

Stop extraction of sand from Sandhya river

HC issues order on govt to save Birshrestha Jahangir's house, museum from erosion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday ordered the government to stop sand extraction from the Sandhya river in Barishal to save the Birshrestha Captain Mohiuddin Jahangir Smriti Museum and other structures from being devoured.

In response to a writ petition, the court stayed for three months a work order issued by the divisional commissioner permitting Md Zahidur Rahman, owner of M/S Satata Traders, to extract sand from the river in Babuganj upazila.

The DC had issued the work order on April 15.

The court also issued a rule asking the authorities to explain within four weeks why the work order should not be declared illegal. It also asked them to explain why they should not be ordered to stop the sand extraction.

Secretaries to the ministries of

land, housing and public works, and forest and environment, Barishal divisional commissioner, deputy commissioners of Barishal and Dhaka, and five others were made the respondents, petitioner's lawyer Barrister Ruhul Quddus Kazal told this paper.

Justice FRM Nazmul Ahasan and Justice KM Kamrul Kader passed the order and the rule following a writ petition filed by Abdul Kader Mal, principal of a madrasa in Babuganj.

Abdul Kader filed the writ petition challenging the legality of the work order permitting Zahidur to extract sand from the River Sandhya. Different structures including the museum, his house, a local college, and a madrasa would be devoured if the sand extraction continued, he said in the petition.

Deputy Attorney General ABM Abdullah-Al-Mahmud represented the state in yesterday's hearing.



A Syrian fighter from the Turkish-backed National Liberation Front (NLF) fires a heavy artillery gun from the rebel-held Idlib province against regime positions in the northern part of Hama province yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

India tense ahead

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counting of votes and sent out alerts to chief secretaries and police chiefs of all states.

The ministry said it has asked states and union territories to be on guard after "calls given in various quarters" for sparking violence and disrupting counting. The ministry said the states and union territories have been asked to take adequate measures for the security of strong-rooms, where electronic voting machines (EVMs) are kept, and vote counting venues.

The central security agencies have received inputs that some organisations and individuals, particularly in the states of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar and Tripura, have given certain statements which may lead to violence and disruption in counting process, an official said.

A slew of exit polls released after the world's largest election ended on Sunday projected that Modi and his allies would return to power with between 282 and 313 seats out of 543 in parliament.

But Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi yesterday dismissed the exit polls and urged the party workers to be alert and vigilant.

"My dear Congress party workers. The next 24 hours are important. Stay alert and vigilant. Don't be afraid. You are fighting for the truth," Gandhi, head of the Congress party, said on Twitter.

"Don't get disappointed by the propaganda of fake exit polls. Keep faith in yourself and the Congress party. Your hard work won't go to waste. Jai Hind (Bow to the motherland)," he wrote.

India's ruling coalition led by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) welcomed the predictions and promised to rev up growth, double farmers' income and boost infrastructure spending in the next five years.

"The NDA has resolved to speed up economic growth and fulfil the needs of the people in the next five years of our government," Home Minister Rajnath Singh, a senior member of the BJP, told reporters. "We're committed to a strong, developed and inclusive India."

However, exit polls have proved misleading before. In 2004 they

predicted that prime minister Atal Vajpayee's BJP-led government would be re-elected but results showed the opposite, bringing a Congress-led alliance to power under Manmohan Singh.

In the last election in 2014, the BJP won 282 seats, the first time a party had won a majority on its own in 30 years. It then cobbled together an alliance with a commanding 334 seats.

Counting of the roughly 600 million votes cast was due to begin at 8:00am (0230 GMT) today. If there is a clear trend this should be evident by around midday.

Lok Sabha elections were held in seven phases from April 11 to May 19. Though the elections were largely peaceful and saw around 67 percent turnout from the over 90-crore electorate, incidents of violence had been reported in several areas.

Political parties opposed to the BJP have alleged tampering of voting machines and intimidation of election officials in several areas.

On Tuesday, more than 20 opposition parties had called on the election watchdog to ensure the machines were not manipulated after video clips emerged on social media purporting to show irregularities.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) moved swiftly to refute the reports, saying voting machines were "absolutely safe in strongrooms", and those shown in video clips were reserves.

Party volunteers yesterday joined armed police to guard strongrooms containing the four million electronic voting machines (EVMs) used in the vote before counting begins.

And ECI yesterday turned down an opposition demand to tally the VVPAT (Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail) slips with the Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) before votes are counted.

The verification of EVM votes with VVPAT slips from five random polling booths in each assembly segment - made mandatory by the Indian Supreme Court -- will be done after the counting of votes and not before, the EC said yesterday.

Amit Shah, president of the BJP, yesterday said that the opposition was rattled by their likely defeat and were "tarnishing" India by raising questions about the electoral process.

Engr withdrawn

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said, "Despite having multifaceted controversies surrounding the project, which is the biggest one in the country's history in terms of expenditure, it is being implemented as a priority project of the government.

"But we think the type of irregularities surfaced at the beginning centring a small part is a warning for the future in ensuring the project's transparency.

"The budget for the power plant project has been set at over Tk 1.13 lakh crore. So, the massive irregularities that have surfaced over spending only Tk 25 crore leave an ominous sign," he said in the statement.

The nuclear power plant is being constructed on the banks of the

Padma in Rooppur area of Pabna's Ishwardi upazila.

According to reports in the media as well as on social media, the purchase prices of various items to furnish the project's 966 apartments for the Russian engineers and others were abnormally higher than the market prices.

The reports claimed that each pillow was bought for Tk 5,957, and the cost of carrying it to an apartment was Tk 760. An electric stove cost Tk 7,747 and the carrying cost from the ground floor to the top one cost Tk 6,650.

The reports also said that the price of an electric iron was Tk 4,154 and the carrying cost Tk 2,945.

The reports sparked wide spread criticisms across the country. Masudur Alam, the project director, was also criticised on social media.

On May 20, the High Court sought enquiry reports from the housing and public works ministry on the alleged irregularities. The HC asked the Attorney General's Office to collect the reports from the committees formed by the ministry and submit those to the court within a week of its reopening after the upcoming vacation. It means the reports would have to be submitted by June 23.

S'pore launches

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Because it's so small and squeezey, I feel a bit like a second-class citizen smoking in there," e-commerce executive Azfar Zain told AFP after using the cabin.

"There are no seats, either. I'm not comfortable with smoking there unless they make the room bigger."

Office worker Rama Dass said he preferred to smoke outside, adding, "sometimes I just need a bit of fresh air".

Singapore-based Southern Globe Corporation, which launched the cabin on Tuesday, said it planned to deploy 60 such structures by the end of the year.

Singapore first introduced anti-tobacco laws in the 1970s as part of a national effort to reduce smoking.

It has since expanded the number of public places where lighting up is prohibited, including university campuses, common areas around apartment blocks, and inside private cars with the windows down.

Khalid Hussain

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Ghazal, had heart and kidney related diseases, along with other old age complications.

Khalid's first namaz-e-janaza was held last night at Minar Mosque in Dhaka's Mohammadpur area. His body will be taken to the premises of Hindol Academy, Nazrul Institute and Govt College of Music in Dhaka this morning for paying homage. He will be buried at his ancestral home in Kushtia, where his mother was buried, today.

"This is an irreparable loss," said Khairul Anam Shakil, Ekushey Padak winner and General Secretary at Bangladesh Nazrul Sangeet Sangstha. "Khaled Hussain was one of the architects of preserving the true essence of Nazrul Sangeet, and Bangladesh Nazrul Sangeet Sangstha started its journey under his guidance..."

"Even at this age, being physically ill, he tried to be here for us as much as possible. He was an amazing Nazrul Sangeet artiste but he was capable of singing many different genres. He was well known for it since he was young. We have lost a mentor...Khaled Hussain will always be alive through his work."

Eminent Nazrul Exponent Sadya Afreen Mallick said, "Khalid Hussain was a tireless exponent of Nazrul songs.... His absence will be deeply felt across Nazrul enthusiasts..."

"Nazrul wrote and composed around 400 Islamic songs -- belonging to Hamd, Naat, Marsia and motivational sub-genres. Of them, about 300 are available," Khalid had said, known particularly for his emotive renditions of Nazrul's Islamic songs, in an earlier interview with The Daily Star.

Khalid Hussain was born on December 4, 1940, in Kolkata. He has several solo albums to his credits. Khalid, president of Bangladesh Nazrul Sangeet Sangstha, had numerous students, fans and well-wishers both at home and abroad. Apart from receiving the Ekushey Padak in 2000, Khalid was honoured with multiple recognitions, including the Nazrul Academy Award and Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy Award.

Cast adrift in sea

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International Airport around 5:30am Tuesday, was released after 2:00am yesterday from immigration, where they were kept for about 20 hours.

This group of survivors is different from the 14 Bangladeshis rescued by Tunisian fishermen and coastguard, and sheltered by the local Red Crescent.

Their paths, however, may have been the same.

According to ASM Ashrafur Islam, labour counsellor of the Bangladesh embassy in Libya, a ship with some 150 migrants had left the Libyan port city of Zuwara on May 9.

In mid-sea, some of the migrants were transferred to two other boats.

One of the boats had some 80 migrants, including around 70 Bangladeshis, and it capsized due to a combination of the rough sea and being overloaded.

Afterwards, four bodies of Bangladeshis were recovered and kept at a Tunisian hospital. Fourteen others were rescued, three of whom would be arriving in Dhaka on Thursday.

Eleven others are not willing to return, but will be motivated to do so, Ashrafur said.

The labour counsellor said they had information that the other boat with some 70 migrants, including some 40 Bangladeshis, had reached Italy.

After one of the boats capsized, he flew to Tunisia to help arrange repatriation of the survivors.

The total number of migrants on the boat from which Amir was rescued was not yet known, Ashrafur told The Daily Star from Libya.

Sharing his experience of how he went to Libya, Amir said he began to plan after a broker, Zafar, allured him to go to Italy.

First, Amir went to Dubai in May last year with a visit visa. He stayed there for ten days. Brokers there then arranged a "paper visa" of Libya and sent him there.

After more than a month in Libya, Amir was put on board a boat heading for Europe. That journey came to a premature end as the boat was

intercepted by the Libyan coastguard. Amir, along with the other migrants, were then jailed.

"My family had to pay Tk 2.25 lakh to get me out of jail," said Amir, 35, father of a daughter.

After his release, he went to Tripoli and worked at a pharmacy for some six months. In between, he continued to dream of reaching Italy.

Finally, on May 9, he boarded yet another boat heading for Europe. Fate, however, had other plans for the illegal voyage.

Amir once again failed to reach his destination after the boat's engine failed.

He said he had spent a total of Tk 8.5 lakh that he made from selling the land he owned.

Mohammad Zafar of Bhairab was the broker to whom he and his family handed over all the money. Now, however, he regrets what he has done.

"I have failed in two ways - I lost money and failed to reach Italy. I will try to get back the money from Zafar or file a case," Amir said.

Another returnee, Rasel Ahmed of Sylhet sadar, said his brother Rubel had left for Italy on May 26 last year after paying Tk nine lakh to travel agent Parvez Ahmed and his father Rofiqul Islam of Bishwanath upazila.

"We gave them Taka 5.5 lakhs before he left and then he was in Libya for several months. Around two months ago, we gave them another 4 lakh so that he can reach Italy. The contract was to use large steel boats and reach Italy directly," said Rubel.

Meanwhile, scores of reporters and photojournalists waited for returnees the whole day on Tuesday at the arrival of the Dhaka airport, but found none from Tunisia.

Earlier, an immigration police said they were quizzing the returnees and were verifying their names and identities through local police stations.

HC irked

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Yesterday, the HC bench of Justice FRM Nazmul Ahasan and Justice KM Kamrul Kader passed the order during hearing a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Umme Kulsum seeking its order for compensating the victims.

"Those who run business should have some human values. We are not happy at the behavior of Green Line about implementing our order," the bench said, adding that this court would pass further order on June 25.

During the hearing Advocate Ozi Ullah withdrew himself as a lawyer for Green Line Paribahan.

He told the court that he would not defend the transport company as it did not communicate with him about the case and about paying compensation to Russel.

Deputy Attorney General Abdullah-Al-Mahmud Bashar told The Daily Star that the Green Line Paribahan can now engage another lawyer to defend themselves.

Russel, who was present in the courtroom, told this correspondent that Green Line Paribahan did not give him Tk 45 lakh as per the HC order even the company did not communicate with him. The company had earlier given him Tk 5 lakh, he added.

During hearing of the same writ petition, the HC bench on March 31 ordered Green Line to pay Tk 50 lakh to Russel by April 3 and asked the company to inform it by April 4 after compliance.

The company handed Tk 5 lakh of Tk 50 lakh to Russel on April 10, writ petitioner's lawyer Advocate Khandker Shamsul Haque Reza said.

The Green Line Paribahan had earlier given Tk 3 lakh to Russel for his treatment, he added.

Get ready for difficult times

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various difficult situations."

The report did not elaborate on those difficulties, and did not directly mention the trade war or of the United States.

No further trade talks between top Chinese and US negotiators have been scheduled since the last round ended on May 10, the same day President Donald Trump increased tariffs on \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods and took steps to levy duties on all remaining Chinese imports.

Negotiations between the United States and China have stalled since early May, when Chinese officials sought major changes to the text of a proposed deal that the Trump administration says had been largely agreed.

However, Chinese Ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai, speaking to the Fox News Channel, said on Tuesday that Beijing was still open for talks.

Repercussions of the blacklisting mounted on Huawei, with some mobile operators, including the Ymobile unit of Japan's Softbank Corp and rival KDDI Corp putting launch plans for Huawei's new P30 Lite smartphone on hold.

Another big Chinese tech firm, video surveillance equipment maker Hikvision Digital Technology Co Ltd, could also face limits on its ability

to buy US technology, the New York Times reported, citing people familiar with the matter, sending the firm's Shenzhen-listed shares down 5.54 percent.

RETALIATION
While China has not said whether or how it may retaliate to the measures against Huawei, state media have taken an increasingly strident and nationalistic tone.

US firms said in a survey released yesterday they were facing retaliation in China over the trade war. The American Chamber of Commerce of China and its sister body in Shanghai, said members reported that they faced increased obstacles such as government inspections, slower customs clearances and slower approval for licensing and other applications.

It also said that 40.7% of respondents were considering or had relocated manufacturing facilities outside China. Of the almost 250 respondents to the survey, which was conducted after China and the United States both raised tariffs on each other's imports this month, almost three-quarters said the impact of tariffs was hurting their competitiveness.

To cope, about one third said they were increasingly focusing their China operations on producing for Chinese

customers and not for export, while one third said they were delaying and cancelling investment decisions.

Long considered a solid cornerstone in a relationship fraught with geopolitical frictions, the US business community has in recent years advocated a harder line on what it sees as discriminatory Chinese trade policies.

The United States is seeking sweeping changes to trade and economic policies, including an end to forced technology transfers and theft of US trade secrets. Washington also wants curbs on subsidies for Chinese state-owned enterprises and increased access for US firms in Chinese markets.

China for years has blocked major US tech firms, including Google and Facebook, from fully operating in its market. Those and other restrictions have fuelled calls from within the US business community for Washington to pursue more reciprocal policies.

Cui told Fox News Channel that US restrictions on Huawei "are without any foundation and evidence" and could undermine the normal functioning of markets.

"Everybody knows Huawei is a privately owned company. It is just a normal Chinese private company," Cui said. "So all the action taken against Huawei are politically motivated."