

No legal bar to continuing Kajol's trial

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday rejected three petitions seeking cancellation of charges framed against photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol by a tribunal in three cases filed under the Digital Security Act.

The bench of Justice ASM Abdul Mobin and Justice Mohi Uddin Shamim issued the rejection order because the petitions were not presented properly, Deputy Attorney General Sujit Chatterjee told The Daily Star.

There is no longer any legal bar for the tribunal concerned to continue the trial proceedings, he added.

Kajol's lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua told this correspondent that he will move three separate appeals before the HC so that he can place arguments in detail against the tribunal's illegal charge framing order in the false cases.

A Dhaka tribunal on November 8 last year framed charges against Kajol in the three cases.

Awami League lawmaker from Magura-1 Saifuzzaman Shikhor, Jubo Mahila League central committee members Usmin Ara Belly and Sumaiya Chowdhury Bonya filed three cases with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Hazaribagh and Kamrangirchar police stations under the DSA on March 9, 10 and 11 in 2020.

Sub-inspector Mohammad Russell Mollah of Detective Branch of police pressed charges in the cases to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka on February 4, March 14 and April 8 last year.

Kajol was charged with circulating indecent, defamatory, objectionable, and fake information about several ministers, lawmakers, and top Jubo Mahila League leaders on Facebook.

Kajol went missing on March 10, 2020. Officials said the Border Guard Bangladesh found him roaming around the Benapole border area on May 3 the same year and detained him. He was then sent to jail by a Jashore court.

He was later shown on documents as arrested in the three cases filed under the DSA.

The lower court denied him bail for seven months until the High Court on November 24, 2020, granted him bail in one of the cases. The HC on December 17, 2020, granted him bail in two other cases after Kajol's lawyer argued that probes had to be completed within 75 days of filing of the cases, and the investigators failed to do so.

The photojournalist walked out of jail on bail on December 25, 2020.



Firefighters dousing a blaze that broke out in a Nilkhet book market in the capital yesterday. It took them one and a half hours to bring the fire under control.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Criminal cases to be filed for zebra deaths

Probe finds Gazipur safari park staffers tore open bellies of 3 of the dead animals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ministry of environment, forest and climate change yesterday decided to lodge criminal cases against those involved with the death of 11 zebras at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Safari Park in recent weeks.

The development comes after the probe committee formed by the ministry on January 26 following the deaths of the animals submitted its 18-page report on Sunday.

The probe found the employees of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Safari Park tore open the bellies of three dead zebras with a sharp weapon to pass off their death to injury.

As many as eight zebras died in the safari park last month, but the park officials tried to conceal the matter from Mostafa Kamal, the secretary of the ministry, when he called in on January 22.

"So it shows that they were trying to hide the incidents of death of zebras,"

the report said, while calling for further investigation on the matter.

The probe committee also found negligence in duty on the part of the in-charge of the safari park as he did not form any medical board

when the zebras started dying towards the end of December last year though he is empowered to do that if necessary.

Also at the meeting yesterday, it was decided that departmental cases will be filed against the officials responsible for the death of animals.

The meeting also decided to implement all recommendations made by the probe committee in phases.

To improve the operation quality and protect the animals from unnatural deaths, the probe committee gave 24 recommendations: 11 are to be implemented in the short-term, four in the mid-term and nine in the long-term.

Earlier, the probe committee members said the 11 zebras died from nitrate poisoning.



Hike prices and get slapped with cases

DNCRP warns essentials traders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Directorate of National Consumers Right Protection (DNCRP) will file cases against retailers found selling essentials at an inflated price ahead of Ramadan, as the government looks to rein in prices from spiralling out of the means for the poor and the fixed-income people.

"If someone sells goods at a price of their own will, we will file a case against him. Fines will also be imposed. The shop will be sealed," said Monjur Mohammad Shariar, director (additional charge) for admin and finance at DNCRP, after a meeting yesterday with representatives of wholesale markets.

Instructions were given to businesspeople in view of the recent increase in prices of essential commodities and Ramadan.

SANCTIONS ON RAB

Decision to lodge case in US court expected this week

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh could decide this week to lodge a case with a US court to fight that country's sanctions against Rab and seven of its current and former officials.

"We are very close to a decision to appoint a representative for speaking and fighting legally on our behalf," State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam told reporters at the foreign ministry yesterday.

He said the government spoke with three law firms and is expected to take a decision this week.

Shahriar said Dhaka will make both legal and diplomatic efforts to have the sanctions – imposed in December last year over Rab's alleged human rights violations – withdrawn.

Slain Mitu's father objects PBI's final report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Father of Mahmuda Khanam Mitu, also father-in-law of former SP Babul Akter, yesterday filed a no-confidence petition with a Chattogram court on the PBI's final report in the Mitu murder case.

Mosharraf Hossain lodged the petition with the court of Chattogram's Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Abdul Halim, which has fixed March 6 for a hearing.

He told The Daily Star, "PBI submitted its final reports on the case I filed without any discussion with me. Also, the new investigation officer didn't even record the statement of Babul's children, who are eyewitnesses in the case... I filed the objection seeking further investigation in my case."

Former SP Babul Akter, plaintiff in a murder case over the killing of his wife Mitu in 2016, has been behind bars after being arrested in the case filed by Mosharraf.

Under-12s will get vaccine if WHO recommends

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday said the government will vaccinate children under 12 if WHO recommends.

"They [primary school students] will also return to school. As teachers and other staffers have already been inoculated, there will be no problem," he told journalists at Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons in Dhaka on Saturday while talking about the upcoming countrywide special Covid-19 first dose vaccine campaign.

There will be 16,000 vaccine centers in rural areas and 8,500 in the urban areas and more than 70,000 vaccinators and volunteers for the one-day special campaign. No one will require any document or prior registration.

"After this, the activities to give second and the booster dose will be strengthened," he said.

Meanwhile, the health directorate has reported 1,595 new cases and 16 deaths in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

Rights worker

FROM PAGE 1

The commission then set March 8 to pass further orders.

Along with Mortuza Ahmed, Information Commissioners Abdul Malek and Suraiya Begum conducted the hearing.

Shamsul Bari, chairman, and Ruhil Naz, RTI coordinator, of the Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB) wrote in The Daily Star last week that "information-seekers find themselves in a quandary when the Information Commission itself concurs with the denial of information by the authorities concerned."

They added that exemptions like Section 7(f) "recognise the need for balance between citizens' rights to monitor the work of the government and, at the same time, the legitimate right of the government to undertake measures to protect public interest."

"Since the Information Commission's decisions are final and cannot be challenged in the courts, except in regard to the law's application, the matter normally ends there."

Riot police clash with NZ anti-vax protesters

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand anti-vaccine protesters pelted police with a "stinging substance" sending three to hospital with injuries yesterday, as tensions spilled over in an angry weeks-long protest.

Metro in return for stake in a 'smart city'

FROM PAGE 1

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has long been thinking about reclaiming land from the sea, he added.

Mosharraf said the Chinese firm will reclaim the land, build the smart city on it, and build the metro. In exchange, Bangladesh will give it a part of the land.

"It's a very good proposal and Bangladesh will surely benefit."

Mosharraf said the standing committee has recommended in favour of the proposal and asked the ministry concerned to send the proposal to the prime minister.

"I will write to the prime

minister, requesting her to accept the proposal."

The Chinese firm will reclaim the land, build the smart city on it, and build the metro. In

He added it is yet to be decided which country would get what percentage of the land.

CDA Chairman M Jahirul Alam Dovas said the Bangladeshi company has not been selected yet.

"We just forwarded the proposal to the ministry for its decision," he told The Daily Star last night.

EXPERT'S WARY

Prof Anu Muhammad said whenever there is a proposal for a public-private partnership project, people only hear

good things about it.

"But the general public face problems later and they suffer. People do not have access to the documents of those projects and do not know the facts," he said.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said, "Taking control of our land, permanently or on lease, cannot be a good thing for us. It is a matter of land ownership and sovereignty of the country."

"Reclaiming land and making a satellite city is in their business interest, not ours. It is also necessary to check whether the project will be aligned

with our own development plans. Also, the past work experience of the Chinese company should be checked beforehand.

"The metro project raises the question of land acquisition and our own development plans for the area. I am not saying we will not reclaim land to build a satellite city. But if there is a question of control over land by a foreign company, it must be scrutinised twice."

The development comes two weeks after Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said the government will begin a feasibility study for a metro in Chattogram with South Korea grants.

EC search committee finalises 10 names

FROM PAGE 1

there is any female member on the proposed list.

Meeting sources said ex-bureaucrats, ex-army officials, former judges, university teachers and social workers make up the final nominations.

A source in the committee said they proposed two names for the post of CEC who do not have experience of serving in the bureaucracy.

The names discussed for the next EC are former cabinet secretary Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, former cabinet secretary Mohammad Shafiqul Alam, former secretary Habibur Awal,

ex-army chief Iqbal Karim Bhuiyan, former secretary Ujjwal Bikash Dutta, justice (ret'd) Nazmun Ara Sultana, former Dhaka University VC AAMS Arefin Siddique, DU teacher Sadaka Halim, local government expert Tofail Ahmed, President of Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA) Munira Khan, Economist Mansur Ahmed and former principal secretary Abdul Karim.

The Daily Star, however, could not independently verify the names.

The search committee asked political parties, professional bodies and individuals to submit their nominations. In response, it got 322 names.

The committee held meetings with eminent citizens, media personalities, university teachers and election experts to know their views and suggestions over the EC formation.

Following their recommendations, the committee published all the 322 names, but it did not publish the names of the final nominations.

Meeting sources said revealing the names before sending them to the president would be "discourteous", and some quarters may also create controversy over it.

The BNP and some other opposition parties did not propose any names,

citing no confidence in the search committee.

The previous two search committees, formed in 2012 and 2017, did not disclose proposed names despite demands from political parties.

On February 5, the six-member search committee was formed under the "Appointments of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act-2022".

As per the EC law, the committee will propose 10 names – two names against each post – to the president who will then appoint the CEC and four other ECs.

Sixth brother

FROM PAGE 1

Sumana Sharna had been losing and regaining sense since being told of her husband's death. Whenever she came to, Sumana began weeping weakly, broken by the 15-day torment of Raktim slowly but surely losing the battle for life at CMCH.

"I could not sleep for a moment in the past 15 days. Whenever my eyes closed, I dreamed that doctors had called me to inform that my husband regained consciousness," said Sumana.

"What will happen to my son? How will I live now? Where shall we go?" she asked hopelessly.

Raktim's brother-in-law Anupam Sharma said Riddhi, the deceased's four-year-old son, had been asking for his father for the past few days. The family members had told the child that his father was sleeping and would bring him chocolates when he woke up.

"What do we tell him now?"

Raktim's mother, Manu Rani Shil, was speechless after hearing the news of the death of her sixth son within the span of a fortnight.

Raktim was admitted to CMCH unconscious and did not regain consciousness, said Prof Dr Noman Khaled Chowdhury, head of neurosurgery at CMCH.

"He had brain haemorrhage and multiple fractures in his body," he

said. Prof Dr Ranjan Kumar Nath, head of ICU, said they formed a medical board and tried to deliver the best treatment but could not save him.

Raktim, along with his six brothers and two sisters, were walking back home after taking part in funeral rituals for their father when a pickup truck hit the seven brothers and one of the sisters.

Five brothers died that day while Raktim and his brother Plabon were admitted to the hospital in a critical condition. Their sister Hira Shil was also injured, but recovered later.

Plabon was released from CMCH on February 13 and filed a case with Chakaria Police Station.

Locals rushed to the house of Raktim at Chakaria hearing the death news.

Local UP Chairman Hasanul Islam Ador also rushed there to console the bereaved family.

BD-Afg first

FROM PAGE 12

the return to international cricket for Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal, who endured a lengthy layoff before making a return to cricket through the BPL recently.

Bangladesh have a 5-3 win-loss record against Afghanistan, with the most recent meeting ending in a 62-run victory for the Tigers during the 2019 World Cup in England.