

Verdict any day on executive magistrate-led mobile courts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court will deliver a verdict any day on a writ petition that challenged the legality of operation of mobile courts comprising executive magistrates for trial of petty crimes on the spot.

The bench of Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury and Justice Ashish Ranjan Das kept the petition as Curia Advisari Vult -- meaning that the verdict could be delivered anytime -- after concluding hearing on the matter on March 8.

Following the petition, the HC on October 16, 2011, issued a rule asking the government to explain why the provisions of the Mobile Court Act, 2009 that empower executive magistrates to exercise judicial powers through mobile courts should not be declared unconstitutional.

Mobile courts, which are

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

India luring Bangladesh into military treaty: BNP



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

India is using the prospect of the Teesta agreement to drag Bangladesh into signing a military treaty between the two countries, the BNP alleged yesterday.

"There have been newspaper reports that India is using the Teesta deal as a bait to lure Bangladesh into signing India-Bangladesh defence treaty," said BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmed while speaking with journalists at a press briefing at the party's Naya Paltan office.

Any defence or military deal with India will be a betrayal to Bangladesh and its people, he said, adding that "Such a deal will threaten the sovereignty of Bangladesh" and the "people will thwart such anti-state deal."

Rizvi, with his comments, was referring to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's upcoming tour of India, where, according to reports, the two countries might sign security and military agreements.

Meanwhile, at Jatiya Press Club, BNP standing committee member Moudud Ahmed at a discussion organised by Democratic Council said that party Chairperson Khaleda Zia would be acquitted of all charges "if the courts remain neutral".

The corruption cases against Khaleda Zia are nothing but acts of political vengeance, he added.



A part of the newly razed hills in the port city's Pahartali area near a housing project of Chittagong City Corporation. Illegal hill cutting continues to thrive in the area, as per locals, under the patronage of influential people. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Cutting hills for 'housing plots'

MINHAJ UDDIN, Ctg

Despite a government ban, illegal hill cutting continues unabated in Pahartali area of Chittagong city.

In the last two month, two hills have been partially razed in the area north to the Lake City Housing Society of Chittagong City Corporation (CCC).

The Department of Environment (DoE) visited the site last month, and estimated that the area of newly razed hills could be around 1.5 acres, said Khandokar Mohammad Tahajut Ali, a DoE official.

"We issued show cause notices against six persons, whose names were on a signboard claiming ownership of the fatted land, on February 7 after finding evidence of hill cutting," he said.

While visiting recently, it was found that the only road leading to the area goes through the housing society.

When contacted on a given phone number of a landowner, one Jainal said they have bought the land in a flattened state. He refused to provide further information and asked to contact councillor Jashim regarding hill cutting.

The Daily Star spoke to at least a dozen of locals regarding the issue, but they were reluctant to speak fearing repercussions.

Eventually, wishing anonymity, they alleged that councillor Jahurul Alam Jashim of ward-9 and his men were involved in hill cutting. The two hills were partially cut around two months ago, they said. They also alleged that councillor Jashim has the absolute authority in the area.

Earlier, hills on at least two acres of land had been razed in Pahartali area under Akbershah Police Station just after Jashim became the councillor of north



The razed area has been converted into plots and a signboard was erected claiming ownership of one.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Preservation Act 1995 (amended in 2000) prohibits cutting of hills without an approval from the authorities concerned. If anyone breaks the law, the punishment is up to two years' imprisonment or Tk 2 lakh fine, or both, for the first time. The second time, it is up to 10 years' imprisonment or Tk 10 lakh fine or both.

Seeking anonymity, some DoE officials alleged they were getting regular phone calls from a top Awami League leader of the city unit to exempt Jashim from the charge sheet in the case.

DoE is yet to submit the charge sheet as an investigation is underway, said DoE official Tahajut Ali.

"We are hoping to submit it (charge sheet) within this month," said Azadur Rahman Mollick, director of DoE, Chittagong (metro).

When asked about the recent hill cutting, he said, "Legal actions will be taken against the six persons who were issued show cause notices for razing hills."

Contacted over phone, councillor Jashim, also general secretary of ward-9 unit Awami League, said there has not been any hill cutting in the area for the last two years.

He denied his involvement in

razing hills and claimed that his political opponents were making those false allegations.

The hills that were razed in the last two months were next to the Lake City Housing Project, he said. "I own a nominal amount of land there. The miscreants who are cutting the hills could be identified by checking ownership documents of the land."

He alleged that influential people including police, journalists and government officials own lands in the area, and are involved in hill cutting, but everyone uses his name because of his involvement in politics.

According to the DoE documents, the Lake City Housing Project is around 30 acres, which used to be a hilly area. CCC bought the land in 2003.

Rafiqul Islam, superintendent engineer of CCC and also the project director, said all the lands were bought from individual owners. The project area has been flattened and divided into plots, each containing 2.5 kathas of land.

Afaj Ullah Chowdhury, general secretary of Lake City Housing Owners' Association, said the project has around 548 plots. So far, 148 have been handed over to plot owners.

When asked about the hill cutting near the area, he, however, evaded the question, and said, "I don't want to get into conflict with anyone."

The main road of the housing project, stretching from south to north from the entrance, is 1,550 feet long and 40 feet wide, according to the DoE documents.

Locals said the hills to the north side of the project, which was previously unapproachable, has become easily accessible due to the construction of the road.

Taking advantage, some unscrupulous people are trying to flatten the hills and develop another housing project there, they alleged.

"DoE and other law enforcement agencies are not sincere in stopping the menace of hill cutting. Over the years, many hills have been destroyed in the city for housing projects. If it continues, the remaining hills would vanish soon," said Edris Ali, vice president of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa) Chittagongzone.

People should be made aware of the consequences of hill cutting, he said. Also, miscreants, regardless of who they are, must be given exemplary punishment.



Another signboard claiming ownership. PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

But, the Ansar members of CCC barred this correspondent from entering the area saying that only the land owners and men belonging to CCC councillor Jashim were allowed entrance.

However, this correspondent entered the area through the hills and found evidence of hill cutting although no one was seen in action.

The razed areas have been converted into plots and two signboards were erected claiming ownerships.

Pahartali (ward-9) in 2015, according to DoE.

DoE also filed a case against Jashim and his associates on May 28 that year under the Bangladesh Environment Preservation Act.

According to the Kattali land office, the two acres of hills that were razed in 2015 in north Pahartali area falls under Bangladesh Survey Marks -- 178, 179 and 180. The area is completely hilly and has 27.5 acres of hills.

But, Bangladesh Environment

COMILLA CITY ELECTION

Infighting may cost Awami League victory

RASHIDUL HASAN and PANKAG KARMAKAR, from Comilla

Infighting within the district Awami League might make it difficult for mayor candidate Anjum Sultana Shima to win the upcoming Comilla City Corporation polls.

This could give BNP nominee Monirul Haque Sakku an edge over Shima in the battle of ballots slated for March 30.

Several local AL leaders said the over three-decade intra-party rivalry might cost party candidate dearly in the election if the AL high-ups fail to resolve the differences.

The two AL factions are led by Shima's father Afzal Khan, former convener of Comilla (south) AL, and the ruling party's local lawmaker AKM Bahauddin Bahar.

In the maiden Comilla city polls in 2012, Afzal ran for mayor with backing from AL. Bahar and his supporters did not campaign for the party favourite, said local AL leaders.

Afzal subsequently lost the election to his nearest rival Sakku by over 30,000 votes.

Bahar won party ticket to contest the parliamentary polls in 2014. But Afzal fielded his son Masud Parvez Khan Imran to run in the election as an independent candidate. However, Imran lost to Bahar.

According to AL sources, both Bahar and Afzal in the last couple of months lobbied top party leaders to secure nomination for their mayor favourites.

Bahar backed his aide Arfanul Haque Rifat, former vice president of district Jubo League, the AL's youth wing. But the party picked Shima for mayor.

Frustrated at this, Bahar's supporters were not campaigning for Shima, added the sources.

Krishak League Vice-chairman Omar Faruk, former VP of Comilla Victoria Government College Central Students Union

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid along with school students, teachers, government and non-government officials at a human chain organised by Anti-Corruption Commission in front of the capital's Jatiya Press Club yesterday to raise awareness against corruption. Similar human chains were held in several districts.

PHOTO: STAR

Road crashes kill five, injure 24

CITY DESK

Five people were killed and 24 others injured in road accidents in five districts yesterday and on Thursday.

In Dhaka, a man died after a microbus ran him over in Postogola yesterday.

Md Faruk, 50, a worker of a re-rolling mill in the area, was on the way to his residence at Fatullah of Narayanganj, said police.

As soon as Faruk reached near Postogola truck terminal, the microbus hit him from behind leaving him critically injured around. He was declared dead in hospital. Police detained the driver.

In Mymensingh, a schoolgirl was killed as a bus ran her over in Seedstore area in Bhaluka upazila yesterday. Shimu Akhter, 10, a fourth grader and daughter of Mosharrif Hossain of Labonkuta village, died on the spot.

Following the incident, agitated locals put a barricade on the highway and torched two buses. Police and fire-fighters brought the situation under control.

In Trishal upazila, an unidentified youth was killed and three others injured when a bus crashed into a roadside shop while overtaking another bus in Bogar Bazar area yesterday. The victims were sitting inside the shop, said police.

In Comilla Sadar, a youth was killed after a

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1