



Bollywood star Sushmita Sen walked the fashion ramp last night at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka. She was the main attraction at the launch of shampoo brand TRESEmmé, launched by Unilever.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Bangladeshi expat to build country's tallest building

Says Muhith

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Bangladeshi investor will construct the tallest building in the country as a Chinese investor has backed off from the project, the finance minister said yesterday. Kali Pradip Chaudhuri, the chairman and founder of the KPC Group of Companies, will build the 300-metre tower on a 40-acre land in Purbachal, AMA Muhith told reporters.

He said some work for building the convention centre had been finalised after Chaudhuri, who lives in the US, showed his interest in the project.

"It is all done. Now, his people will come and start their work within weeks."

Muhith said the government had agreed to provide the Bangladesh expatriate with the land in Purbachal to set up a planned international convention centre.

Chaudhuri, who is from Sylhet, would also build a hotel, an exhibition centre and a stadium around



Kali Pradip Chaudhuri

the proposed building. "Chaudhuri builds the tallest tower wherever he goes."

"He [Chaudhuri] wanted to do something for Bangladesh. I have been talking to him for the last five to six years. His heart aches as he said he had done nothing for the country."

"Now, I have to sit with the land department about the issue."

The minister said the construction work of the convention centre must be completed and it should be ready for use by May 2016. An annual meeting of the Islamic Development Bank is scheduled to be held there that year.

The KPC Group is engaged in numerous businesses around the world serving diverse industries such as healthcare services and facilities, pharmaceutical and biotechnology, education, real estate, infrastructure development, agriculture, architecture and engineering, alternative energy, waste management, travel services and information technology.

SC judge seeks CJ's impeachment

Bangabhaban says it is yet to receive any letter

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Supreme Court judge has written to the president for impeaching Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha over the judge's removal from a bench of the apex court.

In a letter to President Abdul Hamid yesterday, Justice AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury alleged that the chief justice "out of his personal grudge" had removed him (Shamsuddin) from a bench of the SC.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the letter.

The SC judge said the chief justice didn't allow him to take part in the bench's activities since September 9.

"I wrote to the chief justice on September 8 after I got a letter with his [the CJ] instructions on September 2. A cause list of the benches related to the Appellate Division was published on September 8, and I found that I had been removed from the bench," Justice Shamsuddin, who retires on October 1, mentioned in the letter to the president.

Copies of the letter were sent to the offices of the prime minister, the Speaker of Jatiya Sangsad, the chief justice, the law minister and all the SC judges, according to sources at the apex court.

Contacted, SC Registrar Syed Aminul Islam told this correspondent that he knew nothing about the letter.

Talking to The Daily Star around 6:30pm, president's Press Secretary Joynal Abedin said they were yet to get any such letter.

Recruit 5,000 judges to clear case backlog

JS body recommends

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary body yesterday recommended that the government recruit at least 5,000 judges to bring pace in the work of judiciary and clear a backlog of millions of cases at different courts.

In a meeting, the parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and parliamentary affairs also suggested that in case of not getting competent candidates, the law ministry could appoint retired judges on a contractual basis, said Suranjit Sengupta, chief of the body.

In response, Law Minister Anisul Huq informed the committee that they had already requested the government to take necessary steps to appoint around 500 judges on an emergency basis, meeting sources said.

Emerging from the meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, Suranjit, also a senior Awami League lawmaker, said the number of judges in the country was around 1,700. The number was fewer than that of the neighbouring countries in terms of population.

Pointing to a sorry state of the country's judiciary system, particularly to ensure justice on time, Suranjit said the committee had earlier also made a recommendation to introduce double shifts in all courts to reduce the case backlog.

"It's a basic right of the people to get justice within the shortest possible time," the lawmaker observed.

The committee also recommended that no-one would be deprived of justice in the name of quick disposal of cases, he added.

Protests cripple city

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academic activities in at least 85 private universities.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday said the door for talk with private universities is not closed, and that the government was not rigid on any matter in the last six years.

"I hope they will talk to us and we shall see what can be done," he told reporters after a meeting at the Secretariat.

Replying to a query, Muhith said the government always reconsiders matters when necessary. "We've taken a step and justified it. It does not mean we are totally rigid," he said.

Demonstrations were also held in Chittagong, Rajshahi and Sylhet.

However, there were no reports of violent activities or any clash with the police.

Anti-VAT agitation intensified after police fired rubber bullets at students of East West University in the capital's Rampura last Wednesday. Protests erupted the next day [on Thursday] with students of other universities joining in and stopping the capital in its tracks.

In the face of students' demonstrations, the government "clarified" that the VAT was to be paid by the universities and "it would not be levied from the students".

Students, however, rejected the "clarification" and continued their agitation demanding complete withdrawal of the VAT.

In the capital, on the first working day of the week yesterday, demonstrators blocked traffic staging sit-ins at Shukrabad, Dhanmondi 27 intersection, Panthapath intersection, Mohakhali, Kakali intersection in Banani, Aftabnagar in Rampura, Bashundhara and House Building in Uttara.

Holding banners and placards, they chanted slogans such as "No VAT on Education," "Education is not a product" and "Shoot us if you want, we won't pay VAT". They also took out processions.

Hundreds of people were seen heading to their destinations on foot or rickshaws. Some vented their anger while some expressed solidarity with the students saying the government should not impose VAT on education.

"It is the government who should come forward and find a solution," said Morshed Kamal, a banker, who had to take a rickshaw from Dhanmondi to reach Badda.

But the situation was painful for Farhana Rahman, a middle-aged woman.

With pain in her left leg, she walked all the way from Farmgate to Science Lab to reach Lab Aid Hospital in Dhanmondi in the scorching heat.

"It is disturbing and students should not hold people hostage," she protested.

But at the same time, she expressed her resentment towards the government. "Students already spend a lot of money for their education. How will they get any extra money to pay the VAT?"

Around 10:30am, students of Daffodil University gathered on Mirpur road blocking Dhanmondi 27 intersection, Surkrabad and Russell Square.

Students of Stamford University, University of Liberal Arts, United International University and University of Asia Pacific blocked Satmasjid Road in Dhanmondi.

Several hundred students of Dhaka International University and World University blocked Panthapath intersection disrupting vehicular movement with Russell Square.

East West University students gathered near Rampura Bridge blocking traffic throughout the day, forcing commuters to remain stranded on both sides of the bridge for hours.

Dr Mohammed Farashuddin, chairperson of the trustee board of East West University, urged the protesters to go back to classes saying the university authorities will pay the VAT, but they did not budge.

Later, East West University authorities announced that tuition fees would not be increased in the next three years.

Traffic came to a halt on the Pragati Sarani road that connects the Airport Road with Moghbazar via Nadda, Natun Bazar, Badda, Rampura and Malibagh, after students of North South University blocked the street at Bashundhara.

Farzana, a student of NSU, said, "We are demonstrating against the

imposition of VAT on education. Whether or not the university would increase tuition fees is a different issue."

Students' blockade at Mohakhali Wireless Gate intersection stopped traffic between Mohakhali and Gulshan-1 intersection.

Uttara's House Building and Banani's Kakoli areas were blocked around 11:00am by students of three universities. Vehicles could not move on the Airport Road due to the agitation.

Over a few hundred students of Gono Bishwabidyalay, a private university in Savar, blocked the Dhaka-Aricha highway at Baishmil gate in Ashulia, on the outskirts of the capital, around 11:00am, reports our Savar Correspondent.

UNIVERSITIES CLOSED

Meanwhile, amid widespread protests, North South University (NSU) yesterday suspended classes till Tuesday and Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) declared Eid vacation till September 26. The university authorities made the announcement issuing notices on their websites. Brac University also issued a notice saying it will remain closed today due to unavoidable circumstances.

OUTSIDE DHAKA

In Chittagong, several hundred students of different private universities blocked the Wasa intersection of CDA avenue road in Chittagong for nearly two hours from 11:30am, reports our Chittagong correspondent.

The demonstration was initiated by Premier University and later joined by students of East Delta University, Southern University, BGC Trust University and International Islamic University Chittagong.

As their numbers grew, they completely blocked the road around 12:00 noon, resulting in at least two kilometre-long traffic jam on each side of the road.

In Sylhet city, Court Point, Shaheed Minar and Surma Points -- three key points in the city -- were blockaded by the students.

Students marched out and held a demonstration in Kalaimari area in Rajshahi city around 12:30pm, said Iftekhar Alam, assistant commissioner of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police.



Cardinal Fernando Filoni, a Vatican minister now on a pastoral visit to Bangladesh, calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the latter's office yesterday.

PHOTO: PMO

Teachers threaten

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The platform of public university teachers also sought immediate intervention of the prime minister and said they won't stop their ongoing agitations on the assurance of any cabinet member.

Teachers of all the 37 public universities yesterday observed a daylong work stoppage to press for a separate pay scale. No classes were held in any of the universities but examinations remained out of the strike's purview.

They will hold a similar programme again on September 17. Their demands also include equal benefits and salaries for senior professors and senior secretaries.

The teachers' body ruled out sitting with Finance Minister AMA Muhith for discussion regarding the pay scale.

"He [Muhith] has grown old. It is time for him to resign. Teachers will not sit with him since he is biased," FBUTA President Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed said at a press conference at Dhaka University Club.

"We will not stop our movement even if a cabinet member assures us of solution. We want the prime minister to step in immediately."

Farid Uddin said a tougher movement will be waged after the Eid if the government does not take a "realistic and constructive decision" regarding their demands.

However, talking to journalists at the secretariat, Finance Minister Abu Maal Abdul Muhith said the matter is not so serious that it has to be solved in a day or two. He said it would be considered in an appropriate time.

On Thursday, the finance minister said, "A pay scale was announced following teachers' movement in 1973. Since then the teachers had been receiving salaries and allowances under a unified pay scale."

He also said the new pay structure

had 20 grades, and like in the past professors were given the same status as secretaries, who under grade 1 would get a monthly salary of Tk 78,000.

"The pyramid structure usually applicable to other professions does not apply to university teachers and the number of university teachers is higher in the upper ranks than in the lower ones."

Rejecting finance minister's comments, FBUTA General Secretary Prof Maksud Kamal said pyramid structure exists in the public universities in Bangladesh where the number of teachers in higher ranks is higher than that in the lower ranks.

"We know that he [Muhith] is the chief of the newly formed cabinet committee which is dealing with the teachers' demands. Teachers will never accept a committee headed by a person who made himself controversial with vindictive remarks against teachers," he said reading out a written statement at the press conference.

"Including two super/zero grades, there exist 22 grades in the 8th pay scale, a matter the finance minister consciously avoid discussing publicly. By creating two special positions for bureaucrats, teachers have been downgraded by two steps," he said, referring to creating two special levels putting senior secretary and secretary-in-charge "two levels above them."

Talking to The Daily Star last night, Prof Farid Uddin said they demand reinstatement of selection grade, which has been scrapped in the 8th national pay scale, approved by the cabinet on September 7.

They also want salaries of selection-grade professors to be equivalent to that of senior secretaries. Besides, university professors who are now under grade-III have to be elevated to grade-I, which secretaries belong to.

Indemnity law illegal: HC

FROM PAGE 1

2002 and January 9, 2003.

Around 24,023 army and 339 navy personnel along with BDR, police and Ansar members were involved in the anti-crime drive.

As many as 57 people died in custody and hundreds suffered injuries in torture during the operation, according to the writ petition.

However, the then government put the toll at 12 and said all the victims died of heart attack in hospitals after being handed over to police.

The joint force had arrested 11,245 people, including some 2,482 listed criminals, and recovered 2,028 firearms and 29,754 bullets.

In the absence of a parliament session, the BNP-Jamaat government first promulgated an indemnity ordinance on January 9, 2003, hours before the operation ended.

The ordinance was signed into a law on February 24 the same year, drawing a barrage of flak from a cross-section of people, including eminent lawyers and rights activists.

Nearly a decade after its passage, Supreme Court lawyer ZI Khan Panna filed a writ petition with the HC in 2012 challenging the indemnity law, the second of its kind in the country.

On July 29, 2012, an HC bench issued a rule upon the government to explain why the act should not be declared unconstitutional. The court also asked the authorities to explain why they should not be directed to create a fund of Tk 100 crore to compensate the victims of the drive.

In its reply, the home ministry

recently informed the court the government had no information that anyone died of torture in the joint force's custody during the operation, Deputy Attorney General Motafer Hossain Sajju told The Daily Star.

Giving its verdict yesterday, the HC observed that every human being had an inherent and fundamental right to life and that no one could be deprived of this constitutional right.

Torture and death in law enforcers' custody is not permitted by the law, the court said, adding that the Joint Drive Indemnity Act 2003 was against the rule of law.

The law was in violation of fundamental rights and constitutional provisions of equality before law and right to protection, the court said.

Although the Jatiya Sangsad is sovereign in making laws, this sovereignty is subject to the constitution and therefore it cannot pass any law against the fundamental rights of the citizens, the court noted.

All citizens are equal before the law and nobody, including members of law enforcement agencies, is above the law. Therefore, there is no scope for giving wholesale indemnity to the individuals or members of joint force or law enforcement agencies, the bench said.

It added any form of torture of citizens in custody of joint force and law enforcement agencies was illegal, as law did not permit physical or mental torture of any accused person during interrogation.

The HC observed that law enforcers could not take law in their own hands, and by doing so the members of joint

force under Operation Clean Heart infringed the rule of law.

The court said hundreds of people had reportedly been injured and maimed and thousands of their family members suffered and were deprived of earnings due to the actions of the joint force during the drive.

The HC bench thanked ZI Khan Panna for filing the writ petition.

The court said another impunity law had been promulgated to stop trial of the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members, but nobody ever challenged that law.

The infamous ordinance had shielded the assassins of Bangabandhu, his family members and others.

The Khondker Moshtaq Ahmed regime issued the ordinance after assuming power through the coup and the bloodbath of August 15, 1975.

Later, the ordinance was ratified in parliament in 1979 through the fifth constitutional amendment that also legitimised the military rule of Ziaur Rahman.

The Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina, one of the two surviving daughters of Bangabandhu, repealed the act in 1996.

Yesterday, petitioner's lawyer Shahdeen Malik told reporters that the members of the joint force had been kept above the law through formulating the Joint Drive Indemnity Act 2003, as nobody could file any case against them.

But through its verdict, the HC has brought the members of the joint force under the law, he added.