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RANGA'S REMOVAL Rangpur JP rife with tension

STAR REPORT

Tension is running high among the grassroots Jatiya Party leaders and activists in Rangpur following Mashur Rahman Ranga's removal from all party posts.

A day after his removal, Ranga, the chief whip of the opposition in parliament, yesterday announced that he would quit the party if it was not run democratically.

He was a presidium member of the JP and also the president of its Rangpur district unit.

Supporters of Ranga and JP Chairman GM Quader are at loggerheads over the former's removal. The two groups chased and counter-chased each other at Jahaz Company intersection in Rangpur city on Wednesday night and yesterday morning.

Ranga's followers staged demonstrations at Zero Point in Rangpur's Gangachara upazila on Wednesday night, hours after the decision on his removal was announced.

The protesters also burnt effigies of Quader and demanded the MP from Rangpur-1 (Gangachara) be reinstated to all JP posts.

Meanwhile, another group of JP men, led by Rangpur city Mayor Mostafizur Rahman, welcomed Ranga's removal.

Speaking at a press conference at the party office in Rangpur city on Wednesday night, the mayor said they would take tougher actions against any party men who would try to create trouble over the MP's removal.

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Farmers clearing hydrophytes and preparing their land for cultivation in Barishal Sadar upazila yesterday. Relentless heavy rain had destroyed their Aman seedlings there.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

COPYING GOVT DOCS

Ex-EC staffer sued under DSA, Official Secrets Act

EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

A former staffer of the Shariatpur Sadar upazila election office has been sued under the Official Secrets Act for possessing photos of confidential documents, EC server passwords, and audio and video recordings of internal office conversations.

He is also facing charges under the Digital Security Act in the same case.

This is the second case filed under the Official Secrets Act -- a colonial-era act that criminalises sharing of government information -- in recent times, with the first being filed against Prothom Alo journalist Rozina Islam just last year.

Sohrab Hossain, election officer in Shariatpur Sadar, filed the case with Palong Model Police Station on September 13, accusing Mohsin.

Earlier, Mohsin was
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ASSAULT ON COPS

Court frames charges against 51 BNP men

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against 51 BNP leaders and activists in a case filed over vandalising vehicles and assaulting policemen during a protest procession in the capital in October 2017.

Amanullah Aman, an adviser to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, and joint secretary generals of the party Khairul Kabir Khokon and Habib-Un-Nabi Khan Sohel are among them.

Aman, Sohel, Khokon and 48 others, now on bail, pleaded not guilty after Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Tofazzal Hossain read out the charges.

Earlier in the day, the court dismissed petitions seeking their acquittal from the charges and fixed February 1, 2023, for the trial to begin.

According to the case statement, it was alleged that around 9:05am on October 10, 2017, a group of BNP leaders and activists, led by Aman, brought out a procession, protesting the issuance of an arrest warrant against Khaleda near Dainik Bangla intersection. They vandalised vehicles, assaulted policemen

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PRISON IN FORESTLAND

2 govt agencies face off over land demarcation

MOSTAFA YOUSUF

The Department of Prison and the Forest Department are at odds over demarcation of forestland in Ukhiya upazila of Cox's Bazar.

The land ministry allotted 160 acres of land, which is part of a protected forest in Ukhiya's Paglirbil, to the prison department to build a prison.

Prison authorities placed demarcation flags in the beginning of May, but Forest Department (FD) staffers removed those at the end of June. This prompted prison officials to write to the home ministry to take legal action against the FD officials.

The FD wrote a letter to the land ministry to cancel the lease citing laws, policies and High Court rulings to conserve forestland.

Preferring anonymity, a forest official said as per a Cabinet Division circular issued in 2015, any organisation building any structures that fall within forest area should have clearance from the FD, but the prison authorities could not come up with any such document for the land in question.

The official said the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act-1950, National Forest Policy-1995, Forest Act-1927 and the land use manual of the land ministry prevents any forestland from being leased out to any individual or organisation.

The forest is home to dozens of plant species and the critically endangered Asian Elephant along with wild boars, reticulated pythons, leopard cats and the Asian Palm Civet.

Md Shah Alam Khan, superintendent of Cox's Bazar district jail, told The Daily Star that in the face of obstruction from FD, they had to stop work there.

"We wrote to our high-ups about their obstruction. The security service division of home ministry already wrote letters to relevant authorities for legal action against the officials," he said.

Sarwar Alam, divisional forest officer of Cox's Bazar South Forest Division, told

The Daily Star that they have no issues with the prison authority. All they ask is for them to go through proper procedure.

Shah Alam said the open prison is the first of its kind in the country. Inmates who have light sentences and those at the end of their sentences will be shifted there. There will be scope for fish farming, gardens and other handicraft for the inmates who will be allowed to visit their families.

FD officials said the forestland is part of plot 602 which was declared a protected forest through a gazette notification in 1935.

The land ministry memorandum issued in March 1995, and Section 29 of Forest Act-1927 states that no protected forestland should be leased out without permission from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

FD in a letter sent to the prison department in August asked them to obtain permission from the relevant ministry and stop the demarcating until permission was granted. The letter

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Robot 'taught to laugh at jokes'



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A robot has been taught to laugh at jokes in a bid to make it more human.

Researchers at Kyoto University in Japan are using artificial intelligence to train robots about appropriate laughter -- and to differentiate between chuckles and rip-roaring squeals.

In Frontiers in Robotics and AI, a multidisciplinary journal, they described working with a robot called Erica with the hope of making conversations more natural.

"We think that one of the important functions of conversational AI is empathy," said lead author Dr Koji Inoue, an assistant professor at Kyoto University in the Department of Intelligence Science and Technology.

"Conversation is, of course, multimodal, not
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EU worried at violence over protest

UNB, Dhaka

The European Union has raised concern over the escalation of protest-related violence in Bangladesh.

"The European Union (EU) and Member States engage with political parties in Bangladesh in line with diplomatic practice. The EU has raised concerns about escalating protest-related violence and the need to ensure participatory and peaceful conditions as the next parliamentary elections approach," the EU Embassy in Dhaka tweeted marking the International Day of Democracy.

Yesterday marked the 15th anniversary of the International Day of Democracy.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said without a free press, democracy cannot survive and without freedom of expression, there is no freedom.

"On Democracy Day and every day, let us join forces to secure freedom and protect the rights of

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PESKY PLASTICS ... A monkey is seen chewing on plastic bottles discarded by tourists in the Sundarbans. The dire consequences of plastic pollution in the ocean are well known, but it can be dangerous to land-based animals as well. They may suffer from various forms of entanglements as well as accidental consumption. The pesky substance can pierce animal organs and also can cause intestinal blockage, resulting in death. Bits of plastics packed in the stomach also reduce their urge to eat, leading to starvation. Human intervention on unprotected wild lands can increase the probability of plastic pollution, putting all the inhabitants at risk. Many land-based animals such as elephants, tigers and cattle die across the world due to accidental plastic consumption. With the planet already suffering from an environmental health crisis, can we really afford to lose our wildlife to an act as mindless as pollution?

PHOTO: ADNAN ASIF

Allegations mount against Rajshahi BCL top brass

ARAFAT RAHAMAN

A Chhatra League activist yesterday filed a case against the new BCL president of Rajshahi district unit, Sakibul Islam Rana, accusing him of extorting money promising employment.

Atikur Rahman, former general secretary of Durgapur BCL, filed the case with a court, alleging that the pro-ruling party student leader took around Tk 1 lakh from him on March 31, promising him a job at Rajshahi University.

Talking to The Daily Star, Atikur said, "But he failed to get me any job and refused to return the money."

Not only this, several other allegations against Rana and the BCL unit's General Secretary Jakir Hossain Omi surfaced soon after the Rajshahi district committee was announced on February 24.

According to documents and some images this newspaper has obtained, Rana was a joint convener of Rajshahi College's Muslim Hall unit of pro-BNP student body Chhatra Dal. He used to actively participate in meetings and other political activities.

Murtaza Famin, former president of Rajshahi College unit of Chhatra Dal, said Rana was a joint convener of the hostel's Chhatra Dal unit for almost three years since 2016.

BCL insiders claimed Rana was involved in Chhatra Shibir too.

Rocky Kumar Ghosh, former president of Rajshahi metropolitan BCL, claimed Rana was involved in Shibir, the pro-Jamaat student body, and later he joined Chhatra Dal.

Rocky said Rana used to join political meetings of Chhatra Shibir.

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