

Forensic Lab to open in Rajshahi

It is expected to expedite investigations in Rangpur and Rajshahi regions

RAFIUL ISLAM

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) is going to launch a state-of-the-art forensic laboratory in Rajshahi for examining evidences, detecting crimes and identifying criminals in Rajshahi and Rangpur regions.

The laboratory has been set up in a four-storey building at Rajshahi Police Lines and Inspector General of Police Mohammad Javed Patwary is expected to inaugurate it on February 3.

“After inauguration, evidences of cases with Rajshahi and Rangpur metropolitans and ranges police can be tested there. They do not need to come to Dhaka anymore,” said Shaikh Nazmul Alam, deputy inspector general of CID’s Forensic Division.

“Earlier, it took a long time to get laboratory reports and this delayed investigations, and sometimes evidence would be damaged,” said another CID official, adding that the lab will expedite investigations in these regions.

Initially, a 40-member team, led by an additional superintendent of police, will be deployed at the lab.

The lab in Rajshahi is the third of its kind in the country, with the other two in Dhaka and Chattogram.

CID officials said such labs play

a significant role in examining important evidences to solve criminal cases.

But sending evidences from one division to another requires time, leading to delays. The lab in Rajshahi will reduce hassle, they said.

“The laboratory is well-equipped with highly specialised and sophisticated equipment of international standards. It is competent to carry out any chemical examination and documentation,” Rumana Akhter, special superintendent of CID’s Forensic Division, told The Daily Star. The officials further said there would be a “ballistics section” to examine arms and explosives and separate sections for inspecting forgeries and counterfeit notes.

A special crime scene unit has been added to the lab to collect evidence from the scene of crime.

There will also be finger and foot print sections to match prints collected, a handwriting analysis and photography sections to accelerate investigations.

Its chemical laboratories will help uncover the presence of intoxicants in dead bodies, even those dug up from graves. It can also be used to test explosives or acid to find out how they were made, CID officials said.

North Korea to ban tourists over China virus

AFP, Seoul

North Korea will ban foreign tourists to protect itself against a new SARS-like virus that has claimed at least nine lives in China and sickened hundreds, a major tour operator said.

Several nations including the US have stepped up checks on airport passengers to detect the coronavirus, which first emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, but a ban on tourists would be a first.

The virus has caused alarm in China and abroad because of its genetic similarities to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which

killed nearly 650 people across mainland China and Hong Kong in 2002-2003.

The vast majority of foreign tourists to North Korea are Chinese, and their numbers have swelled significantly in the last year as relations between Beijing and Pyongyang have warmed, generating vital foreign currency for the isolated country.

But as of Wednesday, North Korea will “temporarily close its borders to all foreign tourists as a precaution to the coronavirus”, Chinese-based specialist operator Young Pioneer Tours said in a statement.

Bangladesh moves

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weaknesses are more prevalent than in flawed democracies -- in political culture, functioning of government and political participation,” reads its definition of a hybrid regime.

“Corruption tends to be widespread and the rule of law is weak. Civil society is weak. Typically, there is harassment of and pressure on journalists, and the judiciary is not independent.”

Last year, Bangladesh ranked 88th with a score of 5.57 and this year it ranked 80th with 5.88.

Among the South Asian countries, only India and Sri Lanka are ahead of Bangladesh. However, India moved down 10 notches on the index this year.

The Democracy Index provides a snapshot of the state of democracy worldwide in 165 independent states and two territories, according to the intelligence unit.

It is based on electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture and civil liberties.

Norway topped the index, with a score of 9.87, while North Korea was at the bottom, with a score of 1.08. China is now 153rd scoring 2.26.

The Index, published on the website of Economist Intelligence Unit yesterday, described 2019 as a “tumultuous year” for Asian

COUNTRY	RANK
Bangladesh	80
India	51
Nepal	92
Sri Lanka	69
Pakistan	108
Bhutan	91
China	153
USA	25
Russia	134

democracies. The biggest change occurred in Thailand, which moved up 38 notches, while introduction of a law against “fake news” in Singapore affected its score in civil liberties.

Singapore, Hong Kong and India have all dropped, with violent protests and threats to civil liberties.

“The 2019 result is even worse than that recorded in 2010, in the wake of the global economic and financial crisis.”

The index reveals that despite a growing disillusionment with formal political institutions, political participation is on the rise in almost every region around the world, with the population being spurred into political action, the research group said.

Stop production

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Election Commission and the chief executive officers of Dhaka north and south city corporations have been made respondents to the rule.

The High Court bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman issued a suo moto (voluntary) move in the wake of a report published in The Daily Star yesterday under the headline “Laminated posters in city polls: A big threat to the environment”.

Supreme Court lawyer Barrister Manoj Kumar Bhowmick placed the news report before the HC bench for necessary order.

He told the court that laminated posters are harmful to the environment and public health. Therefore, the production and display of such posters need to be stopped immediately.

The elections to two Dhaka city corporations are scheduled to be held on February 1. Ahead of the polls, candidates are conducting door-to-door campaigns and hanging a huge number of posters in their respective areas.

About 140 mayor and councillor candidates out of total 745 in their disclosure of election expenditures mentioned that they would print

nearly 50 lakh posters.

Almost a week before the city polls campaign began, the HC directed the authorities concerned to ban single-use plastic products in coastal areas, hotels, motels and restaurants across the country in one year as those are hazardous to health and environment.

The plastic products include drinking straws, cotton buds, cigarette butts, food packaging, food containers, bottles, plates, plastic cutlery and plastic bags.

The HC bench of Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury and Justice Khandaker Diliruzzaman came up with the order following a writ petition jointly filed by 11 rights organisations, including Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), seeking necessary order.

The rights organisations submitted the writ petition as a public interest litigation on December 17 last year, mentioning the hazardous effects of plastic -- particularly single-use plastics -- on ecology, aquatic and marine life, soil fertility, agricultural production, human health and safety.

According to the Department of Environment (DoE), the country generates around 3,000 tonnes of plastic waste every day.



Mukim Chowdhury, one of the four Dhaka University students who were beaten up by BCL men at a dormitory on Tuesday night, began a sit-in at the base of Raju Memorial Sculpture yesterday, demanding justice.

PHOTO: ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

BCL men at it again, torture 4 at DU dorm

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The event harks back to the killing of Buet student Abrar Fahad by BCL activists at a dorm on October 7 last year. The BCL activists labelled him as a Shibir man before torturing him to death.

Abul Hossain, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, said the students were handed over to their guardians around 2:30pm yesterday.

However, Sanwar and Afsar’s fathers told this newspaper late last night that they didn’t know where their sons were and their phones had been switched off.

Minhaz told The Daily Star that he was at a relative’s house in the capital.

Narrating the event, Mukim said, “Around 11:15pm on Monday, Chhatra League hall unit Vice-president Anwar Hossen called me and asked me go to the hall’s guestroom. After reaching there, I saw hall union Vice-president Saifullah Abbasi Ananta, General Secretary Toufikul Islam, hall BCL Joint General Secretary Amir Hamja and Anwar Hossain.

“Since another group of students were celebrating someone’s birthday, the Chhatra League leaders took me to the hall union office.

“Then they called Sanwar and him to come to the union office. After Sanwar reached there, Anwar showed us screenshots of a Messenger conversation and said that it was proof that we were Shibir activists.

“At one stage, Amir Hamja started to punch me and kick me, saying that I was a Shibir activist. After a while, I realised

that the screenshots were fake.

“They kept asking us to admit we were Shibir activists. Hall union VP Abbasi then started beating us up with a hammer.”

Mukim alleged that around 12:30am, the BCL leaders took them to the roof of the dorm where former BCL central unit member Mahfuzur Rahman Emon, Amir Hamja, Abbasi, and hall BCL Vice-president Kamal Uddin Rana struck them with wires and cricket stumps.

The BCL men mainly struck their on knee and hands, Mukim said.

“Around 1:30am, they took me to the guest room again and I saw Minhaz Uddin and Afsar Uddin come to the guest room after being called by the leaders.

“They continued to strike me and Sanwar up and started beating up Minhaz and Afsar as well,” Mukim said.

He alleged that Prof Billal Hossain, house tutor of the hall, came to the guest room around 2:30am and didn’t do anything to stop the beating.

The house tutor then informed the proctor’s office and police.

Prof Billal could not be reached for comment.

Shahbagh police took Sanwar and Mukim to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, and later to the police station.

Talking to this correspondent, Minhaz gave a similar account of the events.

Wishing anonymity, several BCL leaders, who were present at the scene, admitted they had beaten up the four students.

Big scammers top defaulters’ list

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These firms are largely responsible for the rise in defaulted loans in the banking sector.

Rimex Footwear Ltd, Crescent Leather Products Ltd and Rupali Composite Leatherwear Ltd -- all sister concerns of the Crescent Group -- are the top three loan defaulters, shows the list unveiled by Kamal.

The three firms, which took major portions of the loans from the Janata Bank, didn’t pay back any money to the state-run bank.

According to Bangladesh Bank, the Crescent Group’s total loan from Janata stands around Tk 4,000 crore. The state-run bank disbursed the loans, sidestepping the banking rules and regulations.

Three companies of AnonTex -- Galaxy Sweater and Yarn Dyeing, Simran Composite and AnonTex Knit Tex -- are also on the list of loan defaulters.

The group swindled more than Tk 5,500 crore from Janata between 2007 and 2014.

The list includes Benetex Industries, a concern of Buildtrade Group; Bismillah Towels, a concern of Bismillah Group; and Hallmark Design Wear, a company of Hallmark Group.

Buildtrade Group siphoned off more than Tk 3,000 crore from both public and private banks, according to BB data.

Three non-bank financial institutions (NBFI) have also become defaulters as they failed to pay back bank loans taken for running business.

They are Bangladesh Industrial Finance Company, International Leasing and Financial Service, and Peoples Leasing and Finance Services.

The BB has already started the process of liquidating one of the three NBFI -- Peoples Leasing and Finance Services -- for its failure to repay the depositors’ money.

The central bank had earlier unearthed a number of financial scams at the NBFI.

Among the government entities, the food ministry’s defaulted loan is Tk 26.46 crore.

Bangladesh Bank statistics show that the defaulted loans totalled Tk 1,16,288 crore in September last year.

According to Kamal’s statement in the House, the amount fell by Tk 19,302 crore in the following two months.

Bank officials said the defaulted loans dropped due to relaxed loan rescheduling facilities offered by the government in September last year.

BANK DIRECTORS’ LOANS

As of September last year, directors of various banks took loans amounting to Tk 173,230.89 crore from their own as well as other banks, said the finance minister.

The amount is around 12 percent of the total outstanding loans, according to him.

Directors of 25 banks have taken loans of Tk 1,614.77 crore from their banks -- around 0.166 percent of the outstanding loans of the banks.

Bank directors also took Tk 171,616 crore from 55 other banks. The amount is 11.21 percent of their total loans.

How Gambia took the case to the ICJ

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a military crackdown in Myanmar, a delegation of OIC visited Bangladesh, the country that offered shelter to the persecution victims.

Abubacar Marie Tambadou, justice minister of The Gambia, who worked for years as a lawyer at the UN tribunal and focused on the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, too was in the delegation.

Talking to the Rohingya refugees, Tambadou recalled the Rwanda genocide that wiped out about 800,000 lives in 100 days. Around 250,000 women endured sexual assault during the Rwanda genocide.

After the visit, Tambadou told the US-based Public Radio International, “I have had previous experience interacting with surviving victims of genocide, in particular the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

“When I heard the stories being recounted by the witnesses, I noticed there were striking similarities -- not only in the fact that there is a process of historical dehumanisation that has occurred in Myanmar against the Rohingya, but also the fact that Myanmar authorities had engaged in systematic and organised operations which targeted Rohingya, targeted women.”

“The world failed to help in 1994,

and the world is failing to protect vulnerable people 25 years later,” he added.

Later, at the OIC conference, he proposed formation of an Ad Hoc Ministerial Committee on Accountability for Crime Against Rohingya.

Bangladesh, which was seeking a permanent solution to the crisis, and other countries of the 57-member body, strongly supported it.

Eventually, that OIC committee supported Tambadou, whose leadership eventually got the Rohingya genocide case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

ICJ is scheduled to issue a ruling today on the case that seeks provisional measures to stop the ongoing genocide in the Rakhine state of Myanmar and hold accountable the perpetrators.

The Rohingyas, for the first time, have found a hope of justice.

Many wondered how The Gambia, a low-income country of agrarian economy trying to recover from an authoritarian regime of Yahya Jammeh, comes to lodge such a case.

“Well, our experiences in The Gambia is what has actually informed the position of the government of The Gambia to speak out against the

oppression of others, wherever it occurs around the world,” said Tambadou.

The fact that no one helped the Gambians, no one put pressure on President Jammeh to stop his atrocities has led them to go through a very difficult two-decade period, he said.

“We don’t want others to feel our pain or our fate. We know how it feels like to be unable to tell your story to the world, to be unable to share your pain with others in the hope that they will help. We know what it feels like to be helpless. We have lived through it for over two decades, and we don’t want others to suffer the same fate,” he said.

Shireen Huq, co-convenor of Bangladesh Civil Society Platform on Justice and Accountability for the Rohingyas, who was present at the ICJ hearing on the Rohingya case in December, said during the visit to Rohingya camp in 2018, Tambadou could smell genocide on the Rohingyas.

“The Gambia has actually created a giant example of standing beside the persecuted minority. It is a struggle for global justice and humanity,” she told The Daily Star.

The Netherlands, Canada and the UK have supported the case. It is time for others to follow the case, she added.

ICJ ruling today

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Prize laureate who has been widely criticised for her role in the Rohingya crisis.

The Gambia argued that Myanmar has been committing genocide against the Rohingya Muslim population living in Rakhine state. To prove its case, it cited reports by the UN Fact-Finding Mission and different global rights bodies.

About 750,000 Rohingyas fled a brutal military campaign since August 2017 and took shelter in Bangladesh. They joined some 300,000 others who had fled previous waves of violence from Rakhine, where they have been denied citizenship since the 1970s and are deprived of basic rights like health and education, and freedom of movement.

More than 24,000 Rohingyas have been killed by Myanmar’s state forces since August 2017, according to a report by the Ontario International Development Agency, which involved researchers and organisations from Canada, Australia, Bangladesh, Norway and the Philippines.

More than 34,000 people were thrown into fire and more than 114,000 others were beaten up, the report said.

It also said 17,718 Rohingya women and girls were raped since the Myanmar army and police systematically targeted the world’s most persecuted group.

The UN termed it a classic example of ethnic cleansing, while an independent UN Fact-Finding Mission described the violence as having genocidal intent and demanded probing the senior military officers.

Though the UN repeatedly adopted resolutions condemning the atrocities by Myanmar, the UN Security Council could take no concrete actions against Myanmar to stop the genocide mainly due to opposition from the country’s close allies -- China and Russia.

Bangladesh, influenced by China and India, signed a bilateral deal with Myanmar for the Rohingya repatriation, but the refugees refused to go back to Rakhine, saying the situation there were not conducive to their return and that there was no guarantee of safety and citizenship.

The Gambian Justice Minister Tambadou, who worked for years as a lawyer at the UN tribunal that dealt with the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, assumed a position of leadership in the lawsuit because of his special expertise.

Both The Gambia and Myanmar are signatories to the UN’s Genocide Convention.

Gambia’s filing the case marks the first time a country without any direct connection to alleged crimes has used its membership in the Genocide Convention to bring a case before the ICJ.

Earlier, the International Criminal Court began an investigation into the rights violation against the Rohingyas by Myanmar. The ICC holds accountable the individuals, while the ICJ holds accountable the state as a member of the UN Genocide Convention.

During the hearing, The Gambia argued that Myanmar had a state policy of eliminating the Rohingyas. Denial of citizenship, Rohingya ethnicity, restrictions on freedom of movement, marriage, health, education, and livelihood since 1970s are all part of that genocidal policy.

Further arguing that promoting the narratives of hatred, mass killings, rape and other forms of sexual violence, burning Rohingya villages in 2016 and 2017 bear the testimony of genocide, The Gambia requested the ICJ to ensure provisional measures to stop the ongoing genocide against the Rohingyas.

Lawyers for The Gambia also requested that Myanmar shall not destroy or render inaccessible any evidence related to the events described in the application.

Myanmar, on the other hand, outright denied the allegations of genocide and ethnic cleansing, though it said its army used disproportionate force and committed crimes against the civilians during clearance operations in Rakhine since August 2017.

Talking to The Daily Star, Nay San Lwin, media coordinator at the Free Rohingya Coalition, a global platform of the Rohingyas, said they were expecting the ICJ to order provisional measures to stop the genocide.

“We expect it because genocide has happened over the years against us. It still continues. It must stop and the evidences of genocide must be protected for holding Myanmar accountable,” he said over phone from Germany, where he lives.

In its analysis, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) said Myanmar is legally bound to comply with the order, if given by the ICJ.

Under article 41(2) of the ICJ Statute, the court’s provisional measures are automatically sent to the UN Security Council. Such an order would increase pressure on the council to take concrete actions in Myanmar, including through a binding resolution to address some of the indicators of genocidal intent.

Asked what would happen if China and Russia used their veto at the UN Security Council, Nay San Lwin said he expects that not to happen.

“If it happens, it means there will be no future for the Rohingyas as well as for the global justice and humanity. But we hope justice will be done.”