

BRIBE, CORRUPTION

TIB criticises Nahid for his comments

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh yesterday criticised Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid for his recent remarks on bribe and corruption.

In a statement, the graft watchdog said, "The honourable minister declaring himself corrupt might be an act of courage, but he needs to step down on ethical grounds for the sake of validating that courage and set an example -- this is what TIB expects."

Speaking at a laptop and certificate distribution ceremony of the Directorate of Inspection and Audit (DIA) on Sunday, the minister claimed that corruption has come down significantly in the education sector due to measures taken by his ministry.

Referring to a situation of eight years back, Nahid said, "When I sat with EED [Education and Engineering Department], I told them that please do good works. My request to you is that you take bribe, but you must keep it within a tolerable limit. [I said that] because I didn't

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Underprivileged families have put up shanties on both sides of the railway line in the capital's Tejgaon area. Many do their domestic chores on the lines. The railway authorities seem to turn a blind eye to this illegal occupation of their land. The photo was taken on Friday. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Blogger lands in jail in a case under ICT act

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court sent a blogger to jail yesterday, a day after he was arrested from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in a case filed under the Information and Communication Technology Act.

Immigration police detained blogger Asaduzzaman alias Asad Noor around 10:00pm on Monday at the airport when he was leaving for Nepal. He was later handed over to Airport Police Station, said Nure Azam Miah, officer-in-charge of the station.

Metropolitan Magistrate Muhammad Mazharul Islam sent Noor to jail and asked the police to send the case documents to Dhaka CyberTribunal.

On January 11, 2017, Mufti Omar Faruq, president of Amtali unit Islami Andolon Bangladesh, lodged the case against Noor and another blogger Limon Fakir with Amtali Police Station in Barguna over "writing defamatory words" in social media against Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH).

Noor and Limon are residents of Uttar Tiakhali village of Amtali union of Barguna.

Noor went into hiding after police

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FRESH GUNFIGHT IN KASHMIR

India kills 'top militant'

AFP, Srinagar

Indian forces have killed the commander of a Pakistan-based militant group in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said yesterday, as the disputed territory ended its deadliest year for a decade.

Noor Mohammad Tantray, the head in the Kashmir valley of the Jaish-e-Mohammad group, was trapped in a house outside the main city of Srinagar on Monday evening along with his associates, triggering a fierce overnight gunbattle.

Police described the operation as a "significant breakthrough" after Tantray's body was found under debris on Tuesday.

Police and troops cordoned off a group of houses at Samboora, "which resulted in a fierce gunbattle leading to elimination of top JeM commander Noor Mohammad Tantray," police said in a statement.

Tantray's two associates managed to escape, a police official said on condition of anonymity.

The 47-year-old JeM commander, who was only three feet tall according to police reports, was described by officials as a new "security headache" when he took over as head of the group in Indian Kashmir last year.

According to police he spent 12 years in jail after being convicted in a case of militancy in 2003, but jumped parole two years later to rejoin JeM.

As the news of Tantray's death spread, hundreds of residents shouting "Go, India, go back!" spilt onto the streets, throwing stones and clashing with government forces who fired tear gas and pellet guns.

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Halda losing fish species

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jointly conducted by Bangladesh University of Engineering Technology, Bangladesh Agricultural University and Chittagong University.

The twelve-month study carried out between March 2015 and February 2016 found at least 26 fish species have disappeared from the Halda.

Some of the species that are no longer found are Goni Chapila, Ilisha, Telipasha, Chital, Foli, Mrigal, Koksa, Ghor Poia, Gujija Ayre, Meni, Dhela, Chep Chela, Teri Punti, Baleetora, Pabda, Madhu Pabda, Tengra, Shilong.

Other lost species include Dhain, Batasi, Pangwash, Ghajal, Koitor Poa, Poa, Baila and Nuna Baila.

Dr Manjurul Kibria, a professor of Zoology at Chittagong University, who was on the research team, said there were 76 fish species in the river accord-

ing to a similar study in 2009.

That figure has now come down to 50, he told The Daily Star.

The river stream has seen the construction of dams from 1976 to 2011 that has reduced the flow of water, causing ecological disturbance to the riverbank and food chain. This resulted in fewer plankton and benthos that are essential food sources for various species of fish.

The Water Development Board built dams at Dhurong Khal while the Local Government Engineering Department set up rubber dams at Bhujpur union and Harualchori.

Across the Halda and its tributaries, there are many agricultural fields that require water for irrigation. These dams have benefitted the farmers of these regions but were set up in an unplanned way.

Where the river originates, there is an expanse of tobacco farming on both sides of the shore. The pesticides and fertilisers that are sprayed on the tobacco plants all wash into the river stream and also affect the underwater ecosystem.

Factory waste released through the Khandokia canal and Katakhal canal into the river are also accountable for the presence of harmful chemicals in the water, he added.

The research team has seen the extensive impact of rubber dams on the plankton community, Kibria said.

Planktons have deteriorated drastically in the spawning period (April-June) downstream, while it was high at the same location during post spawning season (July-October).

"The team recorded the lowest amount of biotic community at the

site of the rubber dam. It also harms the benthic community (aquatic animal population), which lies at the bottom of the river, at the points of Harualchori and Bhujpur where two rubber dams are in operation."

The poor number of benthos is prevalent during November-March when the river becomes almost dry, as water extraction begins in full swing for crop cultivation.

Kibria added that the government prohibited fishing permanently from Madunghat to Nazirhat in a gazette issued in 2010.

"The decision let the kachkey (Corica Soborna) fish to breed in huge numbers. This specie eats up much of the plankton, harming other species in the river," he added.

The research suggested that the

authorities take steps to stop indiscriminate sand extraction from 13 legal and 20 illegal Balu Mohal (sand station) of Halda, tobacco farming at Manikchari, pollution from factories, save the oxbow and protect the brood fish.

Kamal Uddin, a resident of Gorduara union adjacent to Halda River, who once fished in the area, said they used to catch various species of fish in the past. But many species like Pabda, Modhu Pabda and Gujija Ayre have disappeared now.

District Fisheries Officer Mominul Haque said not only in Halda, but various fish species are going extinct from the swamps as well.

He blamed indiscriminate fishing and pollution for this and underscored the need for creating sanctuaries to save the fish species.

DNCC mayoral polls in late February

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and the education boards to defer SSC and equivalent examinations slated for February 24 and 25.

The SSC and equivalent exams are set to begin from February 1. According to the schedule, tests for geography and environment are to be held on February 24, and the practical exam on music the following day.

"The chairmen of the boards for secondary and higher secondary, madrasa and technical education said they have no problem in this regard. They will set fresh exam dates after the announcement of the polls schedule," said Helal.

Contacted, Dhaka Education Board Chairman Mahabubur Rahman said, "We told them [EC officials] that it is very much possible to reschedule the exams, as the matter [DNCC polls] is of national importance. They said they will inform us about it in mid-February."

The mayoral post fell vacant following the death of DNCC Mayor Annisul

Huq on November 30. As per the electoral laws, the by-polls for the post must be held within 90 days of its falling vacant.

On December 1, the Local Government Division declared the post vacant.

The ruling Awami League is likely to nominate Atiqul Islam, ex-president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, as its candidate, while the BNP is expected to pick party leader Tabith Awal, who had contested the previous election with its support.

Atiqul told this correspondent that he already started exchanging views with voters, and that he visited 12 of the 54 DNCC wards.

"I got green signal from the Awami League. But I will formally launch campaign after getting nomination. I am making all-out preparations for contesting the polls," he said.

Tabith could not be contacted as he is now abroad.

Asked, his father and BNP Vice Chairman Abdul Awal Mintoo said, "Tabith is young and energetic. He knows well about the city. Besides, He did well in the previous election. I do not see any reason for choosing someone else as candidate."

The businessman also said that an educated and energetic candidate like Tabith should get the party nomination for bringing a drastic change to the mega city.

Talking to this correspondent, a number of Jatiya Party leaders said the party would not nominate anyone for the mayoral post, and it is likely to extend support to the AL candidate.

Contacted, JP Co-chairman GM Quader said the party is yet to decide on contesting the by-polls.

He, however, said it was highly unlikely that the JP would field a candidate for the mayoral post.

Meanwhile, Bobby Hajjaj, chairman of the newly formed party Nationalist

Democratic Movement, nominated singer Shafin Ahmed as its candidate for the DNCC mayoral by-polls.

He made the announcement at a press conference at the Jatiya Press club with Shafin at his side.

In reply to a query, Shafin said, "I have already started campaigning... I will share my future plans with the voters. I hope everybody will support me."

In terms of population, the DNCC is the country's largest city corporation with 23.45 lakh voters.

In the previous election on April 28, 2015, BNP-backed mayoral candidate Tabith boycotted the polls halfway on the voting day, bringing allegations of widespread rigging.

In November 2011, the AL-led government split the Dhaka City Corporation into two.

The first election to the undivided DCC was held in January 1994, and Mohammad Hanif became the first elected mayor.

15 workers

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plates through welding without wearing eyeglasses and masks.

Mohammad Idris, a shipbreaking worker, lost the lower portion of his left leg in an accident at a shipbreaking yard on April 11, 2015.

He said the owners did not provide them with PPE. "The owners provide safety gears to the workers only the day when the inspection team from the Department of Environment visits the yard," he added.

Abu Taher, president of Bangladesh Shipbreakers Association, however, claimed the owners provide the PPE, but the workers do not use those as they do not feel comfortable.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers' Association (BELA), said the only way to stop the accidents is mechanising the entire procedure.

"Workers don't break ships in the developed countries. It's done by machines," she said, adding, "Using PPE can only save workers from minor accidents. It cannot save them from fatal ones."

Majority ends in acquittal

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"This forensic test result is considered prime evidence in any case," he said.

DNC Additional Director General (intelligence) Nazrul Islam Shikder said his department started studying verdicts in narcotics cases this year.

Investigators often in the charge sheets mention that the suspects are accused of possessing yaba or phensedyl instead of saying amphetamine and codeine, he said, adding that such "mistakes" weaken the charge sheets.

In many cases, investigators are "bribed" to prepare faulty charge sheets.

Talking to these correspondents on November 13, a female drug trader, who had been facing six cases, said she got acquitted in three of the lawsuits after "spending" Tk 90,000 and several weeks behind bars.

Wishing not to be named, the woman from Karwan Bazar Railway slum said she again got involved in drug rackets immediately after coming out on bail.

Most of those freed from jail on acquittal do the same thing, Ahsan Ur Rahman, DNC deputy director (Intelligence), said.

The dearth of witnesses and lengthy legal procedures are also helping criminals go scot-free.

Sometimes, the legal procedures are so lengthy that when DNC officials are asked to appear before courts as witnesses, they already go into retirement by that time. Some of them are not even notified about the hearing dates as they no longer remain at work, said DNC officials, adding that usually, each of the department officials is

witness in 80 to 100 cases.

DNC ADG Nazrul Islam said, "We are writing to magistrates requesting them to hear multiple drug-related cases on a single date so that a DNC officer can give witness statements in a number of cases on the same day."

Sohely Ferdous, assistant inspector general of the police headquarters, told The Daily Star that on many occasions, they lost track of witnesses as trials began long after the suspects had been arrested.

At times, the investigation officers get transferred before the trial begins, she said.

Moreover, many witnesses do not want to testify against powerful and influential suspects for fear of life while others give false statements for money, the officer added.

Some DNC officials also blame public prosecutors for the poor rate of conviction in drug-related cases.

Contacted, Tapash Kumar Pal, additional public prosecutor (Addl PP) at Metropolitan Sessions Judges Court, however, refuted the allegation.

It's the law enforcers, who do not produce witnesses properly, he said.

Police bring some "floating" witnesses who remain traceless during trial, said Tapash.

"In some cases, the witnesses in cross examination informed us that they know nothing about the cases," he said, adding that the accused take advantage of such "loopholes" and get acquitted. "We have nothing to do about it."

Besides, he said, they also receive faulty investigation reports, which help accused go unpunished.

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