

## 301-member BCL committee announced

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) last night announced its 301-member full-fledged committee.

Talking to UNB, BCL General Secretary Jakir Hossain said only the regular students who have contributions to the organisation have got posts in the committee.

Saifur Rahman Sohag and Jakir Hossain were elected president and general secretary respectively of BCL at its 28th council on July 26 last year.

On the same day, the names of one vice president, one joint secretary and one organising secretary were also declared.

## ANN demands

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over the summonses. They urged the government to respect due process in hearing the cases.

ANN is an alliance of 22 media in 19 countries in Asia, including The Daily Star. Anam sits on the Board of Editors.

The members of ANN are: The Straits Times (Singapore), Philippine Daily Inquirer (Philippines), The Korea Herald (South Korea), Dawn (Pakistan), The Nation (Thailand), The Star and Sin Chew Daily (Malaysia), The China Post (Taiwan), The Statesman (India), China Daily (China), The Jakarta Post (Indonesia), The Yomiuri Shimbun and The Japan News (Japan), The Kathmandu Post (Nepal), Kuensel (Bhutan), The Island (Sri Lanka), Eleven Media (Myanmar), The Daily Star (Bangladesh), The Brunei Times (Brunei), Rasmei Kampuchea (Cambodia), Vientiane Times (Laos) and Viet Nam News (Vietnam).

"ANN sees this as an attempt to harass and intimidate the media in the South Asian country. We find this a worrying development that further challenges the media environment in Bangladesh," the letter stated.

"Mr Anam is one of the network's pillars and his example of journalism has inspired and helped steer the alliance through its 17 years of history. He has set a rare example by making an introspective comment about a lapse in his editorial judgement in publishing a few reports, based on information given by the Task Force Interrogation Cell (TFIC) in 2007, without being able to verify those independently," it further said.

The editors noted that Anam "appears to be paying an undue price for it with the 75 cases that have been filed against him so far, only showing political aggression that does not serve the interest of Bangladesh."

The lawsuit galore began days after The Daily Star editor appeared on a television talk show on February 3 and expressed his regret over a lapse in his editorial judgement in publishing some reports, based on information given by the TFIC without being able to verify those independently.

As of February 18, 75 lawsuits have been filed against Anam in 50 districts. Of them, 17 involve pleas for bringing sedition charges against him, while the rest are defamation suits.

A court issued an arrest warrant against Mahfuz Anam on February 16 on a libel suit, but revised its order the next day and issued a summons. Anam is set to appear before that court on March 28. Several other courts have served summonses against him for defamation.

## Pay hike

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Tk 32,000-37,000. Salary of joint district and sessions judges will be Tk 54,370 to 74,460, up from Tk 28,000 to 37,000.

Salary of senior assistant judges and those who are in equivalent rank was Tk 23,000-34,200 under the pay scale of 2009. Now they will draw Tk 44,450 to 72,210.

Salary of assistant judges will be Tk 30,935 to 64,430 against the previous salary of between Tk 16,000 and 25,600.

The cabinet secretary said the pay scale for the judicial service members has been fixed, bringing little changes in the recommendations by the national pay commission.

He said the judges' salaries were hiked proportionately with what they have been awarded in the pay scale of 2009.

The secretary added that their pension facilities had gone up from 80 percent to 90 percent.

The cabinet also gave the nod to the drafts of Tree Conservation Act-2016 and Tea Act-2016.

The main objective of the Tree Conservation Act is to conserve the century-old trees, said the cabinet secretary.

The new law proposed conservation of the old trees in the reserve forests and other forests of the country in the interest of environment protection, he added.



A foreigner and three bank officials arrested in connection with the recent ATM card frauds being taken to the DMP Media Centre for a press briefing yesterday.

PHOTO:

STAR

## Foreigner, 3 bankers held

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skipped off four ATM booths around the capital. The central bank investigation detected that this gang has stolen data of over 1,200 cards, but was able to withdraw cash by using around 40 cards.

After investigating for a week, detectives arrested Thomas, the mastermind, at his Gulshan home, where he used to live with his Bangladeshi wife and a new-born baby, Monirul said.

Based on his information, the DB later arrested the three locals from the same area yesterday.

Footage of CCTV cameras inside the ATM booths helped police arrest Thomas and the bank officials.

Monirul claimed that the arrestees, during preliminary interrogation, told police that they along with some other foreign nationals and a Bangladeshi expatriate in London have been involved in the crime for a long time.

They embezzled hundreds of thousands of currencies from foreign accounts, he said, adding that their

offence came to light as they, for the first time, took money from local accounts.

Thomas told detectives that two of his foreign accomplices -- a Romanian and a Spanish -- had left the country days before the scam became public knowledge.

Police are scrutinising Thomas' information with immigrations database to identify the two foreigners, Monirul said.

A DB official said Thomas had an identity card claiming that he is a citizen of Germany. The official said they were probing to see if the card was genuine.

A DB official said Thomas is a member of an international ATM skimming syndicate. He withdrew crores of foreign currencies in different countries in Africa and Asia before coming to Bangladesh.

A court yesterday placed the four on six-day remands each, detective said.

Replying to a query on how the four met each other, Monirul said Thomas came to the country pretending to be a

manpower businessman and communicated with the three to plan the fraud.

Detectives are also investigating Thomas' communication with some businessmen.

Replying to a query whether it was a failure of the Special Branch of police, which deals with foreigners, to prevent the crime, Monirul said this kind of crimes happen in many developed countries.

Investigators said they found out that Thomas was leading a lavish life in Dhaka stealing money from credit cards used by people abroad. He along with his foreign and local accomplices used to follow foreigners and set up skimming devices to steal data. They then created fake cards which they used for withdrawing a huge amount of cash from other countries.

But these cases were not detected in Bangladesh as those were foreign cards used by foreigners.

Thomas and a Bangladeshi expatriate Farid Nabir checked in at the Holiday Planet hotel in the capital's

Gulshan on December 13, 2014, and checked out on December 24, 2014, said Akbar Hossain, general manager of the hotel.

Thomas returned the same day and checked into a suite of the hotel and stayed there until August 7, 2015. His wife started living with him at the hotel about two months before he checked out. The couple rented an apartment in the same neighbourhood for over Tk 1.5 lakh a month, he added.

Meanwhile, Farid Nabir, who told the hotel that he was a citizen of the UK and his hometown was in Sylhet, checked into the hotel on January 20 and left on February 3 morning. CCTV footage of him leaving the hotel revealed that he left the hotel and got into a mid-size blue SUV. The registration number of the SUV, which had a flagpole in the front, could not be seen in the footage.

"He used to throw parties in 5-star hotels once or twice a month. He had a very lavish life in Dhaka," said a police official wishing not to be named.

## PM lashes out at Star editor

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newspaper like The Daily Star would publish whatever the DGFI had supplied to it since the paper is very much aware of its language. "It seems that the DGFI is more intelligent than The Daily Star as whatever the DGFI supplied, the daily published in full like a good boy."

In this connection, she warned that those who had orchestrated conspiracies would be tried the way the war criminals are being tried. "Those who were involved in this conspiratorial plot would be tried like the war criminals for destroying the constitution."

The PM said the paper became too desperate to brand her as corrupt during the last caretaker regime by publishing news against her.

"So, I would like to tell Mahfuz Anam that you have made many ill attempts to brand me as corrupt. You are merely a Mahfuz Anam, but even your mentor World Bank could not label me corrupt over the Padma bridge issue," she mentioned.

Hasina said a certain quarter is now expressing "frustration and grief" over filing of cases against the Star editor.

Making her stand clear, the PM said she had argued that the chief of the caretaker government would run the country, not the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI). "My house was searched twice and I was arrested without any warrant. My sick husband was pushed down...we didn't disclose it, but I want to know who provoked it," she said in an emotion-choked voice.

Hasina said she was dragged to jail where she had to live in a damp room and sleep on a fragile, torn bed.

The premier said she was kept into solitary confinement for 11 months. "Even my relatives were not allowed to meet me on the Eid day. I became sick as I suffered from allergy and an eye infection, but no physician was permitted to visit me."

She said her husband and fupu (aunt) were at last allowed to meet her on the Eid day, but the latter was asked not to disclose her sickness to the media. "My fupu didn't disclose it on that day, but she revealed it later by calling in reporters to her house."

The PM said she was later shifted to the hospital from the jail, but was again taken to the jail when the doctors said a blood test was needed for her. "I was transferred to the hospital again when I fell sick due to low pressure." "During that time, I was not allowed to change my dress and I was taken to

the court. There were 16 cases against me... a dozen of those were filed by the BNP and the rest by the caretaker government."

The PM asked those who are making statements protesting filing of the cases against the Star editor as to what would be their reaction if they were kept into solitary confinement for 11 months.

"Would you make statements and offer sympathy if torture, repression and mental pressure are inflicted on your families like my son, daughter and sister underwent during that time?" she questioned.

Hasina said the then caretaker government had tried to form a King's Party, but failed. Later, a world-renowned Bangladeshi national tried to float a political party and prepared a list of 70 persons while the Star editor backed the move, she added.

About the January 5, 2014 national elections, she said the people would judge the role of the newspaper which tried to foil the polls. "But when we held the elections, frustration gripped them as their dreams remained unfulfilled."

She said when the Liberation War began, she went through sudden disruption in her studies but the Star editor moved to West Pakistan for his education. "Later, he [Star editor] went to Kolkata and he was given the responsibility for writing English as he knew English...this is his joining the Liberation War."

"What could we expect from a person who moved to Pakistan during the war for higher education? What these people, who helped Brigadier Amin and Brigadier Bari as well as the DGFI, can deliver for the country and the people?" she asked.

The PM said those, who published the DGFI-supplied fake news, had so far written "fake, false and adulterated reports by pretending to be honest". "Their intention is to destroy the country," she complained.

In this connection, she mentioned that some AL leaders have opened their mouth on this issue, but there is still hesitation among some others to speak the truth.

The PM said two newspapers have been engaged in spreading malice against her over the last 20 years. "Except for the initial few years, these papers since their inception always spread malice against me and wrote against me...it seems that the Awami League is their enemy.... They have

been unmasked now as truth can never be suppressed."

The country witnessed the emergency rule due to misrule and corruption of the BNP-Jamaat government, she told her audience. "A different face emerged when the caretaker regime assumed power. They tried to consolidate their power and the two newspapers backed them."

The Star editor admitted that he ran the DGFI-supplied unverified news, but the paper's masthead always reads "journalism without fear or favour".

What kind of journalism it was when the editor published unverified news, she questioned. "My question is that what type of friendship he had with the DGFI or Brig Bari or Brig Amin? Was it a fact that he had been sold out to them?"

Hasina also wanted to know whether the Star editor was involved in the plot of "minus-two formula". "If you publish such false news, there won't be journalism without fear, but I have nothing to say if you are sold out."

Hasina said the Ekushey is the symbol of grief, strength and glory in the life of every Bangali.

"On this day in 1952, many valiant sons of the soil, including Rafiq, Shafiq, Salam, Barkat and Jabbar sacrificed their lives for protecting the dignity of the mother tongue."

Hasina paid her deep homage to the memories of the language martyrs. She also paid her deep respect to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who had steered the Language Movement from inside the jail.

The resonance of the pride of Amar Ekushey is now resounded in the hearts of the people of 193 countries surpassing the boundary of Bangladesh, she mentioned.

"The day reached to a new height on 17 November 1999 when the Unesco recognised the 21 February as the International Mother Language Day at the initiative of the then Awami League government and with the help of some expatriate Bangladeshis," the PM said.

The government has set up International Mother Language Institute to preserve the languages of the world and carry out research on those, she noted.

She said the Ekushey is the symbol of our democratic values, Bangali nationalism, spirit of liberation war and

JUSTICE MANIK'S COMMENTS

## HC directive sought to stop coverage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A writ petition was filed with the High Court yesterday, seeking restrictions on publishing and broadcasting by the media the "derogatory" comments of Justice AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik, a former Supreme Court judge, about the judiciary.

SM Zulfiqur Ali, an SC lawyer, submitted the petition for a directive from the HC on the information secretary, asking him to take necessary step in this regard.

Citing the petition, Zulfiqur's lawyer AKM Ehsanur Rahman told The Daily Star that Justice Manik recently made some comments before the media, particularly on some television talk shows, which affected and undermined the dignity of the judiciary.

The media has constitutional rights to enjoy freedom of expression with some restrictions, but those restrictions were not followed in publishing and broadcasting Justice Manik's remarks about the judiciary, the lawyer claimed.

Ehsanur said the court might hold a hearing on the petition today.

## More cases

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Elsewhere, three more defamation cases were filed on Thursday yesterday. With these, Mahfuz Anam faces 79 lawsuits -- 17 sedition cases and 62 defamation suits.

The barrage of cases began days after the Star editor at a talk show on February 3 made an introspective comment about a lapse in his editorial judgement in publishing some reports, based on information given by the Task Force Interrogation (TFI) cell during the 2007-08 caretaker government's tenure, without being able to verify those independently.

During the period, almost all the media outlets, both print and electronic, ran similar stories.

At the time, this newspaper published 11 such reports -- seven on alleged corruption of Khaleda Zia, her two sons -- Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko -- and other BNP leaders. Three reports involved alleged graft of Sheikh Hasina and one involving the then chief conservator of forests, Osman Gani.

The reports were based on the statements of some top Awami League and BNP leaders and businesspersons, who were interrogated by the TFI cell. Numerous cases were filed against senior politicians, including Hasina and Khaleda, mostly based on those statements.

Khaleda and other BNP leaders still face many of those cases, but the cases against Hasina and most other AL leaders were either quashed or withdrawn after the AL took office in 2009.

Presently, the cases being filed against Mahfuz Anam allege that the reports run by this newspaper led to the arrest of AL chief Sheikh Hasina, thus defaming her.

### THREE MORE CASES

In Chittagong, Ritu Das Babul, a member of Jubo League central committee, filed a defamation case on Thursday evening claiming Tk 100 crore in compensation.

The case was filed with Chittagong Metropolitan Magistrate Court (second) under section 500, 501 and 503 of the Penal Code, said court sources.

Acting judge of the court, Farid Alam, took the case into cognisance and summoned the editor to appear before it on May 10.

Humayun Kabir, counsel for the complainant, said the defamation suit was filed against Anam as various reports published in The Daily Star following the 1/11 changeover tarnished the image of Hasina and her party Awami League.

In Faridpur, Zahid Bepari, joint convener of the district Jubo League, yesterday sued Mahfuz Anam for defamation and claimed Tk 50.05 crore.

Zahid, who is also an assistant public prosecutor in Faridpur court, said in his case statement that the Star carried a report headlined "Hasina regularly took money from magnets" without verifying independently. That report caused a Tk 50-crore damage to the Awami League and Tk 5,00,000 lakh to himself.

The court took the charge into cognisance and ordered Mahfuz Anam to appear before it on March 15.

In Chuadanga, Shafiqul Islam, joint convener of the district Awami Ainjibi Parishad, sued the Star editor in the cognisance court of Chuadanga Sadar upazila, seeking Tk 10 crore for defamation. Chief Judicial Magistrate ABM Mahmudul Haq took the case into cognisance and fixed March 8 for hearing. "STOP HARASSING"

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) President Mojahidul Islam Selim and General Secretary Syed Abu Jafar Ahmed and General Secretary of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal Khaleduzzaman in a statement urged all to stop harassing Mahfuz Anam.

Expressing grave concerns, they said filing of cases all across the country against him amounts to harassment.

"We demand an immediate end to such activities," reads the statement.