."

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing, but the restaurant is located in the centre of Mogadishu, where the Shebab Islamists have carried out repeated attacks.

UN envoy to Somalia Nick Kay, who was visiting colleagues in the north-eastern town of Garowe a day after the Shebab killed six people in an attack on a UN bus there, condemned "another atrocity".

Bank robbers kill 7

FROM PAGE 1

Hospital in Savar, said Anwar Kader Nazim, the hospital director.

Those killed by the robbers inside the bank are Waliullah Subin, 40, the branch manager of Bangladesh Commerce Bank Limited, its security guards Ibrahim and Kazi Badrul Alam, and bank client Shahabuddin Mollah Palash, 50.

Nur Mohammad, 45, Monir Hossain, 32, and Jamir Ali, 26, died of bullet and bomb injuries they sustained while chasing the gang.

The identity of the victim robber could not be known.

Five of the gang entered the bank's Kathgora Bazar branch in two groups brandishing firearms around 2:00pm, soon after the launch break. Once inside, they took 15 bank officials and clients hostage at gunpoint and asked everyone else to lie down on the floor, said hospital sources, quoting injured bank officials.

When they asked the manager to hand over the vault keys to them, he tried to run away. But the robbers shot him, killing him instantly, said Mustafizur Rahman, owner of the building that houses the bank, quoting bank officials and clients.

Hearing the gunshots, someone sought help using the loudspeaker of the mosque opposite the bank when several hundred locals rushed to the spot.

The robbers, aged between 25 and 40, blasted several powerful bombs and crude bombs to create panic, as locals chased them. Some of the robbers fled on foot while others tried to escape on three motorbikes.

Locals chased three robbers on one bike and beat one of them dead and handed another over to the cops.

Police and Rapid Action Battalion members reached the spot about an hour after the incident.

An official of Rab's bomb disposal unit said they recovered three unexploded powerful bombs and two improvised hand grenades from the spot. They had to blast one grenade as it was in an unsafe condition.

Police were collecting evidence of the incident and the process of filing a case was underway.

Selim Hasan, senior vice-president of the bank, said the gang took away about Tk 35 lakh from the cash counter.

But they failed to break the vault, said Managing Director Abu Sadek Md Sohel.

During the heist, one armed guard was at the entrance and two others were inside the bank, he added.

Mamun, a local youth, said the gang parked their bikes near the Kathgora Bazar, some 200 yards from the bank. They then walked to the bank.

The bank is located on the first floor of the three-storey Hazi Nojumuddin

Market in an alley known as Mosjider Goli.

The ground floor of the market houses about 30 shops and the first floor is rented out for the bank and a buying house. The third floor is still under construction.

The bank managing director said police were examining footage from the bank's eight CCTV cameras to identify the robbers.

The branch opened in December last year and its main clients are local businessmen and traders.

'KILLED TRYING TO SAVE LIFE' Shahabuddin Mollah Palash, one of the victims, was in the manager's room when the robbers entered the bank.

Originally from Jhenidah, he had been running business at Kathgora for many years, said his friend Syed Yusuf Mahmood Ali.

When the robbers opened fire on the manager, he tried to grab them. Challenged, the looters opened fire on him as well, hitting him several times in the chest and hands, Yusuf said quoting witnesses.

"He was very dauntless and never hesitated to take risk for saving others. But he had to give his life for his bravery," he added.

[Our Savar correspondent contributed to this report.]

EC seeks army for four days

FROM PAGE 1

Elections to Dhaka and Chittagong city corporations are scheduled for April 28.

"Regular law-enforcement agencies have assured us to provide sufficient forces to maintain law and order. There was no necessity to deploy army during the polls. Nevertheless, we have taken the decision to give the voters mental relief," said Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad.

The announcement came at a press briefing at the media centre of the EC Secretariat in the capital last evening.

Prior to this announcement, a BNP delegation met the CEC and demanded bestowing magistracy power on the military officers to be deployed during polls.

"If the army is not given magistracy power, the main objective of deploying them will not be fulfilled," said BNP standing committee member Barrister Moudud Ahmed, who led the three-member delegation.

Earlier in the day, Election Commissioner Shah Nawaz told reporters that army would not be given magistracy power.

The CEC said they would increase the number of executive magistrates two days before the polls to check any violation of code of conduct or other sorts of illegal activities.

Currently, 12 executive magistrates have been working at the Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) and Dhaka

North City Corporation (DNCC).

The EC on April 19 sat with senior officials of the intelligence and law-enforcement agencies to discuss the issue of army deployment.

At that meeting, officials of both the agencies argued that there was no necessity to deploy army as regular law-enforcement agencies were enough to maintain the law and order.

The CEC, however, told the reporters they would not take any risk and were ready to take every necessary measure to hold the election in a free and fair manner.

In the last two days, the CEC held a series of meetings with four other election commissioners to discuss the issue and came up with the decision yesterday afternoon.

BNP TEAM MEETS EC Meanwhile, the BNP claimed that the atmosphere conducive to hold free and fair city corporation elections had been destroyed following attacks on Khaleda Zia's motorcade by the AL activists.

"We don't think a congenial atmosphere is prevailing. We cannot expect a fair election, if such activities continue," Moudud Ahmed said after a meeting with the CEC yesterday.

A three-member delegation, headed by Moudud, met the CEC at the latter's office and placed a 12-point recommendations for holding free and fair city polls.

Talking to reporters after the meet-

ing, Moudud said, "We have requested the CEC to take necessary steps so that our candidates, who are accused in cases, do not face police harassment at least for the next seven days, and can conduct election campaign."

"Officers-in-charge of many police stations in Dhaka hail from a particular district and region. We have recommended transferring them during the polls," he said.

The delegation also demanded the EC prepare a list of vulnerable polling stations after consultation with all candidates.

Their other demands include dropping of the names of officials, who had political affiliation in the past, from the list of presiding officers and polling officers, and displaying the identity cards of all on-duty law enforcers.

In response to their demand, Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad said they had asked police to investigate the incident of attack on Khaleda Zia.

The commission will take necessary steps after submission of the investigation report, he added.

BNP-backed mayoral aspirant Tabith Awal yesterday alleged that supporters of AL-backed candidate Annisul Huq and pro-ruling party activists attacked Khaleda Zia while she was campaigning for him at Karwan Bazar.

He appealed to the EC to take necessary measures to prevent recurrence of such event.

Debate about number of victims

FROM PAGE 1

2013, killing more than 1,100 people, mostly garment workers, and injuring many others.

At a programme in the capital's Brac Centre Inn yesterday, CPD Additional Research Director Khondaker G Moazzem said 1,134 workers were found dead while 2,535 wounded workers were rescued.

In his survey report "Moving Beyond the Shadow of the Rana Plaza Tragedy: In Search of a Closure and Restructuring Strategy", Moazzem touched on the issues of payment of compensation, treatment of the victims, future impact on businesses, suspension of the GSP and future action plans for the garment sector.

"There has been erratic information from different sources regarding the total number of missing workers," he said.

Despite various initiatives, the victims and their families are not at the same level compared to their condition before the Rana Plaza collapse, he learnt through telephone interviews of some of the victims and their family members.

"The living condition is very poor for the severely injured workers, and for families whose members were killed but are yet to be identified. Among the injured workers, few are employed locally in off-farm jobs after receiving training under various initiatives by different organisations,"

according to the report.

The respondents, including family members of the missing workers, mentioned that they received some financial support from organisations. But the amount varied widely from as low as Tk 75,000 to as high as Tk 12 lakh.

The difference was mainly because of varying levels of income as claimed by the victims and the various amounts of money they received (in two instalments) from the Rana Plaza Trust Fund.

"The amount of financial support received by victims and their families so far is insufficient to meet their needs although they were promised complete financial support to cover their monthly expenses as well as medical expenses for their treatment," said the report.

On the transformation of the sector went though after the incident, Moazzem said it is significant for national and international factors.

"The restructuring of the sector would provide it with improved competitiveness which would be beneficial for the sector. New competitors are emerging in the global market which would change the global sourcing dynamics."

On the post-Rana Plaza export scenario, the report said the conclusion was that the export growth of garment products might have limited scope to be associated with the tragedy though the entrepreneurs often complained about the adverse impact on

export.

"A detailed analysis on products, buyers' strategy in sourcing orders from different markets, buyers as well as consumers' perceptions of Bangladeshi products after the tragedy would enable us to determine the cause and effect of the changing pattern of export of apparels from Bangladesh."

Bangladesh's export to the European market during post-Rana Plaza period is even more inconclusive. After attaining considerable growth in both categories of products in 2013, Bangladesh's export experienced negative growth in 2014.

However, performance of a number of major competitors, including China, India, Vietnam and Indonesia, was disquieting in the European market. Pakistan and Cambodia are found to maintain consistent positive growth both in knit and woven products during post-Rana Plaza period.

Bangladesh's performance has been quite impressive till date with regard to implementation of various activities related to USTR (United States Trade Representative) action plan.

The USTR should take the recent developments positively and consider reinstatement of the GSP facility for Bangladeshi products in the US market in the near future if Bangladesh outdoes the present rate of achievements in terms of implementation of reforms, it added.

No headway in probe

FROM PAGE 1

police barred them by barricading the road leading to the Secretariat Building.

A scuffle broke out between the protesters and the police. Later, a six-member delegation, led by the organisation's president Hasan Tarek, went to the Secretariat.

Laki Akhter, general secretary of Chhatra Union, said, "We have submitted a memorandum to the state minister for home to press home our demands. The state minister assured us that legal actions would be taken against the culprits."

She said they would announce tougher programmes today if there was no visible progress in this regard by the time.

SM Shibli Noman, assistant

commissioner (Ramna zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star that a high-powered team was investigating the alleged negligence of on-duty police, and actions would be taken after the report is submitted.

Bangladesh Chhatra Union activists of Dhaka University, who protected a number of victims from the molesters, alleged that police released all the five culprits they had caught red handed.

Sub-inspector of Shahbagh Police Station Ashrafur Islam was blamed for releasing at least one of the molesters that night. He later confessed to it. Ashrafur has been withdrawn.

Meanwhile, students of English and Anthropology departments of

the DU formed a human chain on the campus, demanding immediate arrest of the molesters.

Shamajtantrik Chhatra Front brought out a procession on the campus while Sammilita Sangskritik Jote formed a human chain at the Suhrawardy Udyan gate near the TSC area.

Meanwhile, Jahangir Alam Sarker, acting deputy commissioner (media) of DMP, said they could neither identify nor arrest anyone in connection with the incident yet.

State Minister for Home Affairs Asaduzzaman Khan said law enforcers were trying to identify the actual culprits involved in the incident. Police was also examining the video footage of the harassment, reports BSS.

It's not a problem

FROM PAGE 1

in one of them.

"The government is playing foul with my husband by filing a number of politically motivated cases against him as he is popular among the people and his voters. The government is depriving him of meeting his voters," Afroza told The Daily Star in an interview yesterday.

"As a candidate, he has every right to seek votes in person. But he cannot do this as he is not being granted bail which frustrates us," she said.

April 26 is the last date for campaigning and April 27 has been set by a High Court bench for hearing one of Abbas' bail petitions.

"It is now almost certain that he will not be able to participate in the electioneering in person," Afroza went on.

Will there be any change in the campaign strategy then?

"We will continue the campaigns as vigorously as we are doing now unless the situation demands any change," she replied, adding that her husband was "in constant touch" with his men and was giving necessary instructions in this regard.

"Even if the bail is not granted, he will surely come in public ignoring fears of arrest because people in Dhaka want to see him among them," she said.

Afroza accused the ruling party men and law enforcement agencies of obstructing their campaigns. "Police are arresting our men almost regularly and harassing them for participating in electioneering for my husband."

"We are complaining to the Election Commission every day about these but they are not doing anything," she alleged.

"If the government thinks that their candidates will win the elections, why then are they hesitating to ensure a level-playing field for all?" she added.

Afroza on Monday unveiled her husband's manifesto with 98 pledges aimed at making Dhaka a liveable, ideal and world-class city.

Civic services, amusement facilities, healthcare, education, traffic, communication infrastructure, environment and waste management, social services and public safety took the centre stage in the manifesto.

Afroza, who has almost no previous campaign experience, has been spending an extremely busy time since the polls electioneering began, going from door to door from dawn to dusk seeking votes for her husband.

How is she coping up with the pressure?

"I forgot all my sufferings and other discomforts when I saw people's enthusiasm and support," Afroza said with a flicker of smile on her visibly exhausted face.