

SC asks HC

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on their own merits and in accordance with law and also prepone the hearing on other related pleas.

The bench, also comprising justices B R Gavaï and Surya Kant, directed that the hearing on other connected matters along with all the applications for impleadment and intervention on the issue, which have been adjourned to a later date by High Court, may be advanced and be taken up on March 6.

The bench passed the order while hearing a plea filed by 10 victims seeking registration of FIRs against BJP leaders Anurag Thakur, Kapil Mishra, Parvesh Verma and Abhay Verma and others for their alleged hate speeches.

“The High Court may also explore the possibility of peaceful resolution of the subject dispute,” the bench said in its order.

However, the apex court kept to itself the issue related to the allegations of hate speech by activist Harsh Mander, who has also filed a separate plea before it related to the violence in which at least 42 people lost their lives and around 200 injured.

It asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to file an affidavit during the day on behalf of Centre giving details regarding allegations of hate speech delivered by Mander, who had purportedly made objectionable comments during anti-CAA protests about the Supreme Court, Government and Parliament.

Mehta told the bench that Mander had “instigated anti-CAA protestors saying that ultimately justice will be done on the streets and the petition in the apex court has been filed for the sake of filing”.

Mander’s lawyer, Karuna Nundy, vehemently denied the allegations and said he had not made any hate speech.

The court, however, was of the view that unless the issue of alleged hate speech is “not sorted”, it will not allow Mander’s counsel to argue his petition which will now be heard by the top court itself on March 6.

Dr Kamal

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party would remain in place.

The party’s internal conflict hit the headlines recently as two groups expelled some leaders from the party by issuing press releases without the approval of the party president.

Kamal yesterday said Gonoforum held its special council on April 26 last year to eliminate organisational weaknesses and revamp the party.

He said about three to four central leaders formed the central committee of Gonoforum and had it approved by the party president which created a stalemate in the organisation instead of bringing dynamism in its activities.

Kamal also said there was lack of organisational discipline due to irresponsible attitude of some party leaders.

Under these circumstances, the party’s central committee was dissolved, he added.

Rejoinder

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correct and the photograph published with the report fell beyond the project alignment.

As per the above-mentioned facts, the report saying the CDA is cutting hills is not correct.

Our reply
The report was published based on the facts found by the DoE inspection team and field visit by our correspondent on March 2.

The DoE already revised the project director and its contracting firm with a notice to appear at a hearing regarding further hill cutting by the CDA.

During the inspection, the DoE found that 40,000 square feet of hills had been razed within the periphery of the base camp built to oversee the work of the Link Road Project. As it is a hilly area, there is no way for people to cut the hill from behind as the road to affected spot is only accessible through the entrance gate controlled by the CDA.

As per the DoE documents, the CDA did not follow the proper procedures to comply with environmental norms since the beginning of the project. Lines of hills that formed the unique natural beauty of Jongol Salimpur area were razed at whims by the CDA. The very fact was raised by the director general of the DoE during his visit on January 27.

A fine of Tk 10 lakh was imposed on the CDA in 2017 by the DoE. The CDA never presented an environmental monitoring plan, which was stipulated while issuing environmental clearance by the DoE to submit it after every three months. The DoE slapped another fine on the CDA of Tk 10 crore and 38 lakh. Spectra was also fined Tk five crore subsequently by the DoE for hill cutting.

A large part of a hill just behind the base camp of the Link Road Project was found razed. This correspondent visited the spot on March 2 and saw that the equipment used to cut hills was for the CDA project. Locals who spoke to this correspondent also said the hills behind the base camp was being cut by the CDA.

We stand by our report.



Democratic presidential hopeful former Vice President Joe Biden arrives on stage with his wife Jill (C) and sister Valerie Biden Owens for a Super Tuesday event in Los Angeles on Tuesday night. PHOTO: AFP

Biden gains big on Super Tuesday

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The Democrats’ campaign is now looking like a two-horse race between former Vice President Biden and leftist Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont.

Just one week ago the Biden saw his campaign teeter on the edge of collapse. Now he is vying once again for frontrunner status.

“It’s a good night and it seems to be getting even better! They don’t call it Super Tuesday for nothing,” Biden told cheering fans in Los Angeles.

Sanders, self-described democratic socialist, was projected to win his home state of Vermont, Colorado and Utah.

He was also ahead in California, the biggest delegate-rich state of all, with a nine-point lead as the count continued yesterday morning.

The centrist Biden was projected to win in Virginia, North Carolina, Alabama, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Arkansas, Massachusetts and even Minnesota -- a state where Sanders had been expected to win handily.

Well after midnight the projection was made for Biden to win Texas, the second largest US state, and yesterday morning he had a narrow lead in Maine with three-quarters of the vote counted. Sanders had been polling ahead in both states.

“We expected a surge. We got a tsunami,” tweeted analyst David Axelrod, chief strategist for Obama’s two presidential campaigns. “New race. Completely.”

A defiant Sanders celebrated his

own wins earlier in the night by tearing into Trump, calling him “the most dangerous president in the history of this country.”

But he also attacked Biden for having voted for the invasion of Iraq and painted him as tarnished by billionaire contributors.

“We’re taking on the political establishment,” he said. “You cannot beat Trump with the same-old, same-old kind of politics.”

Biden saw the results as proof that his bid to bring American politics back to the center, after four years of Trump’s rightwing populism, is on a roll.

“We are very much alive,” he told a crowd in Los Angeles. “Make no mistake about it, this campaign will send Donald Trump packing.”

A key takeaway from Biden’s long list of wins was his strong support among African Americans -- a vital piece in any Democratic presidential candidate’s coalition.

He seemed to fare less well with the large Hispanic electorate, which in California reportedly went heavily for Sanders. But a victory in Texas, which also has a diverse population, suggests Biden has the capacity to build a broad coalition.

That was bolstered by Biden winning all five other southern states on the ballot Tuesday.

Trump, who watched the results on television, tweeted his customary insults about the Democrats, deriding Warren for losing her state of

Massachusetts.

Biden answered on Twitter, saying: “Come November, we are going to beat you.”

Tuesday’s 14 contests gave the dwindling Democratic field a giant potential haul of delegates.

Many in the party are desperate to stop Sanders’ strong push to win the delegate race, saying the senator will be destroyed in an election where Trump will brand him a socialist bent on ending the American way of life.

Biden was practically counted out after a stumbling early campaign, but first began to rebound with a landslide win Saturday in South Carolina.

That was followed by coordinated decisions by two other moderate candidates -- Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar -- to withdraw and endorse their former rival.

Biden is making his third White House bid, after failed runs in 1988 and 2008. He argues he can bring a return to “decency” following the tumultuous, scandal-plagued Trump era.

Sanders’ fans are convinced only he can take on Trump, who also defied his party’s establishment to claim a surprise 2016 victory against Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Supporter Jamison Hanning, a 45-year-old plastics industry technician, said he was “pretty confident” despite Biden’s pushback.

“It is just people in the establishment being afraid,” Hanning said.

BIWTA braves

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the Cadastral Survey (CS).

After the first day of the drive on Tuesday, Arif told The Daily Star that the encroachment violated the Water Body Conservation Act 2000 and Bangladesh Environment Protection Act 1995.

Contacted by The Daily Star over phone yesterday, Aslamul admitted there might have been some encroachment, but he also said that the BIWTA issued two clearances in

2011 and 2015 in his favour, paving the way for him to set up the power plants.

“We may have encroached on the river with the embankment slope and boundary fencing,” Aslamul said.

According to the lawmaker, the shipping ministry conducted a joint survey of the river area near his power plants several months ago but he did not know what the findings of the survey are.

“They must carry out the eviction

in accordance with the latest survey findings but I am in the dark about the findings,” said the lawmaker.

In reply to his claims, Arif said that BIWTA was not evicting any part of the Maisha power plant, for which Aslamul had obtained a clearance. The problem was with the Dhaka North Power Plant and Dhaka West Power Plant as they were encroaching on the river.

BIWTA has so far evicted 23 structures at the site and recovered three acres of the river.

Friendship will grow stronger

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struggle. Their active support for us during our dark days will ever remain a shining chapter in the history of our relations.”

In an exclusive interview to ENA, Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin assures of continued assistance to the new-born state of Bangladesh in reconstructing its war-ravaged economy. All assistance to Bangladesh would be based on the principle of non-interference and mutual respect for each other, he adds.

FIRST BB BOEING FLIGHT LANDS IN DHAKA

The first Boeing of Bangladesh Biman carrying 186 passengers from London lands at Dhaka Airport. An emotion-choked aged passenger alighting from the Boeing amidst chants of ‘Joy Bangla’ says that he has no words to express his feelings for being able to come back to his liberated country in ‘our own national airlines’.

“You know, I have bought this ticket from Bangladesh Biman in London about one and a half months back and since then I have been anxiously waiting for this flight,” he adds.

SRI LANKA ACCORDS RECOGNITION
Sri Lanka accords full diplomatic recognition to Bangladesh. In her letter to Bangabandhu, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandarnaike says, “I look forward to establishment of close relations and friendly cooperation between our two countries and governments in our mutual interests.”

The Sri Lanka government is now in touch with Dhaka to establish a direct telephone link between Colombo and the Bangladesh capital. Bangladesh makes an urgent request for 147,000 tonnes of coconut oil from Sri Lanka.

REPAY LOANS
The government of Bangladesh has called upon loanees of different

Nasa asks for applications

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since the Apollo program to returning astronauts to the moon. We will send the first woman and next man to the lunar South Pole by 2024, and we need more astronauts to follow suit on the moon, and then Mars,” said Nasa Administrator Jim Bridenstine in a statement.

“We’re looking for talented men and women from diverse backgrounds and every walk of life to join us in this new era of human exploration that begins with the Artemis program to the moon. If you have always dreamed of being an astronaut, apply now.”

Any successful astronauts will be selected in 2021 and then begin training, a tough process that can take years.

Last time around, in 2015, some 18,300 people applied and just 11 new astronauts made it through to last year’s graduation.

“Becoming an astronaut is no easy task, because being an astronaut is no easy task,” said Steve Koerner, Nasa’s director of flight operations and chair of the Astronaut Selection Board at Nasa’s Johnson Space Center in Houston.

“Those who apply will likely be competing against thousands who have dreamed of and worked toward going to space for as long as they can remember. But somewhere among those applicants are our next astronauts, and we look forward to meeting you.”

The requirements for applicants

are strict: they must have a master’s degree in a STEM field, or equivalent experience. They must also have two years of related professional experience or 1,000 hours of flying a jet aircraft.

To get through the selection programme, they will also have to pass a physical exam. For the first time, some of the assessment will take place online, with a test that will take up to two hours to complete.

Successful astronauts could be deployed to a wide variety of different missions. After training they would head to the International Space Station to take part in experiments, but may also be selected as part of the plans to head back to the moon and then use that as a step to head to Mars in the mid-2030s.

Padma bridge

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Padma Bridge project said that if the situation does not improve, the deadline of the project may be extended by a month or two.

“Of course, there is an impact [of coronavirus] on different projects... Because many engineers could not return [to Bangladesh],” Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming said yesterday.

The ambassador was speaking at a press conference, organised by China Railway Group Limited in Keraniganj’s Jinjira, on whether the outbreak of coronavirus is affecting major projects undertaken by different Chinese companies.

Later, journalists were taken to the two project sites.

China Railway Group Limited and its subsidiary China Major Bridge Engineering Co Ltd are implementing Padma Bridge Rail Link Project (PBRLP) and Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project (PMBP) respectively.

This is the first time that officials formally admitted that the coronavirus outbreak is hampering the projects.

Since February 5, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader on several occasions said that the construction work of the bridge would not be affected if the coronavirus situation improves in “two months.”

In his written speech, which was distributed among journalists, Wang Kun, project director of PBRLP, said, “The outbreak of coronavirus is affecting the execution of the two mega projects of CREC to some extent because some business entities are not in full operation in China.”

“Some project staff [members] in the epidemic centre are not allowed to leave. To ensure the continuity of the work progress, CREC has been trying its best to mitigate the impact of coronavirus,” he said.

Project Director on behalf of Bangladesh Railway, Golam Fakhruddin Ahmed Chowdhury, said reduction in the number of workers due to coronavirus is hampering their work.

Besides, construction materials cannot be brought as they weren’t able to give approval to the materials after going to China, he said.

Around 260 out of 1,700 Chinese nationals involved in those projects could not return to Bangladesh after they went China to celebrate new year there, a Chinese official said.

Fakhruddin, however, said they have written to the authorities concerned to allow some Chinese nationals to come to Bangladesh for the sake of the project.

Najnin Ara Keya, chief engineer (bridge viaduct) of the project, said around 150 Chinese staff members out of 900 have been stuck in China.

However, they are recruiting Chinese nationals coming from “Non-Hubei” provinces, she told this newspaper.

They are also considering a third-party inspection of Chinese products, she added.

Md Kamruzzaman, deputy project director (Technical) of the Padma Bridge project, said their work is now

moving forward at 70 percent of the original speed and they would try to resume work in full swing within this month.

He said that the Chinese are training local people and have already brought robots for the works.

“We were not aware of the coronavirus outbreak even three months ago. This is some ‘act of God,’” he said.

Saying that they have a target to open the bridge for public in June 2021, he added, “Our target would not be deferred for now but we are suspecting that if catastrophe comes, the deadline may be deferred by a month or two.”

A total 25 of the 41 spans have already been installed and 14 have arrived in Bangladesh. Two are still under construction in China, he said.

Another project official said that these spans were supposed to come to Bangladesh in January but those are still under construction and they are not sure about when those would arrive.

“We have a plan to install the spans that have arrived in Bangladesh within June. But we have to wait for the two spans, as it would take around three months to assemble even after reaching Bangladesh,” he added, wishing anonymity.

“In that case, the deadline may be deferred by one or two months,” he said.

REMEDIES

Wang Kun said all of the Non-Hubei key staff members have returned to Bangladesh after their holiday had been shortened and those who are currently working in Bangladesh have been instructed not to avail any yearly holiday until further notice.

He also said weekends are being utilised to make up for the loss of time due to coronavirus and to make up for the insufficiency of Chinese workers, skilled local workers have been recruited.

He said the Bangladesh government also needs to take proper actions, such as opening of a green channel for visas of Chinese personnel related to major projects and expediting the customs procedure for importing project materials and equipment.

He, however, said that the impact caused by coronavirus on the progress of the rail link project is smaller than that done by slow land acquisition and resettlement.

At that, Golam Fakhruddin said that whenever Chinese contractors brought issues related to land, they tried to settle those quickly.

Bangladesh Railway is implementing the rail link project at a cost of Tk 39,246 crore to connect the capital to Jashore with a 169km double-track rail line over the under-construction Padma Bridge.

Bangladesh Bridge Authority is implementing the bridge project at a cost Tk 30,193 crore to connect Dhaka with 21 southern districts.

New gas field

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will start after a five-day experiment.

Currently, the gas pressure is 2,000 PSI, which is comparatively higher than other gas fields, he added.

BGB cannot shrug

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a BGB member, dead and subsequently forced the BGB authorities to “temporarily” withdraw a camp in the area yesterday.

The statement said no matter who had fired the shots, BGB was the custodian of all the firearms used in the killings, and therefore, could not avoid responsibility.

Expressing grave concern over the incident, the commission said the matter was very sensitive and should be subjected to a fair probe to find out whether the situation had warranted the use of firearms.

The NHRC demanded those responsible be brought to book and wrote to the home ministry to take steps following proper investigation.

At least five people, including a BGB member, were killed and several others injured in a clash between members of the paramilitary force and villagers over illegal logging at Gazinagar village under Khagrachhari’s Matiranga upazila on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, BGB claimed that it withdrew its camp on security grounds, reports our Khagrachhari correspondent.

“We have moved the Gazinagar BGB camp temporarily following directives from high officials”, said GHM Selim Hasan, sector commander of BGB in Guimara region.

However, the district’s Superintendent of Police (SP) Mohammad Abdul Aziz yesterday told The Daily Star that the BGB camp was moved away from the area following a protest by locals.

On Tuesday evening, hours after the violence, villagers staged demonstration and demanded withdrawal of the BGB camp from the area.

Meanwhile, bodies of the victims were handed over to their family yesterday morning after autopsies.

A funeral procession of the deceased was held at the Bothali field of the upazila around 11:30am.

In the procession, several public representatives urged local administration not to harass the villagers in the name of investigation.

Speaking at the function, they

claimed that the villagers didn’t attack BGB rather it was BGB men who opened fire over a trivial matter.

They also rejected the press release issued by the BGB and said there was no issue of smuggling timber in the area.

Meanwhile, a three-member probe committee, headed by additional district magistrate Khandoker Mohammad Rezaul Karim, started its investigation into the incident.

“We already visited the spot and spoke with the villagers and some eyewitnesses,” Karim said, adding that they were hoping to submit the report within next three days.

However, no case was filed in this connection till filing the report around 8:00pm last night, Shamsuddin Bhuiyan, officer-in-charge of Matiranga Police Station confirmed it to this newspaper.

Additional law enforcers have been deployed in the area to avert further untoward incident, said the district’s SP.

Local administration gave Tk 20,000 to the families of each victim to complete their funeral, said Bibhisan Kanti Das, upazila nirbahi officer of Matiranga.

Our Khagrachhari Correspondent contributed to this story.

Indonesia seizes half a million virus masks amid panic buying

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian police seized over half a million face masks from a Jakarta-area warehouse after the country’s first confirmed cases of coronavirus sparked panic buying and sent prices for prevention products skyrocketing.

Authorities were questioning two people after the Tuesday evening raid at a warehouse in satellite city Tangerang, where nearly 600,000 surgical masks were found.

The owners did not have permission to distribute the masks, police said.