Karnataka court upholds ban on hijab in schools

AFP, *Bangalore*

An Indian court upheld a local ban on the hijab in classrooms yesterday, weeks after the edict stoked violent protests and renewed fears of discrimination against the country's Muslim minority.

Southern Karnataka was on edge for several weeks after a small group of girls in their late teens were prevented from wearing the garment on school grounds at the end of last year.

Demonstrations snowballed across the state and police used tear gas to disperse angry crowds as more schools imposed their own bans and radical Hindu groups staged boisterous counter-demonstrations.

After weeks of deliberations, Karnataka's high court ruled that the wearing of the hijab "does not form a part of essential religious practice in Islamic faith".

The court said schools had reasonable grounds to impose dress codes that forbade the headdress in the interests of preventing divisions on religion and other grounds.

"The aim of the regulation is to create a 'safe space'... And the ideals of egalitarianism should be readily apparent to all students."

Additional police were deployed around Karnataka on Monday ahead of the ruling, though there was no sign of fresh protests till mid-afternoon.

As tensions came to a head in February, several violent confrontations in cities across the state were broken up by police and schools were shut.

The hijab is an important article of faith in Islam and many in Karnataka say that Muslim girls have worn it in schools for decades, just as Hindus, Sikhs and Christians have done with symbols of their respective religions.

A bulldozer knocks down shops on a road in the capital's Bangabazar area during a drive by Dhaka South City Corporation. The corporation carried out the drive yesterday to make room for development work. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Insurgents murdered Rohingya leader

Police claim

AFP, *Kutupalong*

Police admitted for the first time yesterday that an insurgent group ordered last year's murder of a respected Rohingya leader, saying they were threatened by his growing popularity.

The assassination of Mohib Ullah last September sent shockwaves through the sprawling border settlements that house hundreds of thousands of stateless Rohingya refugees who fled a violent crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar.

Hours after the 48-year-old was gunned down in Kutupalong, the world's largest refugee settlement, in Cox's Bazar his family accused the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) of orchestrating the killing.

The militant group is waging an insurgency in Myanmar and has been accused of running narcotics, murdering political opponents and instilling a climate of fear in the camps.

Security forces have routinely denied ARSA operates in the camps and blamed Mohib Ullah's death on an unrelated turf war.

But the police investigation has made headway in recent weeks and the inspector manning the probe said yesterday that 15

people with ties to the group had been arrested for their role in the killing, four of whom have issued confessions.

"In their statement the four claimed they are ARSA members and they got instructions from ARSA leaders to kill Mohib Ullah," Gazi Salahuddin told AFP.

"A meeting was held on the night of September 27 to assassinate Mohib Ullah. There were leaders of ARSA (in the meeting) and they demanded he be killed," he said.

Salahuddin said he believed the murder was ordered by ARSA chief Ataullah, who is believed to be in Myanmar, because of the victim's growing following.

"They thought Mohib Ullah and his organisation had become more organised and popular than ARSA. So they killed him," he said.

"Mohib Ullah was working against ARSA and was raising awareness about the group's criminal activities."

The militant group has previously denied any involvement in the community leader's murder.

More than 850,000 Rohingya refugees live in Bangladesh refugee camps, most of whom fled a brutal military crackdown in Myanmar that is now the subject of a genocide case at the UN's highest court in The Hague.

Working among the chaos and unease in the camps, Mohib Ullah and his colleagues quietly documented the crimes that his people suffered at the hands of the Myanmar military while pressing for better conditions.

The former schoolteacher shot to prominence in 2019 when he organised a protest of about 100,000 people in the camps to mark two years since their exodus.

He also met then US president Donald Trump in the White House that year and addressed a UN meeting in Geneva.

Unused data will be carried over from now

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unused mobile data and calls bought for 3-day, 7-day, 15-day, and 30-day periods will add up the next time a subscriber buys mobile data and call times.

Mustafa Jabbar, telecom minister, announced the new rules at the office of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) yesterday.

According to the directive, an operator can offer up to 95 packages in three categories.

Besides, the operators have to send an SMS to their customers, informing them about the monthly expenses in Bangla, and email the information if a user requests it.

Woman accuses 4 of gang rape in Cox's Bazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Cox's Bazar*

A 29-year-old woman yesterday accused nine men of gangraping her in Cox's Bazar.

In a case filed with Cox's Bazar Sadar Model Police Station, she accused Firoj Ahmed, 47, Rasel Uddin, 38, and his brother Nurul Islam, 48, Sharif, 48, and five other unnamed men.

Locals said the accused, who are residents of different areas in Cox's Bazar, are police informants, but officers refuted the claim.

According to the complaint, the main accused Firoj and several others abducted her when she was walking through Mosjid Market around 2:00pm.

That then took her to the house of a man named Fazal Quader in Baharchara area and raped her, tying her hands and legs.

At one stage, the woman fainted, said the complaint, adding that locals sensed something was going on and called 999.

Police later rescued her, but the criminals managed to flee, it said.

Officers said they were looking for the accused.

Siblings set on fire in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two siblings, aged nine and six, were set on fire in the capital's Adabar yesterday allegedly by their brother-in-law.

Mitu Akter and her younger brother were admitted to Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery.

With 98 percent burns, is struggling for life, said Resident Surgeon SM Aiyub Hossain.

Mohammadpur Zone Assistant Commissioner Mujib Ahmed Patwari of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said police are looking for the suspect named Alauddin.

Injured Bappi said Alauddin took him and Mitu to his house yesterday morning and set them on fire after pouring kerosene on them around 11:00am.

Biplob Kumar Sarker, deputy commissioner (Tejgaon), said police found that the man set the children on fire out of anger towards his wife, the elder sister of the children.

Consumers yet to reap

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fixed price for 5-litre containers is Tk 795.

"Both supply and sales have been reduced greatly. But retailers like me are at a loss as we have purchased oil from distributors at higher prices during the rise in demand," Mohammad Gofran, owner of Cumilla General Store at Karwan Bazar kitchen market, told The Daily Star.

Mohammad Yousuf, owner of Yousuf General Store, said, "We have to count our losses, if we sell soybean oil at the labelled price. On the other hand, the magistrates fine us if we sell at a higher price."

The situation was similar in the capital's New Market yesterday.

Distributors at the two markets said almost all companies have greatly reduced supply.

Amir Hossain, a distributor of Rupchada Soybean oil at Karwan Bazar, said, "We have been supplying each 5-litre can for Tk 785 so far after the company increased the rate. Now there is no supply from the company. It may resume tomorrow [today]."

Currently, consumers pay Tk 26-Tk 30 VAT per litre of bottled soybean oil at the government-fixed price of Tk 168 per litre, refiners said on Monday.

Ghulam Rahman, president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB), told The Daily Star yesterday, "It will take time to get the result of the tax exemption."

After exempting the taxes, the government may revise the edible oil price considering the price in the global market, he added.

Family cards may ease

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the cards.

"There will be two copies of the cards. One will be given to beneficiaries and another to dealers," he said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said under another arrangement, 50 lakh people already have cards with which they can buy rice at only Tk 10, reports BSS.

Stating that 38 lakh people received financial assistance (amid the pandemic), she said "a total of one crore people will get the card."

HC DIRECTIVES

The High Court yesterday directed the government to take action under all applicable laws against the hoarders of daily essentials.

In response to a writ petition, the court ordered the authorities concerned to issue ration cards under the open market sale (OMS) programme for edible oil, onion, rice, wheat, sugar and lentils.

It asked them to submit separate reports to it on the steps taken to prevent illegal syndication of businesses and the hiking the prices of essential commodities.

Secretaries at the ministries of commerce and home affairs and chairman of Bangladesh Competition Commission have been asked to place the reports to the HC by April 26, Deputy Attorney General Protikar Chakma told The Daily Star.

Lawyer Syed Mohidul Kabir, one of the three writ petitioners, told this correspondent that only wheat and rice are now sold through OMS Policy, 2015. Edible oil, onion, rice, wheat, sugar and lentils must be included in the policy, which is currently being updated.

The HC also issued a rule asking the officials concerned to explain in four weeks as to why their failure in monitoring and controlling market prices of essentials should not be declared illegal.

The court asked them to explain why they should not be directed to formulate a regulation under the Competition Act, 2012, in order to stop syndicates that are responsible for making the market unstable.

It also wanted to know why the inaction and failure of the national consumer rights protection directorate in taking remedial measures should not be declared illegal.

Secretaries at the ministries of commerce, home affairs and food, Bangladesh Competition Commission, consumer rights protection directorate, trading corporation of Bangladesh and Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry are respondents to the rule.

The HC bench of Justice Farah Mahbub and Justice SM Maniruzzaman delivered the orders and issued the rule.

European PMs

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to capture any of Ukraine's 10 biggest cities.

However, Moscow claimed that it was now in control of the entire region of Kherson, reported Reuters.

Russia's foreign ministry said yesterday that US President Joe Biden and a dozen other top officials including Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin had been banned from entering the country in a reciprocal response to US sanctions.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, meanwhile, said it was too early to predict progress at peace talks, which was scheduled to resume later yesterday by video link.

As US pressure grows on Beijing to withdraw support from Moscow, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday his nation does not want to be impacted by Western sanctions on Russia.

In his most confident public statement yet, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called on Russian troops to surrender, saying they and their officers already knew that the war was hopeless.

The UN said yesterday more than three million people have fled Ukraine since Russia invaded on February 24, nearly half of them minors, with a child becoming a refugee every second.

The bell tolls for him

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The noted filmmaker was born on October 10, 1939 in Santahar, Bogura to Rupchan Pramanik. He completed his SSC from Ahsanullah Institute and HSC from Dhaka City College.

He had a diploma in commercial art from the Institute of Fine Arts, Chittagong University.

In 1958, Azizur started his career as an assistant to eminent filmmaker Ehtesham in the film "Ei Desh Tomar Amar". He made his directorial debut in 1967 with "Saiful Mulk Badiuzzamal", based on a folk tale of Mymensingh.

Throughout his career, Azizur directed 54 films, including "Chhutir Ghonta", "Oshikkhito", "Matir Ghor", "Janata Express", "Shampanwala", "Daktar Bari", "Gormil", and "Shomadhan".

Remembering the legendary director, several artistes recalled memories with him.

Renowned actress Anjana worked in quite a number of his films, including "Oshikkhito", "Mehman", and "Phuleshwari".

"The loss is irreplaceable. I will always be grateful to him for giving me the opportunity to play the lead character in 'Oshikkhito', his fifth directorial venture."

The popular song "Dhaka Shohor Aisha Amar Asha Phuraise" is from this film.

Ilias Kanchan, veteran actor and president of Film Artistes' Association, worked with Azizur in two films -- "Ghor Bhanga Shongshar" and "Baap Beta 420".

"He was really well behaved and intellectually rich. From managing the artistes to his sense of filmmaking and philosophies, he was unique in his own way," said the actor.

Noted actress Champa was amused by his sketching skills. "Although I worked with him in only one film, it never felt that way. We would meet every day at BFDC. He was an amazing artist as well."

Azizur's body will be brought home for burial at his family graveyard in Santahar, Bogura.

The Sutki in shackles

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A year later, the court upheld his petition and delivered a verdict in Yahiya's favour. The court also directed the local land office to issue legal documents certifying the ownership of over 242 acres of land, including the river, to Yahiya Fish Industries, a company owned by Yahiya Raja.

About 20 years later in 1992, the then Habiganj deputy commissioner cancelled the ownership on grounds that the water body was in fact a river and therefore a government property.

In 1996, Yahiya filed a contempt of court petition against the district administration for cancelling his ownership in a Habiganj court.

In its verdict in December last year, the Habiganj court reinstated the ownership to Yahiya, saying the state has failed to produce the documents required to prove it otherwise.

Habiganj Additional Deputy Commissioner Bijen Banarjee yesterday said they will appeal against the verdict.

Land documents, including SA (State Acquisition) Khatiyan, RS (Revisional Survey) Khatiyan, and BS (Bangladesh Survey) Khatiyan, show Sutki is recorded as a river. An investigation by the local administration early this month also found the land is not a private property and that relevant documents earmark it as a river.

The Daily Star has a copy of the investigation report as well as the land records.

Tofazzal Sohel, general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon's Habiganj unit, alleged that the government is yet to win the legal battle due to the "negligence" of government prosecutors who failed to produce the relevant documents before the court.

Bijen Banarjee, the Habiganj ADC, admitted receiving a government report that faults the prosecutors for negligence.

"But we will continue the legal battle to reclaim the river," he added.

He also said Dewan Yahiya Raja concealed vital land records when he filed the case to deceive the court.

Talking to The Daily Star, locals said it was beyond their comprehension how a whole river can be a private property.

Rafiq Mia, 65, a fisherman of Sundarpur village under Baniachang upazila, said they heard from their grandparents that the family has been controlling the river for generations.

Another fisherman, Julhas Miah, said, "Since our childhood, we have been hearing that the river is owned by Raja Saheb. So, we could never fish in it."

During a recent visit to the area, four people were found fishing in the river.

"We are working here on a daily pay basis. We catch fish and hand them over to the river owner, who pays us daily wages. We have no ownership of it," said a fisherman, seeking anonymity.

Nayen could not be reached over the phone as he is abroad now.

His lawyer Faruk Ahmed said, "This is not a river. Their [Nayen] ancestors dug the water reservoir to irrigate crops in this area centuries ago. So, they are the owners of it."

Water Development Board (WDB) officials denied the claim and said it is a river.

"We have already spent around Tk 1 crore to excavate the river," said Shanewaz Talukder, executive engineer of WDB in Habiganj.