

HC asks govt to stop encroachment on Shitalakkhya

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday ordered the government to immediately stop encroachment and construction of structures on the bank of Shitalakkhya river and the canals connected to the river in Narayanganj.

In response to a writ petition, the court also issued a rule, asking the government to explain within eight weeks why it should not be directed to demarcate the area of the river after conducting a survey by a special team and to restore its original condition.

Secretaries to the ministries of planning, environment, land, finance, LGRD, shipping, water resources and communications, chairman of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority, director general of Department of Environment, and deputy commissioner and superintendent of police

of Narayanganj have been made respondents to the rule, Deputy Attorney General M Bashirullah told The Daily Star.

The HC bench of Justice Quamrul Islam Siddique and Justice Md Badruzzaman came up with the order and the rule after hearing the writ petition.

Petitioner Aslam Hossain, a businessman and social worker from Narayanganj, recently filed the appeal, seeking necessary orders on the government to protect the river and the canals from encroachment, Bashirullah said.

Citing the writ petition, Aslam's lawyer Siddiqur Rahman told this correspondent that some freedom fighters reportedly built structures on some canals linked to the Shitalakkhya river in Narayanganj by grabbing them.

Grabbing land of river and canal and building structures there are illegal, he added.



Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury hands over the certificate of a UN prize to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a cabinet meeting at the Secretariat yesterday. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation awarded the prize to Bangladesh in recognition of its floating farming system.

PHOTO: BSS

Terror suspects off the hook

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Twenty-eight other accused in four such cases were released on the same ground. Three of the cases, filed against 10 Tahrir men, have already been dismissed.

Another 151 accused, including suspected militants, in 44 cases are likely to be acquitted due to the same error committed by the investigators.

These 49 cases are among the 283 filed with different police stations in the capital under the anti-terror act between 2009 and May 17 this year.

Police have submitted charge sheets in 234 of them while 49 are still under investigation. And government approval has been taken in 190 cases so far, according to court documents.

Legal experts believe such a simple but important procedural step could be ignored in so many cases because of police's ignorance of the law or a lack of sincerity or underhand dealings with the accused.

Then again many policemen, who are witnesses in different militancy-

related cases, do not appear before court for days, slowing the trial progress.

So much so that warrants were issued against 333 policemen, who were to testify in 62 such cases, as they had not appeared before the courts despite repeated summonses, according to court sources.

Prof Zia Rahman of criminology department at Dhaka University said, "Release of militants in this way is always a threat."

He also said such release speaks of weakness in criminal justice system.

Analysing the 49 cases in which the IOs did not take necessary approvals, it has been found that some of those cases were filed against suspected leaders and operatives of Tahrir and Islamic State (IS). Middle East-based IS has appeared as a major concern for law enforcement agencies after it took credit for some recent deadly attacks in the country.

One such case was filed with Jatrabari Police Station on January 18 against four IS suspects -- Sakhawatul

Kabir, Nazrul Islam, Anwar Hossain alias Baten and Rabiul Islam.

AKM Kamrul Ahsan, who was then an inspector of the Detective Branch (DB) of police, submitted the charge sheet against them on May 25.

A Dhaka court on November 24 indicted the four for conspiring to topple the government through subversive activities and establish a caliphate state in Bangladesh. Their trial is scheduled to begin on February 25.

Additional Public Prosecutor Saiful Islam Helal, assigned by the state to conduct the case, has recently admitted that the IO had not taken the government approval before submitting the chargesheet.

"All the four accused will be acquitted by the court if their lawyers pointed out the procedural flaw committed by the IO."

Helal demanded that the government take punitive actions against the IO for the "utter negligence" he showed in investigating such an important case.

Section 40 of the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009 stipulates, "(1) If any offence is committed under this Act, the police officer concerned shall immediately, after notifying the district magistrate, file a case and start investigation. (2) No court shall take cognisance of any offence under this Act without the prior sanction of the government."

In all the orders releasing the militant suspects, the judges said the courts had given "ample time" after hearing the prosecution to submit the necessary endorsements, but they did not do it.

Sub-Inspector Nurul Haque investigated a case filed with Shahbagh Police Station on May 3, 2012, against suspected Tahrir man Syed Mohammad Galib, who was later released on the same ground.

Nurul, now posted at Dhanmondi Police Station, claimed that he had personally met the Dhaka district magistrate and took his approval. He also had collected the home ministry's approval.

However, court documents show he

did neither of the two.

Another terror case was filed against suspected Tahrir members Imdadul and Shahidul with Motijheel Police Station in 2011. But they were later released by the court as the IO, Sub-Inspector Sheikh Mafizur Rahman, had not taken the home ministry's approval before pressing the charges.

Contacted, Mafizur said he had taken approval from the district magistrate but he did not know that the ministry's endorsement was required as well.

The other militant suspects, released due to such faults made by the police, include Jahidul Islam Jahid and Jahiduddin Milon who were arrested from Topkhana on August 13, 2011, and 18 people arrested from Gulshan during a hartal enforced by Islami Oikya Jote on April 4, 2011.

Besides, the High Court released seven alleged Tahrir members on the same ground in 2011.

Criminal law expert Md Borhan Uddin thinks the officers who investi-

gate such cases do not have proper knowledge of the relevant laws.

"In some cases, the IOs want to save the accused and do not take the necessary approvals intentionally. Sometimes they are simply irresponsible or lack sincerity," he told The Daily Star.

Contacted, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia said he was not in a position to comment since all the 49 cases were investigated before he took the charge in January this year.

"However, we will investigate why the accused were released.

"If any investigator is found not taking the required approvals intentionally or out of negligence, they will be punished ... We will issue a notice asking all the investigating officers to take necessary endorsements in such cases," he added.

Asked about this, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said he was not aware that militant suspects were being freed due to flaws in police investigations.



Rab personnel put on display firearms and sharp weapons recovered after a "gunfight" with suspected robbers in Chandpai Range of the Sundarbans yesterday. Two alleged robbers were killed in the incident.

PHOTO: STAR

No outdoor celebrations

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to allow outdoor programmes from the evening of December 31.

The issue came up after Civil Aviation and Tourism Affairs Minister Rashed Khan Menon told the cabinet meeting that his ministry had planned fireworks on Cox's Bazar beach that evening to mark International Tourism Year, 2016.

He cancelled the fireworks following the PM's directive.

Menon told The Daily Star, "There are security concerns in the country. The quarters which have carried out recent subversive activities at different parts of the country may take advantage on the day and this is why it won't be right to hold any outdoor programmes."

"This is the government decision which has been conveyed through the DCs and law enforcement agencies," he said.

DMP BRIEFING

At a press briefing at the DMP media centre, DMP Commissioner Asaduzzaman Miah said all forms of gathering and celebrations outdoors would be prohibited from dusk on December 31.

However, city dwellers would be encouraged to celebrate the occasion indoors as police would provide security to important establishments, including hotels and clubs.

He also said traffic at Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara, and Dhaka University areas would be controlled and no "outsiders" would be allowed in these areas during that time.

Residents of Gulshan, Banani, and Baridhara have been advised to return home by 8:00pm and those areas would be accessible only through Kakoli intersection.

Dhaka University would be under tight vigilance and students, teachers, and staff would be allowed to enter the university area through Fuller Road provided they have their identity cards, he said.

People not of DU areas have been advised to use the High Court-Doyel Chatter-Shaheed Minar-Palashi route between 6:00pm and 5:00am to pass the DU area, the DMP commissioner added.

No public gathering would be allowed at Hatirjheel area after 6:00pm but vehicular movement

would remain as usual.

All the bars have been instructed to close before 6:00pm on December 31. People with licensed firearms have been asked not to carry their weapon between 8:00pm to 5:00am in residential hotels, and restaurants, said the DMP chief.

Fireworks have been prohibited.

Asked if the restrictions were due to specific threats, Asaduzzaman said they had not received any specific threats.

He said the DMP with the help of officials of the Department of Narcotics Control would conduct a three-day drive against illegal drugs.

The Department of Narcotics Control imposed a ban on buying and selling of all types of liquor across the country for 24 hours from 6:00pm on Thursday.

All bars would remain closed during the period and hotels would not serve liquor to its guests, except foreign guests, said Khandakar Rakibur Rahman, director general of the department, at a press briefing in Tejgaon Industrial Area yesterday.

JMB finds new

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been hiding abroad.

Sources in law enforcement agencies say Shakil belongs to a JMB faction which continues to spread its network despite claims that the spine of the outfit had been ripped off through anti-militancy drives.

Apart from training its members in explosive making and shooting, this group has been providing radical motivation to fresh recruits.

The group's strength came to light after its key den in Mirpur and another in Chittagong were busted recently. A sophisticated semi-automatic sniper rifle and a huge consignment of grenades and bomb-making materials were seized from the dens.

The Mirpur den was their prime training and bomb-making centre. There are several other regional centres, like the one in Chittagong, at different places, said Additional Deputy Commissioner of DB of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Sanwar Hossain.

Detectives suspect Shakil is the architect and maker of the improvised grenades and bombs used in recent attacks on a Shia gathering at Hossaini Dalan, two mosques in a Chittagong navy area and an Ahmadiyya mosque in Rajshahi.

These could be their test cases, added detectives.

"The nature and ingredients of the explosives suggest that they are made by the same group," Sanwar told The Daily Star yesterday.

Shakil has already turned at least two JMB operatives into full-fledged bomb makers. Seven to eight others have also been partially trained up.

Taufique-ul Islam alias Javed alias Rana, a Chittagong JMB operative killed in a "grenade explosion", was trained in bomb-making from the Mirpur den. The 22-year-old militant hailing from Kishoreganj was a commander and chief of the explosive section of Chittagong JMB.

The group has around 25 "Fedains" who are ready to sacrifice their lives for JMB's cause -- establishing the rule of Islam through an armed struggle, said a top DB official, adding that around a dozen of such operatives have been arrested.

Shakil used to visit different areas

of the country to train recruits and make bombs and grenades as per the organisation's requirements, said DMP's DB Joint Commissioner Monirul Islam.

He also said the JMB faction had at least 60 active operatives and over 100 supporters.

Hailing from Bogra, Shakil, also known as Mostafizer Rahman/Mostaq/Nazrul Islam in the organisation, completed his study at Bogra Polytechnic Institute seven years back.

He worked in a private firm for four years. During his service, he became acquainted with some JMB members and began to be radicalised. Due to his academic background, he was given the charge of collecting ingredients, making bombs and training members in explosives.

Shakil eventually became one of top three men of the faction. Initially, he set up his den in Badda area and then moved to Mirpur, detectives said.

He was paid a monthly remuneration of Tk 10,000. Around 20 to 25 other full-timers also get salary from the organisation.

Shakil and JMB second-in-command in Dhaka region Sohel Rana Hiron slipped through police fingers blending with the tenants who were being taken out of the building during the raid on the Mirpur den, officials said.

PM'S DIRECTIVES

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the weekly cabinet meeting yesterday directed ministers to remain alert to militant activities saying that a new conspiracy is being hatched against the country nowadays.

The PM said some local and international quarters are behind the plot. She told the ministers to maintain extra caution, cabinet sources said.

The discussion came up after Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Rashed Khan Menon raised an issue of December 31 night celebration.

Contacted, Menon told The Daily Star that the PM's directives came as there are security concerns in the country following the recent militant activities.

52,000 yaba pills seized in Ctg

CU CORRESPONDENT

Officials of the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) yesterday recovered 52,000 yaba tablets from a lorry in Chittagong city and arrested two people in this connection.

The arrestees are Mohammad Shahjahan, 27, of Laxmipur, and Mohammad Manik, 21, of Khagrachhari.

Acting on a tip-off, officials of DNC Chittagong metro sub-zone took position at Bakalia and halted a Chittagong-bound lorry, coming from Teknaf, near the 3rd Karnaphuli bridge around 2:30pm, said Aslam Hossain, deputy director of DNC Chittagong metro sub-zone.

After searching the vehicle, the officials found 52,000 yaba tablets inside a sack, he said, adding that the lorry was also seized.

A case was filed with Bakalia Police Station in connection with the recovery of yaba tablets.

Man held with 6.6kg gold at Dhaka airport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs officials detained a man along with 12 gold bars, weighing 6.6kg, at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport last night.

The detainee, Shawkat, 25, arrived in Dhaka from Malaysia on a Malaysia Airlines flight that landed at the airport around 9:30pm.

Acting on a tip-off, the preventive team of customs caught Shawkat soon after he came out of the aircraft, said Shahiduzzaman Sarkar, an assistant commissioner of customs.

The officials seized the gold worth around 3.4 crore after searching his carry-on bag, he said.

Customs officials suspect Shawkat, of Comilla, has links with a Comilla-based gold smuggling gang.

He was a frequent traveller to different countries, according to customs officials.

Filing of a case was underway.