

All women should have right to divorce

Says chief justice

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha yesterday said women should also enjoy equal rights to divorce as men do.

"This is my personal opinion. But it's not being implemented for political reasons. The Hindu women in our country don't have the right to divorce. They're also deprived of their father's properties... Indian Muslim women also don't have the right to divorce," he told Women Lawyers' Convention at the city's Cirdap auditorium.

No real development is possible if there are discriminations against women, said Justice Sinha adding that violence against women has been the country's one of the major problems.

He, however, observed such violence could be curbed if the government enacted laws in this regard.

The CJ urged all to come forward to prevent violence against women. Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) organised the convention.

BNWLA Executive Director Salma Ali and its founding secretary Sigma Huda spoke, among others.

Gunmen attack convoy in Kashmir, 2 soldiers killed

AFP, Srinagar

Gunmen attacked a paramilitary convoy in restive Indian Kashmir yesterday, killing two soldiers before entering a training centre for young entrepreneurs with more than 100 people inside, police said.

The militants, believed to be rebels opposed to Indian rule, assaulted a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) convoy before paramilitaries engaged them in a firefight in the training complex on the outskirts of Srinagar.

"Two CRPF personnel died in the initial assault on the convoy and ten others were injured," Javaid Gillani, inspector general of police for the region, told AFP, adding that militants then entered the complex, where they remain surrounded by police.

"All the civilians present inside the building have been evacuated," Gillani said.

The attackers were "holed up" in the main building of the institute and surrounded by government forces, local police superintendent Mohammad Irshad said, adding it was unclear how many attackers were inside.

The stand-off was likely to continue until day break, he said.

At least 120 people, including trainees and staff, were in the building when the militants entered.

Witnesses earlier said three heavily armed militants entered the complex, which houses the government-run Entrepreneurship Development Institute in the region's main city.

They said the gunmen asked everyone inside to "save themselves" and move to a nearby hostel on the campus.

NATIONAL HERALD CASE: Gandhis exempted from personal appearance

PTI, New Delhi

Congress president Sonia Gandhi, son Rahul Gandhi and other three accused — Motilal Vora, Oscar Fernandes and Suman Dubey — were granted exemption from personal appearance by a Delhi court on Saturday as per the Supreme Court's February 12 order.

The court also granted bail to co-accused Sam Pitroda on a personal bond of Rs. 50,000 and a surety of the like amount.

The Gandhis and the other accused in the case also told the court that BJP leader Subramanian Swamy should first satisfy it about the relevance of documents which were ordered to be summoned from various Ministries in the matter.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the Gandhis, told Metropolitan Magistrate Lovleen that complainant Swamy will have to show as to how these documents summoned by the court on January 11 were relevant to the case.

Sibal told the court that the order has been challenged before the High Court by Motilal Vora, an accused in the case, and the High Court has issued a notice to Swamy on the plea.

The lawyers representing the accused also told the court that these documents should be kept in a sealed cover till the issue is decided by the High Court.



The recipients of this year's Ekushey Padak on stage with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after receiving the award at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PMO

Uphold dignity of mother tongue

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She suggested the cultural affairs ministry project the history of Ekushey February in various languages.

Noting that the Bangali nation had gained its hard-fought independence in 1971 following the path of February 21, Hasina said: "As Bangali nation, we have a unique tradition, characteristics and own literature, arts and culture. We'll have to retain it and teach our future generation to follow it."

She remembered with great respect the sacrifices of the language martyrs.

She said it was Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who had proposed forming Rastrabhasha Sangram Parishad in 1948 that initiated the struggle for establishing Bangla as the state language.

About honouring eminent personalities with Ekushey Padak, Hasina said although this is a humble endeavour to recognise their contributions, the real aim is to encourage the future generation so that they could follow these personalities and thus love the country, its people, literature,

culture and engage themselves in research and cultural practice.

Cultural Affairs Secretary Begum Aktari Momtaz delivered the welcome address at the function, with Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor in the chair.

The recipients of Ekushey Padak 2016 are: Justice Kazi Ebadul Haque, Dr Sayed Haider, late Syed Golam Kibria (posthumous) and Dr Jashimuddin Ahmed for their contributions to Language Movement, Begum Jahanara Ahmed (arts - television and film), Pandit Amaresh Roy

Chowdhury (arts -classical music), Begum Shaheen Samad (arts - music), Amanul Haque (arts - dance), late Kazi Anwar Hossain (arts - painting) (posthumous), Toab Khan (journalism), Prof Dr ABM Abdullah (research), Mongsen Ching Monsin (research), Joityprakash Dutt (language and literature), Prof Dr Hayat Mamud (language and literature), Habibullah Siraji (language and literature) and Mafidul Haque for his contributions to Liberation War.

The award carries a gold medal, a citation and a cheque of Tk 2 lakh each.

Recruitment deal to stay unaffected

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"Malaysian Minister Richard Riot himself came to Dhaka to sign the deal. Neither Dhaka nor our high commission in Kuala Lumpur received any notification, written or telephonic, about suspension of the deal," she told The Daily Star by phone.

On Friday, Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said his government suspended the recruitment of all foreign workers, including those from Bangladesh, pending a review of the levy and rehiring programme.

His comment came a day after the signing of the MoU on the hiring of workers from Bangladesh.

He also told Malaysian media that the government would arrest and deport all undocumented foreign workers, who would be over 2 millions, including some 2 lakh Bangladeshis.

Asked about Hamidi's announcement, Shamsunnahar said it was

Malaysia's internal matter.

Hamidi's announcement came amid an uproar from several civil and trade groups, calling on the government to legalise the undocumented migrants first, instead of hiring new foreign workers amid Malaysia's slowing economy.

The deputy PM had previously justified the government's move to bring in Bangladeshi workers, whom he said were meant to do 3D jobs (dirty, difficult and dangerous), which locals preferred not to do.

Since Malaysia's announcement in June last year to this end, Hamidi said his country would recruit 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers over the next three years.

But on Friday, he clarified that 1.5 million Bangladeshis had registered with the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment in Bangladesh for jobs overseas, including in Malaysia.

Accordingly, the deal called G2G Plus was signed in Dhaka, allowing private recruiting agents, alongside the government, to send workers.

However, there were controversies over appointing a private Malaysian company. According to Malaysian media, companies like Bestinet and Real Time Networking lobbied Bangladesh and Malaysian governments to win the contracts to regulate the recruitment process.

Lately, a company named Synerflux was reportedly appointed by Malaysia for the job.

Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies and the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur opposed appointing such a company over fear of monopoly in recruitment.

But the deal went ahead anyway, although there seems to be a flip-flop going on.

Such reversal in policy is nothing new.

Since the Southeast Asian country started hiring workers from Bangladesh, it froze recruitment several times, and allegations of malpractice and labour exploitation have been aplenty.

MALAYSIAN BUSINESSES REACT

In response to Hamidi's announcement, Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce President Choot Ewe Seng said the hardest hit would be the construction, manufacturing and service sectors, which had become too dependent on foreign workers.

He said the government should consider how its latest decision would affect these industries, according to the Malaysian paper, The Star.

Ideal Property Group executive chairman Alex Ooi said the move would negatively affect the construction sector which was already facing a labour shortage.

"The move will impact severely on the progress of key infrastructure projects," he added.

Nation salutes the language heroes

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party chief whip and leaders of the 14-party ruling alliance. After them, Opposition Leader in Parliament Raushan Ershad led her party leaders in showing respect to the martyrs for their supreme sacrifices.

Later, chiefs of the three services, diplomats, wounded freedom fighters, members of Dhaka University Teachers Association, Sector Commanders Forum, other political parties and their wings paid their homage.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia also placed wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar. Last year, she had organised a *doa mahfil* at her office but did not visit the monument.

Later on, the Shaheed Minar was opened to the public. Thousands of people from all strata of society walked barefoot to it for paying tributes to the valiant sons of the soil.

To mark the day, the Central Shaheed Minar and its adjacent areas on Dhaka University campus wore a festive look with street paintings and graffiti with Bangla alphabets and selected verses about mother languages on the walls.

A four-layer security was in place in and around the Central Shaheed

Minar to avoid any unwanted situation. A total of 8,000 law enforcers in uniforms and 1,000 in plainclothes were deployed.

Besides, CCTV cameras were installed from Shabbagh to Shaheed Minar.

The day is a public holiday. The national flag will be hoisted half-mast in all educational institutions and government, semi-government and autonomous offices in respect for the language martyrs.

Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television and private radio stations and television channels will air special programmes on the occasion.

On this day in 1952, students and people from all walks of life took to the streets in Dhaka to protest the then Pakistan government's refusal to recognise Bangla as one of the state languages and imposition of Urdu as the only official language of Pakistan.

Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Shafiur, Jabbar and a few others were killed when police opened fire on their procession.

Pakistan government was ultimately compelled to include an article in the country's constitution on February 29, 1956 that declared, "The state languages of Pakistan shall be

Urdu and Bengali."

However, Ekushey did not end there; it rather planted the seed of freedom in the hearts of Bangalis and 19 years after the Language Movement, an independent country named Bangladesh was born.

To mark the day, ruling Awami League will organise discussion tomorrow at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre, while the BNP will hold a discussion the same day at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh.

President, PM, opposition leader, BNP chairperson and leaders of other political parties issued separate messages on the day.

President Abdul Hamid, in his message, greeted people of all languages across the world on the occasion.

"We feel proud that the spirit of Amar Ekushey is now inspiring the people of different languages around the globe to protect and preserve their own languages and cultures transcending the boundary of our country," he said.

PM Hasina called upon all to protect the dignity of the constitution and take a fresh vow to work together for people's welfare.

"The greatest Ekushey is the symbol of grief, strength and glory in the life of every Bangali," she said and paid her deep homage to the memories of the martyrs.

Raushan, in her message, said February 21 is an occasion for the world to pay respect to their own mother languages.

Paying deep homage to the memories of the language martyrs, BNP chief Khaleda Zia said the spirit of Amar Ekushey would inspire them to resist all "conspiring" forces.

BOMBS BLAST IN JESSORE

Several crude bombs exploded on the premises of the Shaheed Minar in Jessore town early today, said police.

Ilias Hossain, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said the incident happened following a scuffle between two groups over placing wreaths at the monument.

Seven to Eight crude bombs exploded when the local MP Kazi Nabil Ahmed was leaving the Shaheed Minar paying floral tributes to the martyrs, he told The Daily Star over the phone.

Police fired 25 blank shots to bring the situation under control, he said, adding that no one was hurt or arrested.

Cuba visit opens 'a new chapter' in ties: Obama

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama yesterday said that engaging Cuba -- the communist island he is set to visit in March -- is the best way "to advance American interests and values" and help the Cuban people.

Obama seemed giddy when talking about his March 21-22 historic visit. The last US president to visit Cuba while in office was Calvin Coolidge in 1928.

"Hi, everybody. This week, we made it official - I'm going to Cuba," Obama said in his weekly radio address.

The trip follows a decision "to begin a new chapter in our relationship with the people of Cuba," Obama said.

"I believe that the best way to advance American interests and values, and the best way to help the Cuban people improve their lives, is through engagement -- by normalizing relations between our governments and increasing the contacts between our peoples," Obama said.

While "change won't come to Cuba overnight," as the island "opens up, it will mean more opportunity and resources for ordinary Cubans," Obama said.

Since coming to office Obama argued that engagement would do more to change Cuba than half a century of embargoes and isolation.

In December 2014 Obama announced that he and President Raul Castro had engaged in secret rapprochement talks. Diplomatic relations were restored in July 2015.

The White House is betting that opening Cuba to a flood of US tourists and business is the fastest way to bring change.

Uganda's Museveni wins fifth term

Opposition cries foul

AFP, Kampala

Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni extended his three-decade rule on Saturday, after winning a fifth term in polls rejected as fraudulent by the opposition leader under house arrest.

The veteran 71-year-old won 60 percent of the vote in the sometimes chaotic elections, far ahead of the 35 percent garnered by detained opposition chief Kizza Besigye, whose house was surrounded by dozens of armed police in riot gear.

Large numbers of police and troops have been deployed, with the streets of the capital Kampala appearing calm immediately after the widely expected victory for Museveni was declared. US Secretary of State John Kerry on Friday had urged Museveni to "rein in" his security forces.

First surgery

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Lal Sen, a noted physician and coordinator of the Burn & Plastic Surgery Unit, said at a press briefing after the operation.

Since he was suffering from malnutrition, anaemia, and jaundice, we had to wait for him to be fit for the surgery, said Sen.

Diagnosis of the warts had shown that those were not cancerous, he added.

Prof Abul Kalam, head of the institute, led the team. Kalam said the decision to operate on Bajandar's left hand and clear the warts would be made after three weeks.

He said modern electronic medical equipment were used during the surgery and the bleeding was low. The doctors used regional anaesthesia. "We even had light conversation with him during the surgery."

"Since it is an inherited skin disease, there is a high risk of relapse," Kalam said, adding that samples of Bajandar's blood and saliva were sent to the US to have the genetic anomaly, that caused the condition, detected and to know if that can be treated.

If the anomaly can be identified and treated, then there would be no chance of a relapse, he added.

Bajandar's mother Amena Begum and wife Halima were happy to see and talk with him.

"It feels good that his hand is clean now," said Amena.

Sen emphasised on rehabilitation of the patient after his recovery. Warts began to develop on Bajandar's limb when he was 15.

Son of a day labourer and father of a child, Bajandar, before coming to the DMCH, had already spent about Tk 2 lakh for his treatment by borrowing from different sources.

According to information found on the Internet, a Romanian man was first diagnosed with the disease in March 2007. Another case was reported in Indonesia in November the same year in a 35-year-old fisherman. The last reported case also occurred in Indonesia in 2009.

40pc population denied globally

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After formulating the new education policy, the government decided to print primary textbooks in five ethnic languages initially and deliver those to the indigenous children concerned by the beginning of 2014, he said.

"But it has not been done even in 2016."

Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman could not be reached on his phone for comments despite several attempts.

Pursuing education in a language that is not spoken outside the classroom frequently holds back a child's learning, especially for those living in poverty, says the Unesco policy paper.

For instance, Farsi is the official language of instruction in Iran.

Around 20 percent of the fourth graders there taking the test in Farsi reported speaking a different language at home.

"Of these, 80 percent reached the basics in reading compared with over 95 percent of Farsi speakers," the report states.

In multi-ethnic societies, imposing a dominant language through a school system has frequently been a source of grievance linked to wider issues of social and cultural inequality, the Unesco paper finds.

For example, the post-independence government in Pakistan adopted Urdu as the national language and the language of instruction in

schools, which became a source of alienation in a country that was home to six major linguistic groups and 58 smaller ones.

"The failure to recognise Bengali, spoken by the vast majority of the population in [the then] East Pakistan, was one of the major sources of conflict within the new country, leading to the student riots [language movement] in 1952," it says.

In Pakistan, the continued use of Urdu as the language of instruction in government schools, even though it is spoken at home by less than eight percent of the population, has also contributed to political tensions, it adds.

The Unesco report recommended that at least six years of mother tongue-

based education should be provided in ethnically diverse communities to ensure that those speaking a language different from the medium of instruction do not fall behind.

Bilingual or multilingual education programmes should be offered to ease the transition to the teaching of the official languages, it suggests.

To fully support the implementation of mother tongue-based bilingual/multilingual education programmes, teachers should be trained to teach in more than one language, it continues.

Policymakers need to focus on hiring and training teachers from linguistic and ethnic minorities to serve in the schools of their own communities, the paper states.