

HC upholds BNP MP Harun's sentence

Questions raised whether he can stay a lawmaker

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The trial court rightly found BNP lawmaker Harunur Rashid guilty and sentenced him correctly in the case filed over evading tax while importing a car, said the High Court in the full text of a verdict.

It upheld the five years' jail sentence of Harunur, but said the sentence would be considered served.

"... From the discussion made above and on perusal of the evidence, deposition of the prosecution witnesses, and the cross-examination made by the convict appellants [Harunur, MP of Chapainawabganj-3, Enayetur Rahman Bappi, former managing director of NTV, and Ishtiaq Sadek, owner of Sky Autos], I am of the view that the prosecution has successfully proved the charge against the convict appellants.

"The learned special judge has rightly found them guilty under Section 409/109 of the Penal Code and correctly convicted and sentenced them which must be upheld," the bench of Justice Md Salim said in the judgement.

Following the HC verdict and observation, a controversy has aroused whether Harunur can hold the office of a lawmaker.

Five years' imprisonment of Harunur has been upheld by the HC and therefore, he cannot remain a lawmaker under article 66 (2) (d) of the constitution, ACC's lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star.

"A person shall be disqualified for election as, or for being, a member of parliament who has been, on conviction for a criminal offence involving moral turpitude, sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not less than two years, unless a period of five years has elapsed since his release," according to the article.

Meanwhile, Harunur's lawyer AM Mahub Uddin Khokon told this correspondent that there was no legal bar for his client to remain a lawmaker and to contest elections for the same post in future as he has already served 16 months.

"We will move an appeal before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court against the High Court verdict and seek his acquittal in the case," he added.

The HC bench said, "Nevertheless, the sentence of the convict appellants Harunur Rashid, Ishtiaq Sadek and Md Enayetur Rahman is treated to have been served out as they have faced prolonged trial in the trial court since 2007 and already served out a substantial part of the sentence."

On October 21, 2019, a Dhaka court sentenced Harunur to five years' imprisonment, Enayetur to two years' and Ishtiaq to three years' in the case filed by the ACC for tax evasion.



People wait in line to cast votes as a technical team staff plugs in an EVM inside a booth of the Safura Khatun Pilot Girls High School centre in Siddhirganj around 10:00am yesterday. This electronic voting machine was brought after the previous one went out of order. Inset, long queues of voters at Government Kadam Rasul College centre in Bandar area during NCC polls yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN/RASHED SHUMON

Covax delivers one billionth vaccine dose

70pc Indians fully vaccinated against Covid-19 as daily infections hit eight-month high

AGENCIES

The Covax scheme aimed at equitable global access to Covid-19 vaccines hit a "key milestone" Saturday when it delivered its one billionth dose, one of its key backers said.

The Covax facility was set up in 2020 by the World Health Organization, Gavi the Vaccine Alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations to ensure that poorer countries can access the vaccines needed to battle the pandemic.

"Covax has delivered its first billionth dose of Covid-19 vaccines to 144 countries & territories across the world," Gavi chief executive Seth Berkley tweeted.

"It's a key milestone in the largest and most rapid global vaccine rollout in history."

All countries have been permitted to order doses through the mechanism, but lower-income

countries have received the jabs free of charge.

But while reaching that one-billion milestone is impressive, Covax has fallen far short of its initial objective of delivering two billion doses by the end of 2021.

That is because it has been forced to compete with rich countries willing to pay a high price and hoarding doses.

In a speech on Thursday, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus pointed out that while more than 9.4 billion vaccine doses had been administered around the world, more than 85 percent of people in Africa have yet to receive a single dose.

Health experts warn that allowing Covid to spread unabated in some places dramatically increases the chance of new, more dangerous variants emerging.

WHO said late last month that nearly half of its 194 member states

had missed its target of vaccinating 40 percent of their population by the end of 2021.

It has called for a redoubling of efforts to ensure all countries manage to hit its second target, of vaccinating 70 percent of their populations, by mid-2022.

India yesterday reported 271,202 new cases of the novel coronavirus in the last 24 hours, its highest daily count in eight months, taking its total tally to 37.12 million, the federal health ministry said.

Deaths from Covid-19 rose by 314 to 486,066, the ministry said.

According to the Health Ministry, over 93 per cent of the adult population have received at least one dose while over 69.8 percent have been fully vaccinated. The drive was rolled out on January 16 last year with healthcare workers getting inoculated in the first phase. Vaccination of frontline workers started from February 2.

Fingerprint hassles

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could not even be registered in the machines as their skin was either damaged or they did not have prints.

In some centres, voting was delayed due to glitches in EVMs, which were later fixed by the Election Commission's technical teams.

However, many voters were satisfied after voting with EVMs for the first time, saying they found it easy and quick.

This was the first time the entire voting process for the NCC polls was done through EVMs. Earlier, the machine was used in some areas on a trial basis.

Mangali Rani Sarkar, 90, cast her vote at Paschim Deobhog School centre around 9:30am.

"It's easier to vote with EVMs compared to stuffing ballots. It takes less time."

Champa Begum, 87, took some help from others to cast her vote at the MW High School centre.

After her fingerprint failed to match three times in a row, polls officials asked the agents there if she should be allowed to cast her vote.

She was finally able to vote as her fingerprint finally matched after agents allowed her to try again.

"It was a little troublesome but she was eager to vote," said her granddaughter Lavli.

Md Mahbubur Rahman, presiding officer of no-77 Bibi Mariam Girls' High School centre, said if a fingerprint is not found for any reason, then the assistant presiding officer will check if pictures, date of birth and other factors match.

"If the other details match, then the assistant presiding officer may allow the person to cast the vote and the officer will complete the process."

At a Sonakanda Beparipara Govt Primary School polling booth, the queue of voters kept getting longer at one point as a senior citizen had trouble voting due to lack of experience with EVMs.

In the Bandar Girls' High School centre, a woman had left as her fingerprint did not match after repeated attempts.

She was later called back in by a polling agent who wiped her finger and helped her complete casting her vote.

Rafiqul Islam, presiding officer at the Government Kadam Rasul College centre, said voters were

lined up even after voting time was up at 4:00pm.

"The delay was caused mainly due to mismatching of fingerprints and people's inexperience with EVMs."

Like him, Sohail Rayhan, presiding officer at No-48 Ekramuzzaman Government Primary School, also allowed voting to continue after the scheduled deadline due to such technical delays.

Voting at Safura Khatun High School under Ward-6 was suspended for around 20 minutes as the EVM went out of order.

Polling Officer Munira Akhter said as many people had to make numerous attempts to match their fingerprints, the EVM had stopped working at one point.

Abdul Awal, presiding officer, said the problem was solved after the machine was replaced.

The centre at Rehati Mohon Pilot School and College faced similar problems.

Nasirul Islam, presiding officer at Kindercare School centre, said, "The problem we face with mismatched fingerprints would not occur if we would register the iris of the eye instead for voting."

IVY wins again

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Violation of the health safety rules was rampant, raising a risk of rise in Covid infection.

After the unofficial results were announced, Ivy thanked all voters for trusting her again.

"I want to work tirelessly for the people of Narayanganj for the next five years. I want to dedicate even the last day of my life for the people, overcoming all odds," she told reporters.

In his reaction, Taimur, a former top BNP leader, said he lost the polls "because of rigging by the administration and EVM manipulation".

"I did not lose the election ... it's a defeat for the government. We have won people's love ... we are grateful to them as well as the media," he said at a post-election press conference.

"You [journalists] have seen the election. I gave you every update. Our Siddhirganj election coordinator was arrested. Following his arrest, many of my other workers started getting arrested as well."

Braving the morning chills, people started to line up at the polling centres even before the voting opened at 8:00am. As the day wore on, the queues grew longer.

Female voters made up a significant portion of the crowd.

"Although it was difficult for me to go to the second floor, I was able to cast my vote. I am happy that I've voted," Chandraban Begum, a woman with physical disabilities, told The Daily Star at a centre in

Morgan Girls High School and College in the city.

Dipali Rani Sarkar, a voter who went to the Narayanganj Government Girls' College centre, had a different experience.

"I was not familiar with the EVM. I made a mistake while casting my vote for the mayor post," said the woman in her late 40s.

After visiting several polling centres, RO Mahfuza Akhter said, "We saw a good number of ballots being cast in the first four hours. The turnout is also very good."

She, however, said there were glitches in EVMs in some centres which slowed down the voting. Those were fixed quickly by technical teams from the Election Commission, she said.

"The election atmosphere is festive and peaceful," said the RO.

The NCC polls have been at the heart of discussion in the country's political arena. The voting was watched closely as it was a test for the current EC, which expires its tenure next month.

Election experts said the EC, widely criticised for its failure to hold fair polls in the past, has something to cheer because of the peaceful election yesterday. Visiting polling centres yesterday afternoon, Election Commission Mahub Talukdar said, "Of all the elections held in the last five years during our tenure, Narayanganj City Corporation has been one of the best."

After the voting ended, EC Secretary Humayun Kabir Khandkar last night

said, "The election was free, fair and peaceful."

Earlier in the day, Ivy cast her vote at the Shishubagh School centre in Paschim Deobhog around 11:00am. Later, she expressed her optimism about winning.

The BNP boycotted the polls, but Taimur joined it anyway. For violating party discipline, he, however, was removed from the post of its chairperson's adviser. He cast his vote at Narayanganj Islamia Kamil Madrasa Centre in Masdar around 8:30am.

"If a free and fair election is held, I am hopeful of winning the polls by a margin of one lakh votes," he said while speaking to reporters there.

Ruling AL lawmaker Shamim Osman, who has a longstanding rivalry with Ivy, voted at Adarsha School centre around 3:35pm.

Terminating the election "peaceful", he said, "I have campaigned for 'boat' [electoral symbol of AL]. My heart bled, but I am a soldier of Sheikh Hasina. 'Boat' will win by a big margin."

Upgraded from the municipality to a city corporation, NCC went to the polls for the first time in 2011. Ivy clinched the mayor post by beating the then ruling AL-backed candidate Shamim by more than one lakh votes.

In the next election in 2016, she defeated BNP-backed aspirant Shakhawat Hossain and became the mayor for the second consecutive time.

[Wasim Bin Habib and Mohammad Al-Masum Molla contributed to this report]

HC allows Evaly to withdraw Tk 2.35cr

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday allowed the controversial e-commerce platform Evaly to withdraw Tk 2.35 crore from its accounts with Southeast Bank and City Bank for running the company, including paying remuneration for the board formed by the court.

The company can also sell or rent 22 cars to meet expenses.

The court also asked the Bangladesh Bank and the National Board of Revenue to give details of the wealth of Evaly, including the expenses made by its incarcerated Chief Executive Officer Mohammad Rassel and Chairperson Shamima Nasrin.

At the same time, the HC ordered the inspector general of police to deploy law enforcers at the Evaly office in the capital's Dhanmondi area to ensure the security of its officials and staff members and its creditors who flock to the venue to retrieve their money.

The order was passed by Justice Muhamad Khurshid Alam Sarkar after holding the hearing on an application submitted by lawyer Morshed Ahmed Khan on behalf of the board of directors of Evaly seeking necessary directives, Sayed Mahsib Hossain, the lawyer for an aggrieved customer named Md Farhad Hossain, told The Daily Star.

BOOSTER DOSE AT NICVD Elderly suffer for mismanagement

MOUDDUD AHMED SUJAN

Hundreds of senior citizens suffered due to the mismanagement in administering Covid-19 booster shots at the National Institute of Cardiovascular Disease Institute and Hospital in Dhaka yesterday.

Visiting the hospital yesterday, this correspondent saw several elderly people standing in a long queue in front of the only booth for booster shots there.

"It is inhumane to make senior citizens stand in line for hours. This is cruelty to those who are physically disabled, and at least 20 percent of the people waiting are [disabled]," said Mohammad Ahsan Ullah, a 68-year-old physician, who came to the NICVD for his booster shot.

In his view, there were three other examples of mismanagement, including no signboard or placard indicating where the booster doses are available; no seating arrangement for the disabled; no separate lines for men and women, etc.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Hosne Ara, a 60-year-old kidney dialysis patient, said, "I am having to brace my hand against the wall for support as I have been standing in line for two hours."

Asked, Dr Shamsul Haque, a line director and member of the covid vaccine deployment committee at the health directorate, told The Daily Star, "The booster dose has been recently introduced while the regular campaign is also going on. So, there will be some issues, but we are trying to resolve them."

President's talks end

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proposals they made in the previous two dialogues in 2012 and 2016 was materialised or evaluated.

As a result, there is no meaning to attend in the same dialogue that will not yield any result, they said.

In the dialogue, most of the political parties proposed Abdul Hamid for taking measures to enact a law on the formation of the EC for holding a free and fair national election.

Quoting Abdul Hamid, several political parties told media that the president told them that he would try to look into the matter although he had limited power in this regard as per the constitution.

Talking to The Daily Star, Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Dr Iltekkharuzzaman said the importance of the dialogue lies in its value as an initiative by the highest office of the state, and ideally all parties would have done well to their political cause if they participated and communicated their expectations for whatever worth.

"On the other hand, in terms of its possible substantive outcome, there have always been doubts and debates. It was clear from the beginning that the aspirations of a truly neutral, capable and credible EC remained a far cry as ministers have been continually ruling out the possibility of enacting the constitutionally mandated law needed for the purpose," he added.

Dr Akbar Ali Khan, a noted economist and a former adviser to the

caretaker government, recently commented that the formation of a search committee would yield no good results as the EC would be constituted with the persons picked by the government.

As per the constitution, the EC should be formed under law, but this law has not been enacted yet in Bangladesh.

The new EC will have to arrange the 12th national election between November 2023 and January 2024.

As a result, issues such as under whom the next election is taking place, how the commission will be formed have become important to different political parties.

The two previous ECs were formed mainly with the people by the choice of the Awami League and its allies, according to many political parties.

It is believed that it will be no exception this time.

As a result, the dialogue with the president is nothing more than a formality, commented different political parties.

The tenure of the current EC, led by KM Nurul Huda, will expire on February 14. President Abdul Hamid is likely to form a search committee within a day or two after wrapping up his dialogue.

The search committee will seek the names of eligible candidates from the political parties. Then they will give a shortlist of those names to the President.

From that list, the president will appoint the Chief Election Commissioner and other commissioners.

Omicron spreading

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Some 5,222 new cases were reported in the 24 hours to 8 am yesterday -- the highest in six months -- and about 77 percent of the cases were in the Dhaka metropolitan area.

According to the division-wise list of the DGHS, the Dhaka division

had a 14 percent bed occupancy rate in Covid-19 hospitals yesterday, while it was 13 percent in Chattogram.

Meanwhile, 22 more Omicron cases have been reported in the country, raising the total number of cases to 55.

Female voters made up a significant portion of the crowd.

"Although it was difficult for me to go to the second floor, I was able to cast my vote. I am happy that I've voted," Chandraban Begum, a woman with physical disabilities, told The Daily Star at a centre in