

AMENDING LAW

Stakeholders consulted, says press council

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Press Council rejected allegations that it, without consulting stakeholders, had incorporated financial penalties for journalists in the draft amendment to the Press Council Act.

In a statement circulated to the media, the council stated that it had multiple discussions at the ministerial level and with the council members.

It stated that the proposal for amending the Press Council Act 1974 was first raised in 2005.

"Since 2012, the council had been discussing about amending The Press Council Act 1974 to include financial penalties for journalists. In 2016, a finalised draft of the amendment, prepared at the general meetings of the council, was sent to the law commission," said the statement.

The statement also said that members of the press had routinely

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REPORT ON DGF

Ex-army man, Netra News sued under the DSA

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A ruling Awami League leader yesterday filed a case under the Digital Security Act against former army officer Hasinur Rahman and Netra News – a news portal – for running a report on the DGF and "tarnishing the country's image".

An interviewee in the report, Hasinur from Cumilla's Laksam upazila, was made the prime accused in the case.

Ilias Ahmed, a freedom fighter, who is also a lawyer at Rangpur Judge's Court and vice-president of the district AL, filed the case with Rangpur Cyber Tribunal.

Judge Abdul Majid of the tribunal took the case into his cognisance, and three people were made witnesses.

A description of the video news, which was published in Netra News's Facebook page on August 13, was included in the case documents.

The case statement claimed the video, titled "Mirrorroom, the secret prison of DGF" was false, defamatory and offensive.

It also went against the state, Ilias said in the case.

He further said the country's image was tarnished through the report, which was nothing but a

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Smoke rises above the burning shopping mall Galaktika following recent shelling in the course of Ukraine-Russia conflict in Donetsk, Ukraine yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Kyiv will fight 'till the end'

Zelensky vows on Independence Day as Russia-Ukraine war enters seventh month; US pledges biggest military aid package yet

AGENCIES

President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday vowed that Ukraine will resist the Russian invasion "until the end" without "any concession or compromise", as the nation marked its Independence Day as well as the six-month anniversary of the start of the war.

"We don't care what army you have, we only care about our land," Zelensky said in a defiant morning video address. "We will fight for it until the end."

Referring to Russia – which launched a large-scale attack in the early hours of February 24 – he vowed Ukraine "will not try to find an understanding with terrorists".

"For us Ukraine is the whole of Ukraine," he said. "All 25 regions, without any concession or compromise."

Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden announced nearly \$3 billion for weapons and equipment for Ukraine in Washington's "biggest tranche of security assistance to date", while the head of Nato told Ukrainians they were an inspiration to the world.

"You [Ukrainians] can count on Nato's support. For as long as it takes," Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said in

a video message.

The planned White House announcement comes as Washington warned Moscow could be planning a surge in strikes on civilian targets coinciding with Independence Day observations, reports AFP.

Gatherings have been banned in the capital Kyiv, where air raid sirens sounded in the morning, and Zelensky has urged citizens to be on guard against "Russian terror".

As the war entered its seventh month with no end in sight, outgoing British Prime Minister Boris Johnson pledged unlimited assistance to Ukraine.

Johnson was in Kyiv yesterday, hailing the "strong will of Ukrainians to resist" Russia's invasion. "We in the UK, not for a second will we give up to Putin's blackmail," Johnson said.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz warned Russia against further attempts to annex Ukrainian territory in the same way it did the Crimean peninsula in 2014.

Polish President Andrzej Duda also advised against any "appeasement", saying: "There is no return to business as usual in relations with Russia."

And French President Emmanuel Macron vowed European Union support

for Ukraine would continue "for the long term".

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the six-month anniversary of the start of Russia's war in Ukraine a "sad and tragic milestone."

In an absurd message yesterday, Alexander Lukashenko, the authoritarian leader of Belarus – which offered its territory as a staging ground for Russia's invasion – gave congratulations to Ukraine on its Independence Day.

Meanwhile, the head of Russia's state nuclear energy agency yesterday held a meeting with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief to discuss an expected inspection of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, occupied by Russian troops and threatened by shelling, which Moscow blames on Kyiv.

In Russia, police detained one of the last opposition figures still in the country and not behind bars after he reportedly criticised Moscow's military campaign in Ukraine.

Politician Yevgeny Roizman, former mayor of the Urals city of Yekaterinburg, was detained for "discrediting" the Russian army in comments about Moscow's military intervention in Ukraine.

Sagar-Runi murder probe report deferred for 91st time

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday asked Rapid Action Battalion to submit by September 26 the probe report of the murder case of journalist couple Sagar Sarowar and Meherun Runi.

With this, the deadline for submission of the report has been rescheduled for 91st time.

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

Sagar, news editor at private TV channel Maasranga, and his wife Runi, 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.

After Sher-e-Bangla Nagar police and the Detective Branch of police, Rab was tasked with the probe on April 18, 2012.

3 die from Covid, 167 get infected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three people died from Covid 19 and at least 167 got infected with the virus in 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday.

With this, the total number of Covid fatalities in the country now stands at 29,319. The mortality rate remains unchanged at 1.46 percent, said a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services.

The total number of cases has gone up to 20,10,490. The daily positivity rate was 3.89 percent after 4,293 samples were tested countrywide during the 24-hour period.

At least 235 patients have recovered during the same period. With them, the total number of recoveries now stands at 19,54,585 and the recovery rate is 97.22 percent.

3 held over gang rape of schoolteacher

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Rapid Action Battalion arrested three accused in a case filed over the gang rape of a schoolteacher from Cox's Bazar on Tuesday night.

A team of Rab 15 picked up the three – Bedar Miah, 28, Mostaq Miah, 24, and Belal Uddin, 22 – from different places of the district.

The arrestees confessed to their involvement in the crime, said Rab 15 Assistant Superintendent of Police Nityananda Das. The accused were handed over to Cox's Bazar Sadar Model Police Station.

On Tuesday, the schoolteacher filed the case with the same police station accusing four people.

According to the case statement, Bedar Miah met the teacher at a function in Cox's Bazar on the night of August 18. The following morning, Bedar along with his three associates got her off an easy bike at gunpoint in Jhilongia of Cox's Bazar and raped her in an under construction building nearby.

Yesterday, a Cox's Bazar court sent the three arrestees to jail after police produced them before it.

Dhaka in talks with Moscow

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Russian crude oil would be given to Bangladeshi experts so that they can find out whether it could be refined here.

Primary discussions for exploring mechanisms to replace the US dollar in trade between the two countries have started, he said, adding, "I have recently met the governor of Bangladesh Bank to discuss the issue."

With major logistical obstacles being removed, negotiations are going on between Moscow and Dhaka for the resumption of wheat purchase on a government-to-government basis.

Mutual efforts of the countries made it possible to increase bilateral

trade turnover manifold. Last year, it reached an all-time high of almost \$3 billion, he mentioned.

About the impact of the Ukraine war on bilateral trade, he said Russia-Bangladesh business relations are going through another challenging time due to the Western sanctions. But the Russian and Bangladeshi companies are getting accustomed to the new reality, he said.

Some of them are using alternative transportation routes to continue mutually beneficial trade. A large number of items have been delivered by air, Mantytskiy said.

"As a result, even in the first quarter of 2022, the turnover between our two countries amounted to a solid volume of \$650 million, which is

only slightly less than that of the same period in 2021."

In spite of the widespread delusion that all Russian banks came under sanctions, there are only 14 financial institutions that cannot provide services to the Bangladeshi partners due to the sanctions.

The bilateral trade operations are being carried out successfully through other Russian banks unaffected by the Western restrictions, Mantytskiy said, adding that the Central Bank of the Russian Federation and the Bangladesh Bank remain in close contact for discussing ways to open correspondent accounts.

Regarding energy cooperation, he said the Rooppur Nuclear

Power Plant is being built without hindrances and the project is on schedule.

On August 19, Gazprom International Investments BV launched the drilling of a new well in the gas fields in Bhola. Drilling of two more wells is expected to begin this year.

He assured that Russia stands ready to supply potash fertiliser according to the previously signed contract, as the American sanctions no longer cover non-organic fertilisers and other essential food goods.

"... There is a growing interest in Russia for procuring Bangladeshi medicine and agricultural products," Mantytskiy said.

Afghan women open library to counter growing isolation

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghan women's rights activists opened a library in Kabul yesterday, hoping to provide an oasis for women increasingly cut off from education and public life under the ruling Taliban.

Since taking over Afghanistan a year ago, the Taliban have said women should not leave the home without a male relative and must cover their faces, though some women in urban centres ignore the rule.

Secondary schools for girls largely remain closed after the Taliban went back on promises to open them in March.

"We have opened the library with

two purposes: one, for those girls who cannot go to school and second, for those women who lost their jobs and have nothing to do," said Zhulhia Parsi, one of the library's founders.

A Taliban spokesman did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

The library's more than 1,000 books includes novels and picture books as well non-fiction titles on politics, economics and science. The books were mostly donated by teachers, poets and authors to the Crystal Bayat Foundation, an Afghan women's rights organisation which helped set up the library.

JRC crippled by a lack of political will

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torpedoed by West Bengal, stalling the minister-level JRC talks for 12 years.

Yet, the JRC remains the lone platform for meetings with India to discuss sharing of water, joint management, sharing of flood-related data, interventions in Indian territory to control flow, embankment and river bank protection work adjacent to borders, and other pertinent issues.

The JRC has now become a consultation platform and it does not have any executive power. It cannot take charge. It can only recommend and execute what the governments of the two countries decide, said Prof Shahab Enam Khan of international relations at Jahangirnagar University.

The discussions at the JRC meetings are not made public and the so-called decisions made there do not always reflect the people's desires. "If we want to make the JRC successful, the information provided to the JRC has to be made public," said the professor.

Water sharing between Bangladesh and India is more of a political issue

than a technical one. "Hence, we need to enhance the capacity of our bureaucrats and technical experts to deal with hydro diplomacy and hydro politics," he said.

Activists and environmentalists alleged that India had built dams unilaterally on almost all transboundary rivers and has diverted water without Bangladesh's consent.

Bangladesh could not handle the issues properly due to a lack of competency and expertise, they alleged.

Sharif Jamil, general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa), said the JRC was an ineffective platform. Delegates of the JRC were supposed to sit twice a year to solve issues but they do not do so.

"... India has unilaterally built more than 40 structures on transboundary rivers in recent years. We have photographs of those structures and also have other proofs," said Sharif.

The United Nations adopted the UN Watercourses Convention in 1997 under which states are allowed to utilise water in an equitable and reasonable manner.

China had voted against it; India and Pakistan abstained; Nepal and Bangladesh voted in favour but did not ratify it.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (Bela), said Bangladesh should ratify the convention to raise its voice at the international level. The convention has provisions for a party to place its demands before the international community and the UN secretary general has the authority to form a fact-finding mission.

"Bangladesh would not be able to avail itself of the facilities if it did not ratify the convention," she said.

"They [JRC] should make all the information and documents public. It is already proven that discussions of bureaucrats, without ensuring any accountability even if they are for hundreds of hours, are not fruitful."

Today, India's Jal Shakti (Water Resources) Minister Gajendra Singh Shakhawat and State Minister for Water Resources of Bangladesh Zahid Faruk will lead their delegations to the 38th JRC ministerial-level meeting in

New Delhi.

The meeting is being held ahead of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in early September.

At today's meeting, the two sides are expected to finalise a joint study on the utilisation of the Ganges water and an agreement for the withdrawal of water from the Kushiara, sources familiar with developments said.

They added that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on sharing data on the water flow of six rivers that enter Bangladesh from India's North-East could be finalised. The rivers are the Monu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla and Dudhkumar.

The JRC has been talking about these six rivers since 1985 but failed to reach an agreement.

The sources said Bangladesh would raise the Teesta issue at the meeting.

When our New Delhi correspondent sought comments from the members of the Indian delegation at the JRC, they declined to comment and said there would be a statement issued after the JRC meeting.

Collusive contracts

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such as more expensive plants receiving orders before their lower-cost counterparts, when it should be the other way around, said Khan while presenting the paper.

"More expensive power plants should be supplying power in peak hours, but instead they are supplying base loads. Similarly, the more expensive plants get gas earlier than the less expensive ones, which suggests there is some informal collusion," he added.

"The overpriced plants are also prioritised in dispatch orders and fuel supplies because their high mark-ups allow them to corruptly influence these decisions," the research said.

The research study found that "the government's contracts with high-cost rental power plants state that if they were not given orders for power, they would still be paid for 60 percent of the power they could have produced."

These large capacity charges created scope to ensure that orders do not go to these plants – because

they were still being paid, the profits were larger by not producing.

The solution is competitive bidding by investors who are politically "unconnected", said the speaker.

"You have to make it viable for an unconnected investor to want to invest," said Khan. This would lead to as much as a 26 percent reduction in plant-level prices, he said.

The research found that providing support from development finance institutions and land lease support can reduce prices by as much as 36 percent.

"Feasible and effective anti-corruption [action] requires identifying and incentivising actors who can and want to implement it," recommended Khan.

Dr Binayak Sen, director general of BIDS, spoke about the need for more transparency to supplement the feasible anti-corruption strategy.

"Nowadays it is very difficult to get access to classified information, such as defaulters, in the area of property taxation, etc.," said Dr Sen, who moderated the event.