

EMBEZZLING Tk 14 CRORE Land officials on 5-day remand

A CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

An official, who had vanished after allegedly embezzling Tk 14 crore meant as compensation for land acquisition, was placed on a five-day remand yesterday.

Setaful Islam, the land acquisition officer at Kishoreganj deputy commissioner's office, was arrested in front of Pirojpur Circuit House by a team of Anti-Corruption Commission officials on January 17.

The previous day, Ram Prasad Mondol, an assistant director at ACC's integrated district office in Mymensingh, had filed an embezzlement case with Kishoreganj Police Station.

The ACC yesterday produced Setaful before a Kishoreganj court with a five-day remand plea which was granted by Chief Judicial Magistrate Abdus Salam Khan.

In December, Setaful went near the Sonali Bank branch in Kishoreganj with sacks and a vehicle to withdraw the huge amount of cash, witnesses told investigators. Once the matter was informed to the authorities and his colleagues, Setaful fled the scene with the money.

Later the cabinet division, in a letter, asked the immigration department to stop Setaful if he tries to flee the country.

Dhaka divisional commissioner's office and Kishoreganj district administration have investigated the case.

Setaful embezzled the money, instead of distributing it as compensation among the people concerned, says the investigation report.

When any land is acquired for implementing government's development projects, the land ministry recommends compensating the land owners. The compensation money is sent to the district administration before it reaches the land owner.

Lohagara UNO

FROM PAGE 16

Justice Syed Muhammad Dastagir Husain and Justice Md Ataur Rahman Khan exempted them from personal appearance before the court in connection with a rule it had issued earlier over the incident.

The court, however, directed the government to transfer OC Shahjahan to any other police station.

Earlier on October 14 last year, a mobile court led by UNO Mahub sentenced Md Belal Uddin of Lohagara to eight months' imprisonment on charge of possessing some cannabis.

Following a writ petition filed by Belal, the HC on January 14 this year summoned the UNO, OC and sub-inspectors to explain their conducts.

The HC also issued a rule asking the respondents to explain why the jail sentence should not be scrapped and why legal action should not be taken against them.

The writ petition says police arrested Belal on October 13 last year in a criminal case and produced him before the court on October 14.

Under the HC's January 14 order, the UNO and the three policemen appeared before the HC bench on January 28 and yesterday.

UNO Mahub's lawyers Barrister Moudud Ahmed and Advocate Abdul Matin Khasru yesterday prayed to the HC not to take any punitive action against their client on the ground that he would face a stigma and his career would be hampered.

Belal's lawyer Advocate Manzill Murshid prayed that the HC should strip Mahub of his power to conduct mobile courts and order withdrawal of OC Shahjahan.

Man stabs

FROM PAGE 2

Rokshana, a daughter of Mozidul Islam of Sahebajot village under Tentulia upazila of Panchagarh, met Shuvo on Facebook. They got married in November last year.

After the wedding, Shuvo took Rokshana to his home in Comilla. On her arrival there, Rokshana discovered her husband was already married and was also a father of one child. She left her husband and returned to her sister's home in Chirirbandar upazila of Dinajpur.

Recently, she had sent divorce papers to Shuvo.

OC Harisul Islam said Shuvo did not want to accept the divorce and attacked her out of anger. Police are still looking for his two accomplices.

PM visits

FROM PAGE 2

Lamakazi road, Sylhet-Gopalganj-Charkhai-Zakiganj road, Darbasta-Kanaighat-Shahabagh road and Dhaka (Kanchpur)-Bhairab-Jagadishpur-Sayestaganj-Sylhet-Tamabil-Jaflang road (Sylhet-Sherpur point), pavement construction work at Sherpur toll plaza point on the highway, Sultanpur Union Parishad Complex Bhaban under Zakiganj upazila, Kamalazar Union Parishad Complex Bhaban under Dakshin Surma Upazila, Kanaighat road and a three-story primary health care centre at Kuituk.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1

prepared a draft report on the case.

Talking to The Daily Star, BNP Standing Committee Member Moudud Ahmed said, "So far I know, they [diplomats] wanted to know about the case. We will apprise them that the case is politically motivated and there is no merit in it. We will also brief them about the latest status of the case.

"The case was filed hastily and the verdict is going to be delivered hurriedly only to humiliate, harass and isolate Khaleda Zia from politics," he added.

The country's political situation heated up soon after the Dhaka Special Court-5 on January 25 fixed February 8 for announcing the verdict in the graft case against Khaleda and five others.

On July 3, 2008, the Anti-Corruption Commission filed the case with Ramna Police Station accusing Khaleda, her elder son Tarique Rahman, now in the UK, and four others for allegedly misappropriating over Tk 2.1 crore that came from Kuwait through a foreign bank as grants for orphans.

The party had boycotted the January 5, 2013 national polls demanding a non-partisan interim government for holding the elections. Diplomatic efforts were made and even the then United Nations secretary-general sent his special envoy to Dhaka to hold an inclusive election. But the initiatives did not yield any positive result.

Since then, the BNP has been demanding the government hold talks with the opposition parties to finalise the framework of the polls-time government. However, the ruling Awami League rejected the call saying that the polls would be held under the incumbent prime minister.

"How the path of negotiation for an election-time government or the next

national polls will be opened if the captain [Khaleda Zia] goes to jail or kept out of the elections?" a BNP standing committee member questioned.

Khaleda had separate meetings with the BNP standing committee members on Saturday and with the 20-party alliance leaders the following day. At the meetings, she called upon her party men and alliance leaders to remain united in future at any cost, said meeting sources.

WHO WILL RUN THE PARTY?

There is a discussion within the BNP about the possible verdict in the case, the party's reaction to the judgment and how it will be run in case Khaleda lands behind bars.

BNP leaders said Senior Vice-Chairman Tarique Rahman would advise the tops leaders to run the party in absence of Khaleda.

According to top leaders, BNP standing committee members consult Tarique to run the party when Khaleda stays abroad. The same policy will be adopted if the party chief is handed a jail term.

According to the article 5(C) of the BNP's charter, the senior vice-chairman is the second-highest post in the party. In the absence of chairperson, the senior vice-chairman can call meetings of the standing committee and the executive committee and can also exercise the powers vested in the chairperson.

The charter also stipulates that none but the chairperson and the senior vice-chairman can call party meetings.

BNP Standing Committee Member Khandakar Mosharrif Hossain said, "Our senior vice-chairman is in London. If required, the party's secretary general will run the party in consultation with Tarique Rahman. We hope we will not have to face such a situation."

Worker killed in explosion at factory

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

A worker was killed and seven others injured when a mixer machine exploded at BSCIC Industrial City at Begumganj upazila of Noakhali yesterday.

The deceased, Nurul Amin Rony, 22, is the son of Khalilur Rahman of Eklaspur union of the same upazila. The injured were Abul Khair, Nasir Uddin, Pradip Saha, Abu Zaher, Suman Chandra Shil, Lutful Kabir and Enamul Haque.

Eight more workers at Globe Drugs Ltd, a sister concern of Globe Pharmaceuticals, lost consciousness in the incident.

Fire service workers from Choumuhani rushed to the spot and took the injured to hospital. Rony died on the way.

Sub-inspector Md Abdullah of Begumganj Police Station confirmed the incident. He said legal action was under process.

IS attack

FROM PAGE 16

"Two bombers detonated themselves and two were killed by our forces and one was detained alive," the spokesman, Dawlat Waziri, told AFP, adding that the attack was over.

Officials said the men, armed with a rocket, two Kalashnikovs and at least one suicide vest, had attempted to breach an army battalion near the Marshal Fahim military academy, where high-ranking officers are trained.

An officer at the academy told AFP he could hear an explosion and gunfire, while other witnesses said the first blasts and gunfire came around 5:00 am.

The gunmen did not enter the heavily fortified compound on the western outskirts of the city, an Afghan security source said. Security forces have swarmed into the area and blocked roads leading to it.

In October a Taliban suicide bomber killed 15 Afghan army trainees as they travelled home from the Marshal Fahim academy.

Militants including the Taliban and IS have stepped up their attacks on beleaguered Afghan troops and police in recent months, sapping morale already hit by desertions and corruption.

Afghan troops have taken what the UN describes as "shocking" casualties since international forces ended their combat role at the end of 2014, though troop casualty figures are no longer released.

HIGH ALERT

Last Saturday, a Taliban suicide attacker driving an explosives-packed ambulance blew it up in a crowded area of the capital, killing at least 103 people -- mainly civilians -- and wounding 235 in one of the worst bombings in the city in recent years.

The blast was a chilling demonstration of the militants' ability to penetrate the heart of Kabul despite stepped-up security since a massive truck bomb killed some 150 people and wounded hundreds last May.

The government has blamed Saturday's attack, which was followed by a national day of mourning, on the Taliban-affiliated Haqqani Network.

Afghans flooded social media with grief and anger. "May God destroy their houses," Kabul resident Aftab Ali wrote on Facebook, adding: "(T)hey are killing innocent humans."

On January 20, Taliban fighters stormed Kabul's landmark Intercontinental hotel and killed at least 25 people, the majority of them foreigners, in an assault lasting more than 12 hours.

But there is still confusion over the true toll from that attack, with conflicting figures given by officials and Afghan media reporting higher numbers.

Kabul remains on high alert as the city braces for further violence. On Sunday, usually a working day, the capital was unusually quiet, while yesterday was a national holiday.

Security warnings sent to foreigners in recent days said IS militants were planning to attack supermarkets, hotels and shops frequented by foreigners.

Several foreign organisations, including humanitarian groups, are reassessing their operations after a particularly deadly week in the country.

100,000

FROM PAGE 2

"The anticipated flooding and landslides in the upcoming monsoon season will make a bad situation much worse."

A recent engineering assessment said all roads in the camp would be inaccessible for trucks, and the World Food Programme is considering using porters to distribute food, minutes of a January 24 meeting of aid agencies involved in logistics said.

The Bangladeshi government allocated 2,000 acres (809 hectares) for a new camp in Ukha, prompting an influx of people before anything was ready.

"Humanitarian partners are now building necessary infrastructure in challenging conditions, with extremely limited space," the UN report said.

Gag on freedom of expression

FROM PAGE 1

websites or in electronic form. It stipulates maximum 14 years in prison for the offences.

Now, the draft of Digital Security Act-2018 splits these offences into four separate sections with punishment ranging from three to 10 years' term.

The proposed law describes some crimes as "non-bailable" and allows a police official to search or arrest anyone without a warrant in special circumstances.

A cabinet meeting, presided over by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office, gave the approval and Cabinet Secretary Md Shafiul Alam later briefed the media at the secretariat.

He said the government has formulated the act to combat growing cyber crimes that are affecting many public and private organisations including Bangladesh Bank.

The draft was approved keeping a provision for revoking sections 54, 55, 56, 57 and 66 of the ICT act, he said, adding that the cases already filed under section 57 will continue.

Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque, too, said the proceedings of the cases filed under section 57 will continue, reports UNB.

Currently, 701 cases filed under section 57 are pending with the lone cyber tribunal of the country, sources say.

Asked whether the proposed law will affect journalism as elements of section 57 were incorporated in the draft, the cabinet secretary did not give any direct answer and only said, "There is nothing about journalists here [in the draft]."

Rights activists and journalists have been demanding cancellation of section 57 for its widespread misuse.

Experts say the section goes against people's right to freedom of expression and free speech and it contains vague wordings, allowing its misuse against newsmen and social media users.

Protests were staged last year after more than two dozen journalists were sued under the section.

Amid widespread criticisms, Law Minister Anisul Huq on several occasions said section 57 would be removed.

Contacted last night, he said, "There is a great difference between section 57 [of ICT Act] and the provisions incorporated in the Digital Security Act."

Asked about the criticisms from journalists and rights activists about the draft, the minister said, "They are saying this for the sake of saying something."

He declined to comment further. After a programme in the capital, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said section 57 was discussed for a long time in the cabinet meeting. The draft will be finalised after many inclusions and exclusions, he added.

REACTIONS

Khandaker Muniruzzaman, acting editor of daily Sangbad, termed Digital Security Act more draconian, more dangerous than section 57 of the ICT Act.

"It can be accepted in no way," he told The Daily Star over the phone.

"We have been demanding cancellation of section 57. But things have not improved; rather, more bad elements have been introduced. Actually, the government has duped the people."

The act will not only curb the freedom of speech and expression but also impede independent journalism.

Asked about section 32 of the proposed act, which deals with spying on government and non-government offices, he said the provision will make journalism more difficult.

"A reporter collects information in various ways. This law will make his or her work more difficult," he said.

Bangladesh Pratinid Editor Nayeem Nizam said they have raised their voices following the misuse of section 57 as a number of cases were filed against journalists and some were detained.

"If this law [Digital Security Act] is passed [in the JS], the media independence will be under threat. I hope lawmakers will recommend removal of these provisions when the draft will be placed in parliament," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Under the new law, he said, any journalist may face the charge of spying when he/she tries to collect government documents for writing a report. "Independent journalism will not march forward if the draft is passed," he added.

Jyotirmoy Barua, a Supreme Court lawyer working on human rights, told The Daily Star that incorporating elements of section 57 in the draft law will create more ambiguity and scope for using it in harassing people.

"It [the new law] could be used as a tool to harass people the way section 57 was used," he said.

About section 32, he said it will shrink the scope for journalists and researchers in their professional and academic activities.

Rights activist Nur Khan Liton said after the Digital Security Act is passed, the freedom of expression will be curtailed, the door for discussion on some specific topics will be shut down and free voice will be muzzled.

There should be a section in the new act binding the authorities concerned to do some scrutiny before taking cases over defamation or hurting religious sentiments, he said.

Baki Billah, an online activist, said the move to enact such a law goes with

the characteristic of the government. The government wants to curb the freedom of expression more, which reflects its "undemocratic character", he said.

"The government has incorporated the very provisions that we have been criticising for long," he told this newspaper last night.

WHAT NEW SECTIONS SAY

Section 21 says anyone spreading negative propaganda against the Liberation War or the Father of the Nation, using digital devices or instigates to do so, will risk being sentenced up to 14 years' jail or a fine of up to Tk 1 crore lakh or both.

He or she will face up to life sentence or Tk 3 crore fine or both for committing the offence for the second time, it said.

Section 25 of the proposed law says a person may face up to three years in jail or Tk 3 lakh fine or both if he or she is found to have deliberately published or broadcast in the website or electronic form something which is attacking or intimidating or which can make someone dishonest or disgruntled; knowingly publish or broadcast false and distorted (full or partial) information to annoy or humiliate someone; knowingly publish or broadcast false and distorted (full or partial) information to tarnish the image of the state or to spread rumour.

A person will face up to five years in jail or Tk 10 Lakh or both for committing the offence for second time, it said.

Section 28 says a person may face up to seven years in jail or Tk 10 lakh fine or both if he or she is found to have deliberately publishes or broadcasts something in the website or in electronic form or get it done to hurt one's religious sentiment and values.

A person will face up to ten years in jail or Tk 20 Lakh or both for committing the offence for the second time, it said.

Section 29 says a person may face maximum three years in jail or Tk 5 lakh fine or both if he or she commits offence stipulated in section 499 of the Penal Code through website or in electronic form.

He or she will face up to five years in jail or Tk 10 Lakh fine or both for committing the offence for the second time, it said.

Section 499 of the Penal Code reads, "Whoever by words either spoken or intended to be read, or by signs or by visible representations, makes or publishes any imputation concerning any person intending to harm, or knowing or having reason to believe that such imputation will harm, the reputation of such person, is said except in the cases hereinafter excepted, to defame that person."

Section 31 of the proposed law says a person may face up to seven years in jail or Tk 5 lakh fine or both if he or she is found to have deliberately published or broadcast something in the website or in electronic form which can spread hatred and create enmity among different groups and communities and can cause deterioration of law and order.

Punishment will be up to 10 years in jail or Tk 10 lakh fine or both for committing the offence for the second time, it said.

Section 32 says a person may face up to 14 years in jail or Tk 20 lakh fine or both on the charge of spying if he or she illegally enters the offices of government, semi-government and autonomous bodies to gather information and uses electronic device to record something secretly.

A person may face up to 14 years in jail or Tk 1 crore or both for hacking, according to section 34 of the act.

If anyone illegally enters any critical information infrastructure, he or she will face maximum seven years imprisonment or Tk 25 lakh fine or both, and he or she may face up to 14 years in jail or 1 crore in fine or both for doing any harm to the infrastructure, according to section 17.

The new law stipulates some crimes under sections including 17, 28, 31, 32 and 34 as "non-bailable", considering the gravity of crimes and magnitude of punishment, the cabinet secretary said.

SOME OTHER PROVISIONS

According to the draft law, the government will form a Digital Security Agency to ensure national digital security and combating cyber crimes. A director general will lead the body.

To discuss the overall digital security of the country and to take "nationally important decision" over the issue, there will be a National Digital Security Council headed by the prime minister, the draft reads.

The government, through a gazette notification, will declare some specific computer systems, networks and information infrastructures, as "Essential Information Infrastructures" to serve the purpose of the act.

NO NEED FOR ARREST WARRANT

As per section 43 of the draft, a police official can search or arrest anyone without any warrant issued by a court.

If a police officer believes that an offence under the act has been committed in a certain place or is being committed, or there is a possibility of crimes, or there is a possibility of destroying evidence, he or she can search the place or any person present there.

The officer can arrest any person if he or she suspects that the person has committed or is committing crimes. In such a case, the officer has to submit a report to the court after carrying out the search, it added.