

Teardrops on ashes of books

Nilkhet book traders suffer loss in Tuesday's fire

MUNTAKIM SAAD

The shopkeepers of the Nilkhet book market that caught fire in the capital on Tuesday are in a miserable state after losing their businesses to the blaze.

One such shopkeeper Billal Hossain, owner of Dewan Store, was staring at the burnt books of his store, piled up on the floor yesterday noon.

"Our fate has also burned with the books," he said.

The shop was the only source of income for his family, but it turned to ashes in the fire, he added.

According to Billal, he stored books worth around Tk 8 lakh in his warehouse that was on the ground floor. Some 65 percent of the books were burnt in the fire and the rest were damaged in water.

Besides Billal's Dewan Store, Gitanjali, Babul Book, Tapan Book Centre, Udayan Library, Boi Bitan and many others faced a similar fate.

Each of the shops has employees, now unaware of how they will survive.

Jahanara Begum, 60, saw the fire on television and rushed to the spot from her house in Paltan.

Her two sons own two bookstores - New Book Garden and Tapan Book Centre - at the market.

"The two stores had books worth Tk 8-10 lakh. They bought new books two days ago taking loans as schools and colleges reopened," said wailing Jahanara.

"We have lost everything. Now, what will happen to my sons? How will they bear the expenses?"

Visiting the fire-ravaged market yesterday morning, this correspondent found that shopkeepers were dumping the burnt books on the floor while the rag pickers were collecting those from the streets.

Gias Uddin, a director of the market, said books and stationery items worth Tk several crores in 50 shops were damaged due to fire and water.

The bookshop owners sought financial support from the government to cover their huge losses, he added.



Ayyub Ali, in his late 50s, stuck in traffic while carrying steel drums from Jurain to Kamrangirchar in the capital. As he does not have any children to support him, the man has to take on extra workload to earn for his wife and parents. The photo was taken in Dhaka's Holaikhali area yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Ukraine mobilises reserves

Seeks to declare state of emergency as Putin says Moscow's interests 'non-negotiable'; US, EU, Australia, Japan impose sanctions on Russia

AGENCIES

Ukraine mobilised its military reserve yesterday and urged its citizens to leave Russian territory as Moscow sharpened its demands, increasing fears of all-out war.

Kremlin chief President Vladimir Putin has defied an avalanche of international sanctions to put his forces on stand by to occupy two rebel-held areas of eastern Ukraine.

In response, Kyiv's President Volodymyr Zelensky has put Ukraine's more than 200,000 reservists on notice that they will receive summons to return to their units.

Ukraine's security council also yesterday called for a state of emergency in the country - a measure that still needs to be formally approved by parliament.

Meanwhile, Ukraine urged its approximately three million citizens living in Russia to leave, as the crisis deepened despite intense international pressure on Moscow, backed by new economic sanctions.

Western capitals say Russia has amassed 150,000 troops in combat formations on Ukraine's borders with Russia, Belarus and Russian-occupied Crimea and on warships in the Black Sea.

Ukraine has around 200,000 military personnel and yesterday's call up could see up to 250,000 reservists aged between 18 and 60 receive their mobilisation papers.

Moscow's total forces are much larger - around a million active duty personnel - and have been modernised and re-armed in recent years.

But Ukraine has received advanced anti-tank weapons and some drones from Nato members. More have been promised as the allies try to deter a Russian attack or at least make it costly, reports AFP.

Washington and Britain say Russia's force is poised to strike Ukraine, but Putin says he is open to negotiation - within limits.

Russia has demanded that Ukraine be forbidden from ever joining the Nato alliance and is seeking to roll back the advance of Western influence in eastern Europe since the Cold War.

"The interests of Russia, the security of our citizens, are non-negotiable for us," Putin said yesterday.

Russia said it had established diplomatic relations "at the level of embassies" with the separatists in Donbass, and started evacuating its

diplomatic staff from all of its diplomatic facilities in Ukraine.

In Kyiv, President Zelensky warned yesterday that the "future of European security" was being decided in his country's standoff with Russia. He demanded "immediate" security guarantees from West and Russia.

Speaking to journalists, Putin on Tuesday set out a number of stringent conditions if the West wanted to de-escalate the crisis.

US President Joe Biden later announced tough new sanctions against Russia for "beginning" an invasion of Ukraine, but he left the door open to a final effort at diplomacy to avert a full-scale Russian invasion.

EU member states, Japan and Australia followed suit yesterday with their own stringent penalties for Moscow and individuals connected with the aggression against Ukraine. Kremlin officials have responded scornfully to the sanctions.

The White House signalled it no longer believes Russia is serious about avoiding conflict, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken cancelling a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov scheduled for today.

Bribery hurts

FROM PAGE 1

Basir to eight years in jail and handed Mizanur a jail sentence of three years.

It also fined Basir Tk 80 lakh and ordered him to pay the fine within six months. In default, he will have to serve six more months in jail.

The judge said the transaction of bribes astonished the nation. Mizanur bribed Basir to get rid of an inquiry launched by the ACC, he added.

The court said Mizanur was a "willing bribe giver or accomplice", and he abetted Basir give and take bribes.

The two accused were produced before the court around 11:15am yesterday before the delivery of the verdict.

Basir was jailed for three years for taking Tk 40 lakh in bribe from Mizanur and another five years for laundering the amount.

His sentences will run concurrently, said the court.

Mizanur was handed three years' imprisonment for giving the amount in bribe, the judge said, adding that he was cleared of money laundering charges in the case.

The time already spent by Mizan and Basir behind bars would be deducted from their sentences, said the judge.

Sheikh Md Fanafilya, a director of the ACC, had filed the graft case against Mizanur and Basir on July 16, 2019. Basir was arrested in the capital's Mirpur area five days later.



Mizanur Basir

Roll-out in a year

FROM PAGE 1

Mizanur, who was in jail in another graft case, was shown arrested in the bribery case on July 17 that year.

The graft watchdog on January 15 last year submitted the charge sheet against the two accused.

Twelve prosecution witnesses gave depositions to the court which framed charges against the accused on March 18 last year.

While it is possible to start implementing the scheme within a year, it might not be possible for the government to include all beneficiaries initially.

The scheme should be piloted first, he said, adding that the government must have its contribution if it wants to make the scheme mandatory for all.

The government will also have to fix what will be the employer and employee's contribution in the case of the formal sector, he added.

At yesterday's press conference, Kamal said the process will be optional to start with but mandatory in future.

A beneficiary will be eligible for the scheme after paying instalments for at least 10 years in a row.

For each citizen, a separate pension account will be created. As a result,

the account will remain unchanged even if a beneficiary changes his or her job.

The proposed scheme says there will be an option for institutions to participate. However, in such a case, the amount of subscription fee for the institution or its employee will be fixed by the national pension authority.

There will be a minimum amount of monthly subscription fee. However, expatriates will be able to pay the subscription fee quarterly.

A beneficiary will ensure the minimum annual savings. Otherwise, his or her account will be frozen. Later, the account can be

resumed by paying a late fee and the due subscription fees.

A beneficiary will be able to save any amount of money in addition to the minimum amount as a subscription fee based on his or her financial capacity.

There will be no option for a one-time withdrawal of the deposited money at any time. However, through an application, a beneficiary can take a maximum 50 percent loan against the deposited money, which must be paid back with interest.

If a beneficiary dies before depositing the instalment for at least 10 years, then the accumulated amount will

be returned with profit to the nominee.

The instalment for pension will be considered as investment and tax rebate while the monthly pension will remain out of income tax.

The government may pay a portion of the monthly instalment for the lower income group people and bear the necessary expenditures of the pension authority and the other relevant organisations.

The pension authority will invest the amount deposited to the fund as per guideline (in ensuring maximum financial return).

If a beneficiary starts to pay an instalment of Tk 1,000 per month at the

age of 18, then he/she may receive Tk 64,776 a month as pension after the age of 60, Kamal said.

The minister made the estimate considering 10 percent profit and 8 percent gratuity on the invested instalments.

For a beneficiary who enrolls at the age of 30, the monthly pension will be Tk 18,908.

The World Bank provided technical assistance to the initiative in light of the best practices from other countries such as India, Malaysia, Sweden and Australia.

In particular, it uses India's experience in developing the national pension scheme.

Losses and poor show continue

FROM PAGE 1

Amid such a situation, the railways ministry yesterday held a meeting in the capital's Rail Bhaban, with Railways Secretary Humayun Kabir in the chair, to discuss ways to increase revenue and improve services.

A deputy secretary of the ministry made a presentation on different areas of the BR, including its income and expenditures, and made some recommendations to improve the situation, meeting sources said.

As per the railways ministry document, the BR carried 373 crore passengers in the last FY - 47.44 percent less than the previous FY.

Mizanur flashed V-sign for victory while being taken back to jail.

Approached for comments, other convict Basir kept mum.

passengers in 2019-20 fiscal year and 927 crore in 2018-19, it said.

The BR carried 0.5445 crore tonnes of goods in the last FY - 71.39 percent more than the 2019-20 FY (0.3177 crore tonnes).

The government in the last two fiscal years twice suspended operations of public transport, including trains, and directed authorities to operate trains at half capacity to contain the spread of Covid-19.

The railway earned Tk 1,427.70 crore and spent Tk 2,822.29 crore in the last FY.

The transport agency incurred a loss of Tk 2,086.70 crore in the 2019-20 fiscal year, up from Tk 1,751 crore in the previous FY, shows the ministry

document.

However, as per the BR Information Book-2020, it made a loss of 2,063.12 crore in 2019-20 fiscal year, up from Tk 1,644.07 crore in the previous FY.

The agency has not made a profit since 2008-09 FY, according to data of the information book. It does not contain any operating income statistics for years between 1971 and 2007.

The presentation paper mentioned that BR can increase its income by operating more freight, container, and commuter trains.

It also said that around 5,000 acres of railway land was grabbed by illegal occupants. If the land can be recovered and used for commercial purposes, the

BR can earn crores of taka, but there are no serious attempts to recover the land.

It would be difficult to cut the railway's loss unless corruption and irregularities are stopped, proper use of assets is ensured, and passenger services are improved," reads the paper.

The BR has been receiving huge investments from successive governments since the Awami League came to power in 2009.

This newspaper could not reach BR Director General Dharendra Nath Mazumder over the phone for comments as he did not respond to calls and a text message.

Railways Secretary Humayun said yesterday's

for railway passenger services, they have asked officials to expedite work of the ongoing projects to expand services.

About corruption allegations, Humayun said although the issue was not discussed formally, they asked all officials to work with honesty because the government will not spare anyone involved in graft.

Regarding illegally occupied railway land, he said they asked the authorities to expedite drives to recover land and dispose of cases filed in this connection.

"We have directed the authorities to amend the railway's existing land use policy, if needed, to make it befitting the times," he added.

Petition filed over Sharif's termination

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A writ petition was filed with the High Court yesterday seeking its directive on the authorities to conduct an independent inquiry into the reported allegations and counter-allegations over the termination of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) official Sharif Uddin.

Ten Supreme Court lawyers, led by Mohammad Shishir Manir, submitted the petition as public interest litigation -- also requesting the HC to pass necessary order to uphold the independent and impartial image of the commission.

Citing the petition, Shishir Manir told The Daily Star that allegations against Sharif Uddin and counter-allegations against the ACC over his termination have damaged the impartial and autonomous image of the commission though it has been established under the law.

He said the HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman will hold a hearing on the petition any day next week.

SAGAR-RUNI MURDER

March 27 next date for case report submission

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday asked Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) to submit by March 27 the probe report of a case filed over the murders of journalist couple Sagar Sarwar and Meherun Rumi.

With this, the investigation officer has so far taken 86 dates to complete the investigation.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Debashish Chandra Adhikary passed the order after Rab's Additional Superintendent Khondoker Md Shafiqul Alam, also investigation officer of the case, failed to submit the report yesterday, court sources said.

Sagar, news editor at private TV channel Mastranga, and his wife Rumi, a senior reporter at ATN Bangla, were killed in the early hours of February 11, 2012, in their rented flat in the capital's West Razabazar.

Physically challenged girl raped in Bogura

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

A physically challenged minor girl was raped in Bogura's Dhunat upazila yesterday.

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