

Whip allowed to go abroad: HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday granted Jatiya Sangsad Whip Shamsul Haque Chowdhury the permission to go abroad, even though a lower court had earlier banned him from traveling outside the country.

In June last year, a Dhaka court issued a travel ban on the ruling Awami League lawmaker because the ACC was investigating him for money-laundering.

The HC stayed the order for a period of six months.

It also issued a rule asking the ACC to explain in four weeks why the lower court's order should not be declared illegal.

The HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman passed the order and rule following a writ petition filed by Shamsul Haque Chowdhury challenging the travel ban.

Shamsul's lawyer Mustafizur Rahman Khan told The Daily Star that there is no case filed against his client, but a Dhaka court on June 21 imposed a travel ban on him citing an enquiry into corruption allegations against him.

Terming the ban illegal, he added, the JS whip can go to any foreign country for any necessary purpose following the HC order.

Shamsul's name came up during the ACC's probe into illegal casinos in the city in 2019. The AL MP, who represents Chattogram-12, is also the general secretary of Chattogram Abahani club.

Judge KM Emrul Kayesh of Dhaka's Senior Special Court had passed the travel ban order last year after ACC Director Syed Iqbal Hossain, who is also head of the enquiry team, submitted an application on June 13, seeking a ban on him and several others from travelling abroad.

PK HALDER LOAN SCAM

ACC summons 4 BB officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission has summoned four officials of Bangladesh Bank's financial institutions inspection division for questioning over Proshanto Kumar Halder's loan scam.

They are: Bangladesh Bank's Joint Directors Mohammad Ferdous Kabir and ABM Mobarak Hossain, Deputy Director Hamdul Alam, and Assistant Director Kader Ali.

In a letter signed by ACC Deputy Director Gulshan Anowar Prodhan, the officials were asked to appear at the ACC's Segunbagicha headquarters on January 24.



Students wearing masks come out of Government Mohammadpur Model School and College in the capital yesterday. The school authorities have put up warning signs at the gate to make students aware of the serious nature of the coronavirus transmission. A message reads -- "No mask, no school".

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Vaccinate whole world to end pandemic

UN chief tells Davos; China orders overseas mail disinfection over Omicron fears; Australia suffers deadliest day of pandemic

AGENCIES

UN chief Antonio Guterres told the all-virtual Davos forum that the world must vaccinate everybody against Covid-19 to ensure a way out of the pandemic.

"The last two years have demonstrated a simple but brutal truth -- if we leave anyone behind, we leave everyone behind," he said on Monday.

"If we fail to vaccinate every person, we give rise to new variants that spread across borders and bring daily life and economies to a grinding halt."

Guterres said the international community needs to "confront the pandemic with equity and fairness."

He noted that the World Health Organization unveiled a strategy last autumn to vaccinate 40 percent of the planet's population by the end of 2021 and 70 per cent by the middle of this year.

"We are nowhere near these targets," Guterres told the World Economic Forum.

"Vaccination rates in high-income countries are, shamefully, seven times

higher than in African countries. We need vaccine equity, now," he added.

Guterres said pharmaceutical companies should "stand in solidarity with developing countries by sharing licenses, know-how and technology so we can all find a way out of this pandemic."

The coronavirus has killed at least 5,565,745 people worldwide since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources yesterday.

China's postal service has ordered workers to disinfect international deliveries and urged the public to reduce orders from overseas after authorities claimed mail could be the source of recent outbreaks.

Multiple small outbreaks in recent weeks -- including in Beijing -- have tested China's strict policy of targeting zero Covid cases, which authorities have pursued even as the rest of the world has gradually reopened.

Australia suffered its deadliest day of the pandemic yesterday as a fast-moving Omicron outbreak continued to push up hospitalisation rates to record levels, even as daily infections

ceased slightly. A total of 77 deaths was recorded, exceeding the previous national high of 57 last Thursday, official data showed.

Japan's new Covid-19 cases jumped to a record yesterday, local media reported, as the government considered expanding measures to contain the infectious Omicron coronavirus variant.

The mayor of Moscow said he was extending Covid-19 home-working rules and guidance to protect elderly people until April 1 as the city braces for a sharp rise in infections with the Omicron variant.

A senior health official in Israel, meanwhile, said the country will continue to offer a fourth Covid-19 vaccine shot despite preliminary findings that it is not enough to prevent Omicron infections, predicting contagions stoked by the variant will wane in a week.

The fastest country to roll out vaccinations a year ago, Israel last month started offering a fourth shot -- also known as a second booster -- to its most vulnerable and high-risk groups. It has held off on expanding the offer to the wider population.

Don't abuse power

President to DCs

UNB, DHAKA

President Abdul Hamid yesterday asked the deputy commissioners not to abuse power while discharging their duties.

The exercise of power is essential to discharge responsibilities properly and efficiently, but it is even more important to ensure that power is not abused, he said while virtually addressing the DC Conference at Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

Hamid reminded the officials of the great leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the creation of an independent Bangladesh.

"We should not forget that since the country became independent under the leadership of Bangabandhu, today I have become the president, you have become the secretary, divisional commissioner or deputy commissioner," he told the conference.

Stating that getting services is the right of the people, he said, "You will have to perform duties as servants of the people."

"Deliver government services to the doorstep of the people. It should be remembered that we run our families with people's money. So, providing government services is not a matter of kindness or benevolence."

He also told the officials, "You have to come up with effective leadership to meet the basic needs of poor people of the country, and ensure social protection and public empowerment of the people, especially women empowerment."

He said land records and survey management was being digitised to ensure the best use of land and land-related services. "But during land records, a group of dishonest employees is doing irregularities in collaboration with locally influential brokers taking illegal facilities. It is increasing public sufferings."

Prof Tajmeri gets bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Prof Tajmeri SA Islam, an adviser to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, was granted bail yesterday in a case filed over obstructing police in performing duties during a rally in Uttara in 2018.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mahbub Ahmed passed the order after a bail petition was filed by her lawyer Masud Ahmed Talukder, court sources said.

The court granted her bail, taking her age, health complications, and reputation as a former Dhaka University teacher into consideration, the sources said.

On January 13, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Arafatul Rakib sent Prof Tajmeri to jail after scrapping her bail plea.

The case was filed with Uttara Paschim Police Station on September 10, 2018, accusing Prof Tajmeri and 133 leaders and activists of BNP and Jamaat-e-Islam of obstructing police and carrying out sabotage in Uttara during a rally to free Khaleda from jail.

Police arrested her on January 13.

Painting a river black

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nowhere near the standard level," he told The Daily Star.

Prof Kamruzzaman Majumder of Department of Environmental Science at Stamford University said every parameter of the river water, including COD, TSS, pH, grease and oil, nitrogen and phenol, was found to be well above the standard levels and this may pose a serious threat to human health.

Around 80 to 100 factories release an estimated 60,000 cubic metres of effluents per second into the river partly due to their incapacity and negligence, according to a DoE report released in 2015.

Visiting a stretch of the river from Doleshwar Ghat area to Fire Service Ghat of Shyampur yesterday, this correspondent found factory effluents flowing into the river right under the steps at Doleshwar Ghat.

There was a foul smell in the area which could make anyone feel almost suffocated. The colour of the river water was pinkish in some areas.

Hanif Sharif, senior executive member of BAPA and also an organiser of Buriganga Nodi Morcha, said many who came in contact with the water developed skin diseases.

Underground pipes through which effluents are being released must be snapped, he said, adding that there are around 65 such pipes in Shyampur-Kodomtoli area.

Sharif Jamil of BAPA said as the garment sector is the country's economic backbone, shutting down dyeing factories will not be a solution to this problem.

"The government must ensure that there are cluster ETPs to treat effluents. It must introduce colorogen technology which doesn't emit any effluent for dyeing clothes. Otherwise, the factories will remain as a big hurdle to decontaminate the river water," he observed.

Advocate Manzill Morshed, who filed a writ with the HC in 2015 to stop pollution by dyeing factories, said the court ordered the DoE to snap gas and power links to those factories which didn't have ETP and shut down the underground pipes.

DoE Director (monitoring and enforcement) Mohammad Masud Hasan Patwary said his department last year disconnected power and gas lines to factories without ETP.

He said the court later ordered them to restore the connections as factory owners submitted compliance reports.

The official said they conduct compliance drives on a regular basis.

"We have shut down six dyeing factories and a re-rolling mills in Shyampur. The problem is when we conduct a drive at one factory, the others close theirs. Some factory owners don't run the ETP at times and we know it. We don't have enough manpower to monitor them round the clock," he said.

Azizul Haque, general secretary of Shyampur Dyeing Factory Association, did not receive calls from this correspondent for comments.

However, Mehedi Mokammel, office secretary of the association, claimed they keep ETPs running.

Scrap unnecessary projects

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representatives make to the people."

She also asked the DCs to take and implement projects in coordination with the public representatives.

Hasina directed the commissioners to take stringent measures to protect government lands, rivers, forests, hills and natural waterbodies.

"Give emphasis on vertical extension in case of constructing new government buildings to ensure maximum use of land, and planned urbanisation and forestation," she said.

The PM asked the DCs to take a tougher stance against religious fanaticism and militancy to maintain communal harmony.

About drives against narcotics, she told them to continue the "zero-tolerance" policy against drugs to create a society free from the menace of drugs.

She also instructed them to strengthen market monitoring to ensure a smooth supply of products in the markets, prevent artificial crises, and keep

prices normal.

Hasina then asked them to take initiatives to coordinate work of government offices in all districts accordingly to ensure Bangladesh's spot on the list of developed countries by 2041.

The conference began on a limited scale due to the fresh surge in Covid-19 cases. It was held at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the presence of 15 ministers and secretaries.

Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque, Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam and the PM's Principal Secretary Dr Ahmad Kaikaus addressed the conference.

Divisional Commissioner of Khulna Ismail Hossain, Deputy Commissioners of Chandpur and Rangpur Anjana Khan Majlish and Asif Ahsan spoke on behalf of the divisional commissioners and DCs.

MEET WITH MINISTERS
At the inaugural session, DCs met with the ministers of the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs and Planning Ministry and top officials of the Finance Division,

Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division and Economic Relations Division.

Planning Minister MA Mannan, after the meeting, said the DCs proposed forming committees at the district level to supervise project implementations.

"We told them that there was no need for it [separate committee]. They have the right to look after work in their respective areas. We told them we will maintain regular communications with them and also to carry out their job accordingly."

Mashiur Rahman, PM's adviser on economic affairs, said the DCs will be involved in overseeing projects implementations if it is necessary.

"Mega projects are carried out in several districts. Therefore, it is difficult to form committees."

Another proposal by the DCs was to erect multi-storied buildings under the Ashrayan Project -- which the PM office rejected.

The DCs also proposed their representation in the selection committee

during the appointment of principals and headmasters at private schools and colleges, ensuring transparency in the work of the institutions' managing committees, and forming coordination committees for secondary education at the upazila level.

After meeting them, Education Minister Dipu Moni told journalists that they are considering the proposals.

About in-person classes during the spread of the Omicron variant, she said, "The situation to shut educational institutions has not yet been created in the country."

She added that students will join online classes if Omicron spreads in educational institutions and the priority now is on vaccinating all students between 12 and 17 years.

"Until Monday, 86 lakh students have been brought under the vaccination campaign."

On the second day of the conference today, six sessions will be held with 13 ministries.

various infrastructure facilities to serve passengers better.

He said Biman has an agreement with Sabre solutions under which its passengers, from February or March, would be able to avail different services, including check-in from home.

Mostafa said, "Despite our limitations, we are sincerely trying to serve our valued passengers properly and we are committed to gaining customers' confidence."

'No more talks on Ukraine'

AFP, Moscow

Moscow yesterday rejected new talks on Ukraine unless the West responds to its demands, as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken prepared to fly to Kyiv in a show of support amid fears of a Russian invasion.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday said that there would be no further negotiations until the West gives it proper answers.

Bumpy all along

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poor service, mismanagement, improper planning and marketing policy, and absence of professionals, he said.

He said over the 50 years, Biman could not directly recruit 50 professionals due to government interference. "Lack of experts and professionals left Biman in a nosedive and its world is gradually shrinking," he added.

A senior pilot, also a leader of Bangladesh Airlines' Pilot Association (Bapa), said it was unfortunate that Biman could not make a proper fleet plan to optimally use its modern aircraft.

For example, he said, "Biman is using Boeing 787-8s, a remarkable long-haul aircraft, on short-haul routes, including Dhaka-Singapore and Dhaka-Malaysia, which is nothing but bad planning."

He said the Boeing 787-8s can fly 14 to 15 hours at a stretch and is best suited for distant cities like New York, Toronto, or Tokyo.

Talking to The Daily Star, chairman, Biman Board of Directors, Sajjadul Hassan admitted that Biman could not achieve its target in the last 50 years.

"Passenger service

quality did not reach the desired level due to various reasons," he added.

Speaking at a programme at the Biman's headquarters in Kurmitola in late November, he even said Biman's quality of service remains the same as before.

Former MD and CEO of Biman, MA Momen said there was no reason for Biman's inability to serve properly and survive in the market.

Biman MD and CEO Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal said manpower shortage was the reason for Biman not flying to new destinations and serving passengers properly. He mentioned a shortage of pilots and cabin crew members.

Acknowledging passengers' allegations on the poor quality of service, he said, "Despite our limitations, we are sincerely trying to serve our valued passengers properly ..."

Biman started its commercial operations on February 4, 1972, with a single DC-3 aircraft.

It now has 21 aircraft -- four Boeing 777-300 ERs, four Boeing 787-8s, two Boeing 787-9s, six Boeing 737-800, and five De Havilland Canada DHC-8 Q400.