

# Sorry state of Ctg museums

Poor collection results in poor number of visitors

MINHAJ UDDIN, Chittagong.

Lack of publicity and poor collections have made the city museums so unattractive that they are unlikely to allure a good number of visitors even on the World Museum Day to be observed worldwide today.

The port city has a very few recreational places for its six million people, but there are four museums here -- the Ethnological Museum in Agrabad, Zia Memorial Museum in Kazir Dewry, Railway Museum in Pahartali and the Tax Archive at the Agrabad CGO Building.

The first two museums are run by the cultural affairs ministry, the Railway Museum by the railway authorities and the Tax Archive is privately run by some government tax officials.

The largest of these four is the Ethnological Museum in Agrabad which was founded in 1965. It currently displays artefacts used by 27 ethnic groups.

"No new collection has hit the museum for a long time. I have been to the museum many times and there is nothing new for me," said Nazmul

Hasan, a student of Government Commerce College.

Abu Bakkar Siddiqi, research assistant of the museum, said they are trying to collect new artefacts including the ones from almost extinct tribes like Mandai and Lusai ethnic groups.

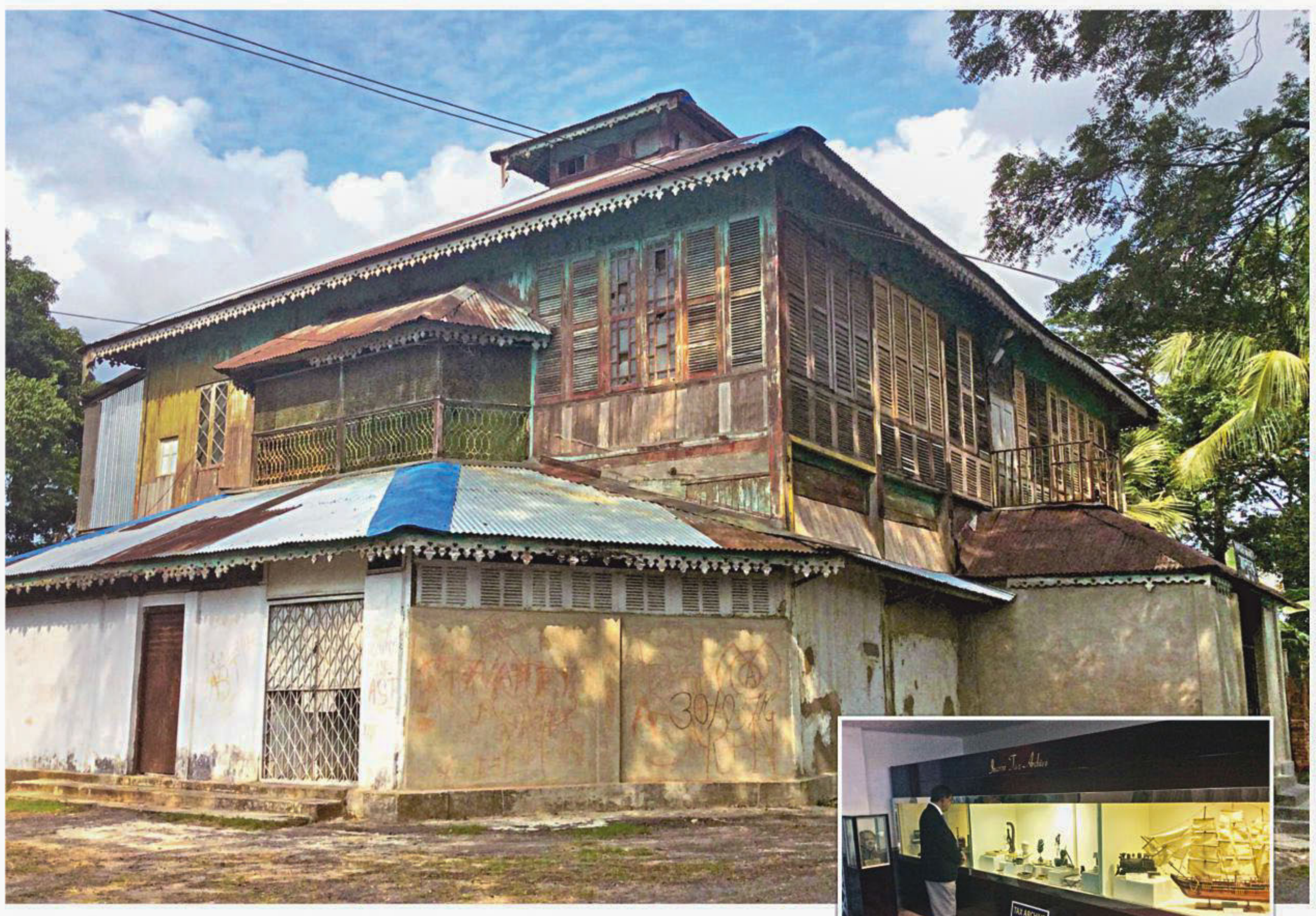
"We have already collected some artefacts. Currently, renovation work is going on. We would display those items once the works are done," he said.

Siddiqi said the number of visitors is still increasing, adding, 26,522 people visited the museum between October 2015 and March 2016. The number was 21,522 during the corresponding period a year earlier, he added.

He however admitted that visitors' presence would have been much higher if new artefacts were displayed with regular publicity about the museum.

The condition of Zia Memorial Museum, established in 1993, is even worse. It was set up on a 3.17-acre piece of land in a colonial period building known as the Old Circuit House. People hardly come across the museum as it is situated quite inside a road from the Kazir Dewry intersection.

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The corrugated iron-sheet- and wood-built building of the Railway Museum in Chittagong city shows how the authorities concerned had neglected the place. Inset, a poorly lit room at the Tax Archives in Chittagong city. Today is the International Museum Day.

PHOTO: STAR



## Story of an MP and a teacher

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those days there was a general awe about members of parliament, for they were the lawmakers. It is on them that the future direction of the country and its people would come from. Speeches made in parliament became documents of history to be treasured by the succeeding generations to read and learn from.

Much before Bangladesh became parliamentarians, they became teachers. In fact, historically Bangalee culture, literature and folklore revered teachers more than the people of any other profession. It was the dream of most of the good students to grow up to be a teacher as it was a glorified profession, if not the most glorified of all. It was an honour to be called a teacher. He or she (though there were very few female teachers) would be a part of every society, club or group that would be formed for any social activity. In almost every village, a teacher would be the natural leader of that community to whom everybody would turn to for guidance on every conceivable issue -- from what to plant this season to what medicine to take for any ailment to how to solve problems with relatives. He was the centre of his community.

In our own student life, a teacher was a man of reverence and respect. Later as we passed out of the university, my friends who were far brighter and more

competent than myself all went on to become teachers either here or abroad. I recall feeling somewhat jealous hearing stories of how their former students would leave everything aside to rush to help them in any way they could and would actually feel privileged for being able to do so.

But these are stories of old times.

Now we have a new one about the two above-mentioned professions that we once revered so much. A member of the current parliament forced a serving teacher (headteacher) to repeatedly "stand and squat holding his ears with his two hands" (kan dhorey uth bosh kora) till he was too tired to continue, and fell down. Only a Bangalee can comprehend the severity of this punishment. Culturally, there cannot be a more humiliating act that one can be forced to perform in public. This is the most shameful, disrespectful and humiliating punishment that one can subject another to. This is what is done when we want to rob a person of all his sense of dignity and self respect. (This can only be compared to the notion of "losing face" in Japanese, Korean or other cultures).

It is more so for a teacher. What is a teacher if he does not command respect of his pupils? How can he face his students unless there is a relationship of dignity with those he teaches? What the

MP has done is to destroy forever this teacher's capacity to face his students with self respect. He may be forced to continue in his job because of pecuniary considerations but his life as a teacher is all but destroyed.

A natural question that arises is does the MP have a right to do what he did? Even the most hardened of criminals have a right to a due process of law before being punished. Here, the teacher was meted out a punishment -- the cruelest that can be for a teacher -- by a public representative who should have known well what impact such an act is likely to have on a teacher. That is of course if he has enough sensitivity to appreciate the status of a teacher.

The MP's explanation is equally astounding. He said he had to humiliate the teacher to "save his life". The choice, according to him, was between the teacher's dignity and life. How credible is the MP's claim? Other teachers of the school have stated that the headteacher did not say anything of the sort that the MP used as an excuse to do what he did. The imam of the nearest mosque asserted that he did not recognise the accusers, meaning these people may well be from outside the locality.

As far as we have been able to collect, the story is this: The teacher punished a student on May 8 and made a comment critical of Islam, which the teacher

outright denies. The next day, the boy's family lodged a verbal complaint with the school managing committee, saying the teacher beat up their son. There was no mention of the alleged derogatory comments about Islam. On May 12, the family filed a written complaint over the alleged beating. Again, there was no mention of any remark about Islam.

The public shaming of the teacher came on May 13, from out of the blue. As if that was not enough, it now emerges that the school managing committee made a unanimous decision on the very day to suspend the teacher on grounds of torturing students, receiving money in the name of teachers' appointment, making derogatory comments about Islam and taking leave without permission. Interestingly, the suspension order was signed only on May 16 and it became public yesterday.

But why now? And on what basis? We have no knowledge that this teacher was served with any notice to explain the allegations brought against him. Why didn't the managing committee suspend him, say, a month ago or two months ago? Is the managing committee trying to save someone now that an MP and his men are drawing widespread criticism for humiliating the teacher?

We call on the education ministry to launch a thorough investigation of the whole matter.

There are four issues that concern us: the mysterious suspension of the teacher, the highhandedness of the MP, the public humiliation of a teacher, and finally the use of religion to instigate mob anger against a member of a minority community leading to a situation where the MP had to humiliate him "to save him". While the first three must be addressed adequately, it is the fourth that warrants urgent attention and firm action.

To us, it is a clear case of a motivated group spreading a dangerous rumour of an alleged insult to religion to create a mob frenzy to force a member of another religion to plead for mercy to save his life. If we take the MP's claim at face value, then the mob was ready to kill the teacher for a so-called "insult" that, as far as we can tell, never occurred.

Can we imagine the implication of this incident for all the teachers of minority communities in all the schools in the country? This is a deliberate attempt to weaken communal harmony and create fear in the minds of religious minorities. All of us, especially the ruling party and its government, must see the wider implications of such acts and act urgently and concertedly. Just saying that all these are "isolated incidents" can only isolate us from the danger that we may be facing.



WOMEN LEADERS FORUM

## PM flies to Sofia today

UNB, London

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to leave the UK today for Bulgaria on a three-day official visit to attend the Global Women Leaders Forum.

Apart from joining the forum, the PM will have official talks with her Bulgarian counterpart Boyko Borissov, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim said.

A British Airways flight (BA 0890) carrying the PM and her entourage is scheduled to depart Heathrow International Airport for the Bulgarian capital Sofia at 8:20am (London time).

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## POLITICAL ROW UN calls for amicable settlement

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations has reiterated its call for resolving political problems in Bangladesh through a peaceful and amicable way.

Responding to a question on democracy and inclusive election in Bangladesh, Deputy Spokesman for the Secretary-General Farhan Haq said the UN encourages the parties in Bangladesh to deal with each other in settling the problems.

When asked whether UN Assistant Secretary General Oscar Fernandez Taranco, who was earlier assigned to mediate in resolving the political impasse in Bangladesh, was still working on behalf of the UN secretary-general.

"Fernandez Taranco, as you know, he heads our peace building support office, and that is the work that he does. He has travelled to Bangladesh in the past, and he will do so again as circumstances allow," said Farhan during the daily press briefing at the UN headquarters in New York on Monday.

"Ultimately, that depends, of course, on the willingness of the parties to deal with each other. And we encourage them to do that, to be willing to deal with each other in a peaceful and amicable fashion," the UN official added.

On the recent killing of a Buddhist monk in Bangladesh, the deputy spokesperson said, "We regard, of course, the question of the deaths of different people, including of secular activists, of people from the Hindu and Buddhist communities and others with extreme concern."

That's essentially a separate issue, "where you've seen attacks by extremist elements against different communities", he added.

## MP's men now out to hush voices

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saved the teacher from being killed by the mob."

He suddenly changed the topic and expressed his hatred of journalists. "We can't let the journalists run the smear campaign against our lawmaker. We have to do something. If needed, we will wage a movement."

Another man came forward. Clad in a panjabi and lungi, he said, "Let the journalists write whatever they want. As long as we remain united, nothing can harm us."

The school has been closed for summer since Saturday, a day after a mob beat up Shyamal and made him do squats holding his ears. Locals that day had been herded by an announcement through a mosque's loudspeaker saying the headmaster had hurt the religious sentiment of the Muslims while he meted out punishment to a class-X student.

Despite it being a holiday, the schoolyard was teeming with people yesterday. Only two teachers were seen in

the teachers' room, but neither wanted to speak.

"I don't know anything about the incident," one of them said when asked about Friday's incident. He hurriedly locked the teachers' room and shot a glance at his colleague. "What are you doing here? Leave immediately."

Both the teachers walked away hastily.

The class-X student, whose mother on May 12 lodged a complaint with the school committee against the headmaster, was at the school along with his mother and sister.

His mother also spoke in tune with the people gathered there. "Do also write that he [headmaster] insulted our religion," she told The Daily Star.

Asked if she mentioned in her complaint the allegation that the headmaster hurt their religious sentiment, she said, "I didn't mention it because I didn't hear him making such remarks. It was my son who heard it."

Many people at the school complained that Shyamal was in the habit of beating up students mercilessly.

However, a college student, who passed SSC exams from the school last year, said he did not see the headmaster beat up students.

"He was strict but he used to help students in their studies a lot," he added.

The Daily Star tried to talk to some villagers outside the school. But most of them would not speak, apparently fearing reprisal.

Around the bend of the road, The Daily Star correspondents met an elderly person who was present during the public humiliation of Shyamal. He spoke up apparently being assured that there was nobody nearby.

"The whole thing was staged," said the man aged over 60, wishing not to be named.

He insisted that Shyamal was not the kind of person who would make derogatory comments about religion. "He has no such records. I know him well and I know he cannot say anything like that."

He said he along with some other elderly villagers went to the complainant's

house near the school following her request.

"She told them that she wants arbitration as the headmaster beat up her child. But she didn't say anything about the teacher hurting religious sentiment of the Muslims.

"When we went to the arbitration on Friday, we suddenly heard an announcement over loudspeakers that the headmaster had hurt religious sentiment. Within an hour, the school ground had hundreds of people," he said.

He demanded the authorities concerned launch a probe to find who had ordered the announcement when the arbitration was only about settling the issue of beating up of the student.

His demand was met yesterday.

A fresh five-member committee was formed to probe the incident, said UNO Mousumi Habib, reports UNB.

The elderly man around the corner said some influential members of the school's committee had been talking behind the teacher's back over the last couple of years. He had even recom-

mended Shyamal leave before things got worse.

A couple of years ago, a rift in the school committee developed over a fund of Tk 50 lakh intended for infrastructure building. Some committee members were envious of the headmaster as he handled the fund. They even accused the teacher of misappropriating a portion of the money, said the local.

**HEADMASTER SUSPENDED**

The school managing committee has suspended the headmaster.

Talking to this newspaper, Shyamal yesterday said he received a letter signed by Farukul Islam, chairman of the committee.

The letter said he was suspended because "he physically tortured students, received money in the name of teachers' appointment, made derogatory comments about Islam, remained absent without leave and used to be late at work".

Signed by committee chairman Farukul on Monday, it said the suspension decision was made on Friday.

## SC irked as HC directives unheeded

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human rights groups and individuals following the tragic death in police custody of Shamim Reza Rubel, a student of Independent University, on July 23, 1998.

In the petition, they also raised allegation that police arbitrarily arrest people on suspicion and force an accused to make confession by torturing him/her on remand.

One of the directives says an accused must be interrogated by the investigation officer in a prison room, instead of a police interrogation cell, until the cell has a glass wall or a wall with grilles on one side to make the accused visible to the lawyer or relatives.

The court also ruled that sections 54 and 167 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) dealing with the arrest

on suspicion and subsequent remand respectively were not consistent with the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution.

In another directive, the court bars police from detaining a person under the Special Powers Act after picking him/her up on suspicion.

The HC asked the government to amend the relevant sections of the CrPC within six months from the date of the ruling.

The then BNP-led government did not agree to abide by the HC directives and opted to challenge them by filing an appeal with the Appellate Division. Now, the AL-led government is pursuing that appeal.

During the hearing on the appeal, the apex court said the Code of Criminal Procedure is a colonial law. Malaysia and

India have amended this law, but it has not been amended in our country.

A four-member bench headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha concluded the hearing and fixed May 24 for delivering a verdict on it.

The allegation that police abuse powers through arbitrary arrest on suspicion and torture on remand has always been a major concern in the country. To check it, human rights activists have long been demanding changes in the law.

Yesterday, the apex court said the incident of anybody being arrested by law enforcers without uniform was a "serious" issue.

It then cited an instance where the son of a freedom fighter, who was a bodyguard of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has allegedly been picked up by

some people claiming to be law enforcers. But he has yet to be traced, it noted.

Defending the appeal, Attorney General Mahbub Alam, however, told the court that the HC directives are not proper due to the socio-economic condition of the country.

Following scrutiny of the HC directives, he said, it appeared that they are in favour of the accused.

If the accused is given huge protection, law and order might deteriorate, he added.

Petitioners' lawyer M Amir-Ul Islam opposed the appeal, saying that the laws that are contrary to the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution can be scrapped.

During the hearing, the SC said the law enforcers produce any arrested person before the media now. The court asks if it is acceptable.

It said this court also has to fight for implementation of the directives in Masdar Hossain verdict for separation of the judiciary from the executive.

A major part of the directives was not implemented yet, the SC said, adding that the judiciary has been facing backlog of cases, as some laws were formulated without proper examination.

The apex court said police officials prepare first information reports and charge sheets in conventional ways; they do not properly apply their mind.

The government has formulated a law in 2008 for money laundering trials and it was amended in 2009 and 2012, it said, adding that hurriedness is seen in bringing amendment, and because of this, harmony among some laws is missing.