

CRISIS IN HAORS

Long queues for OMS rice

Many returned home empty-handed after waiting for hours in Moulvibazar

STAR REPORT

It was 6:00am yesterday when Mina Begum reached a dealer of rice meant for open market sale (OMS) in Pachim Juri union of Moulvibazar.

Though only the first 200 customers are served a day, the 45-year-old stood in a queue behind 418 others, keeping alive the false hope that the dealer might have a change of mind and bend the rule at the last moment.

The desperation was evident as she told this correspondent of it being the second consecutive day that she had spent Tk 40 to reach the OMS centre in Basidpur area, starting off on an empty stomach in the early hours from her home in Khagtega village of Juri upazila.

The queue was still quite long when this conversation took place around 1:30pm. Mina kept waiting, the thought of her seven family members keeping her spirit alive.

The district administration says 4,26,775 people have been affected in the floods hitting late March and April and only around 1,000 got vulnerable group feeding (VGF) cards.

That explained the long queues at the

district's 17 OMS centres where one can buy a maximum of five kilogrammes of rice for Tk 15 a kilogramme.

Mina, along with the hundred others arriving at the Basidpur OMS centre from areas adjoining Hakaluki Haor, urged this correspondent to make public their demand for more OMS centres. AL'S OBAIDUL QUADER ON BNP BNP is interested in photo sessions only, not in standing by flood victims of haors, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader alleged at a rally in Juri upazila yesterday morning.

Refuting BNP's allegation that the government is not taking adequate measures to ease sufferings of the flood victims, he said, "They (BNP) do not provide relief assistance to the people."

The Awami League's Moulvibazar district unit organised the rally to distribute relief among flood victims.

Replying to a query on whether BNP will participate in the next parliamentary polls, he said, "Irrespective of what they are saying at the moment, they will ultimately participate."

FARMERS' RALLY IN SUNAMGANJ Farmers, rights activists and local council representatives at a rally

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Flood-hit people queue in Basidpur area of Moulvibazar's Juri upazila to buy OMS rice yesterday. With the present supply, only around 600 people can buy five kg rice each from three sales centres in the upazila every day. Many complained that they waited in queues for hours but the rice ran out before they could get any. Inset, rice plants rotting under water in the upazila's Khagtega area.

PHOTO: STAR



Chief justice, AG trade heated words

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Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana is absent and Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain is sick, according to the SC sources. The attorney general was requesting the court to adjourn the proceedings for two weeks so that the two judges can be involved in the hearing.

During the ensuing exchange, Chief Justice Sinha said the attorney general was taking the court towards such a situation where he [the AG] would be in danger. Mahubey Alam asked if the chief justice was threatening him.

However, the apex court adjourned the hearing till 11:30am on May 21.

Earlier in the day, the attorney general submitted two separate applications to the SC.

In one application, he prayed to the apex court to adjourn the hearing for two weeks and constitute the bench by including Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana and Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain.

In another application, he requested the SC to seek details about the HC observation that some parliament members had criminal records.

At the beginning of the hearing yesterday, the chief justice told the attorney general that it should be determined whether parliament or the Supreme Judicial Council will have

the authority to remove an SC judge.

This case needs to be settled soon as there should not be a vacuum regarding the discipline of the judges following the scrapping of the 16th amendment, he said, adding that unfortunately the two judges might not be included in the bench.

Mahubey Alam said, "It is my prayer that all the seven judges [of the Appellate Division] will hold the hearing on the appeal. What is wrong with the prayer? Yesterday, you said that all the seven judges will hear the case. If all the judges are not involved, I will be compelled to move a no-confidence petition."

He further said the chief justice will be in office till January next year.

As Justice Sinha said, "You are undermining the court and trying to cause delay in settling the case."

"I am not undermining the court," replied the attorney general. "Go through our applications. The High Court has made many observations about the members of parliament. Has any court in the world made such observations about the members of parliament?"

Justice Sinha said they [judges] would look into the matter while hearing the arguments on the appeal. Justice Md Abdul Wahhab Miah, too, mentioned that they were yet to hear the matter.

The chief justice told the attorney general, "You will place arguments on the appeal later. But what is the problem with placing the High Court verdict now?"

Mahubey Alam said, "You yesterday assured that seven judges will hear the appeal. Today five judges are hearing it. I have become helpless. We will not get justice. Don't compel me to submit a no-confidence petition."

Justice Sinha said, "You are taking the court to such a situation where you will be in danger."

The attorney general said, "Are you threatening me? You yesterday said that seven judges will hear the appeal. You have changed that today. I will withdraw myself from this case."

The chief justice said, "You earlier had placed arguments before the High Court in this case. You know very well about this case. You now place the [High Court] judgment. Why are you insisting?"

The attorney general said, "We will place the judgment. But time has to be given. The sky will not fall down if two weeks' time is given to me. I hope that the two judges will return by this time."

Justice Md Abdul Wahhab Miah said, "As the highest officer of the court, you [attorney general] should not have said that you will withdraw yourself from the case. You may move a prayer but you cannot insist."

Chief Justice SK Sinha said the Supreme Court is the guardian of the constitution and the chief justice has to make decisions considering situations.

"Not necessarily all the judges have to hear the appeal. A judge may fall sick or may go abroad. So there cannot be any precondition for constituting a bench for hearing any case," he said.

"We asked you to submit written arguments on the appeal. There are 155 law officers at the attorney general's office. How much time is needed to prepare written arguments?" The attorney general replied he had to say all those out of helplessness.

"I am humbly praying so that all the seven judges hear the appeal," he further said.

The apex court held the hearing, with Additional Attorney General Murad Reza reading out from the HC verdict, till 12:15pm yesterday.

Yesterday, four amici curiae (friends of court) -- Dr Kamal Hossain, Barrister M Amir-Ul Islam, Barrister MI Farooqui and Advocate Abdul Wadud Bhuiyan -- submitted their written arguments on the appeal to the SC, which started the hearing proceedings on Monday.

On February 8, the apex court requested 12 senior jurists, to place their expert opinions as amici curiae before it.

Rule of law can check arbitrary power exercise

Says chief justice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha yesterday said the prevalence of the rule of law checks any arbitrary exercise of power by the government.

"If the rule of law does not exist, whims and caprice of the authorities would prevail leading to serious violation of people's rights and government's obligations while human dignity would be trampled under," he said, while addressing the concluding session of a seminar on "Judicial independence" at Bangladesh Supreme Court Auditorium.

When two organs of the State fail to perform their duties, the judiciary cannot remain a silent spectator, he said.

The Supreme Court in association with the Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association held the seminar.

The chief justice there said all modern societies throughout the world,

imbued with beliefs in democracy, human rights and economic development, strive to achieve the goal of enforcing the rule of law.

"In fact in a democratic set up people take it for granted. Rule of law has many facets," he added.

The attainment of social, cultural and human rights and rapid sustainable development would not be possible at the same time in a country where the law does not rule.

"Instead, it is ruled by the authorities in power."

SK Sinha said the most important pillar of the constitutional edifice is rule of law.

"Everyone, whether individually or collectively, is unquestionably under the rule of law," he said, adding that, "In our democratic polity under the constitution based on the concept of 'rule of law' which we have adopted and given to ourselves and which serves as an aorta in the anatomy of our

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25-YEAR-OLD CASE

Ershad cleared of graft by HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday acquitted Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad in a corruption case filed 25 years ago.

The bench of Justice Md Ruhul Quddus and Justice Bhishmadev Chakraborty delivered the verdict after hearing three separate appeals.

A Dhaka court had sentenced Ershad to three years' imprisonment in the corruption case involving misappropriation of Tk 1.91 crore. Later, three separate appeals were filed with the HC against the lower court verdict.

Yesterday, Ershad, also special envoy to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, was acquitted as two kinds of charges were brought in the same case and he was not a public servant during the initiation of the case in 1992, Anti-Corruption Commission lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star.

"I have already informed the Anti-Corruption Commission about the High Court verdict. The commission will now decide whether it will move an appeal before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, challenging the High Court verdict. But I think an appeal should be moved," he added.

Ershad's lawyer Sheikh Sirajul Islam told reporters that it was proved from



the HC judgment that the lower court had not delivered the verdict against his client in accordance with law.

Of the three appeal petitions with the HC, one was filed by Ershad seeking acquittal in the case as a lower court had sentenced him to three

years' imprisonment in 1992. The other two appeals were filed by the government for making the punishment stricter.

On March 30 this year, the HC bench allowed the ACC to become a party in the case as a co-appellant.

Chief Justice SK Sinha on March 27 assigned the HC bench to hear the three appeals.

In 1992, the then Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac), which became defunct after the formation of the ACC in 2004, filed the case against former military ruler Ershad with Cantonment Police Station on charge of misappropriating Tk 1.91 crore by misusing power on different occasions when he was the president from December 11, 1983, to December 6, 1990.

Ousted from power in December 1990, Ershad faced 21 cases, mostly for alleged corruption. However, he has already been acquitted in most of the cases.

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Students

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belonged to Enamul and some others.

Headmaster Majeda Begum accused Enamul and his men of chopping down some trees on the school premises and issuing threats so that teachers and students refrained from coming to the school.

Over 50 of the school's 182 students did not appear yesterday, she said, adding that she had informed authorities concerned right after being locked out.

Sadullapur Upazila Education Officer Abel Hossain said they were taking steps so that the school could be opened soon.

Buddha Purnima

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Sharmin Chaudhury is expected to join the programme as the chief guest.

Meanwhile, President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issued messages yesterday, greeting the Buddhist community on the occasion.

The president in his message said, "Gautama Buddha preached about equality and harmony throughout his life to build a peaceful world."

He also hoped the Buddhist community would continue their efforts to develop the country.

In her message, Hasina expressed optimism that the Buddhist community would play an effective role in building Bangladesh as a humanitarian, peaceful and prosperous country.

\$16b plan to up education quality

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but, sources said, there is a lack of coordination among those. Of the 13, nine projects are for the improvement of secondary education. Some of projects are going well while there are debates over some others.

If the proposed programme gets nod, all other projects will come under it, they added.

The reform areas that the programme proposes include teacher salary subsidies to non-government schools in the form of monthly payment order (MPO), teacher rationalisation and performance management, institutionalisation of learning assessments, curriculum and examinations, adolescent girls' health and empowerment and transition of class VI-VIII to primary education.

There has been a debate over the quality of secondary education with experts pointing out several problems that fail to equip students with the knowledge or skills the economy needs.

Inadequate schools, heavy school curriculum, complex textbooks, outdated teaching methods and poor teaching-learning approaches, dropping out, teacher's shortage and poor infrastructural facilities are some of the problems the secondary level is faced with.

A government survey, published last year, showed that around 50 percent of eighth graders do not have expected level of competence in English and 46 percent of them lack proficiency in mathematics.

The teacher-student ratio stands at 1:41 while the size of the average classroom is 60. Around 68 percent of teachers in schools are trained, according to Bangladesh Education Statistics 2015

published by Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information & Statistics.

THREE PRIORITY AREAS

The proposed programme will have three priority results areas -- first one being "Enhanced Quality and Relevance of Secondary Education", officials said.

Under the first area, productivity of secondary graduates would be enhanced by developing their cognitive and technical skills so that they could succeed in job sector.

The curriculum and textbooks for class IX to XII would be revised and a pre-vocational and vocational curriculum would be introduced in grades XI and XII to impart skills relevant to the national and international job market.

One of the major focuses would be strengthening teachers' quality and capacity. Reforms would be brought to the teacher management system through upgrading and delivering pre-service training and in-service training.

A teacher performance management system would also be developed.

A new examination system in class VIII, X and XII would be adopted to achieve improved classroom assessment and national learning assessment.

There will be initiatives to improve school infrastructure -- development of classrooms, water and sanitation facilities, science and computer labs, and other physical facilities.

In order to strengthen school-based management, measures will be taken to enhance the capacity of head teachers by scaling up the National Academy for Education Management (Naem) training programme for them. An accountability mechanism would also be introduced at the school level.

School salary and non-salary grant financing mechanism (both needs-based

and performance-based) will be developed and implemented by 2018.

The second result area "Increased Equitable Access and Retention to Secondary Education" is primarily aimed at ensuring equitable access to secondary education and improving retention rate, especially in class VIII and X where the dropout rate is very high particularly among girls.

The programme will harmonise the currently implemented multiple stipends schemes with varying rates and modalities.

It will give special attention to the adolescent girls and address the key issues causing their dropouts. Supplementary stipends will be provided and toilet and sanitation facilities will be ensured.

Besides, counselling and awareness programmes would be conducted at the school level on girls' health, hygiene and empowerment.

The third result area "Strengthened Governance, Management, and Administration" deals with improving the governance, management, and administration of the education system.

As part of it, the education ministry will put in place a fully functional decentralised secondary education management system in all zones, districts, upazilas, and schools for planning, budgeting, and service delivery.

It would also support the transition to restructured school system as recommended by National Education Policy-2010, which proposed primary education from class I to VIII and secondary education from IX to XII.

Sources said class VI-VIII would come under primary education most likely within the programme period.