

AG office ‘sought stay 13 days before HC bail order’

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The attorney general's office allegedly filed a petition with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, seeking a stay on a High Court bail order that had not even been passed yet.

The bail order came 13 days after the stay petition was filed, according to court documents and defence lawyers.

In the petition, which was filed on December 21, 2021, the AG office claimed the HC granted six months' ad-interim bail to Hefajat-e-Islam leader Mufti Harun Izhar on December 8, 2021, in a murder case filed after the Hefajat's mayhem at the capital's Shapla Chattar on May 5, 2013.

Actually, the HC granted bail to Harun Izhar, education and cultural affairs secretary of Hefajat, on January 3, 2022, not on December 8, 2021, his lawyers AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon and Mohammad Mujibur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

In response to the petition filed by the AG office on behalf of the state, the then chamber judge of the Appellate Division on December 21, 2021, stayed the "December 8, 2021, bail order".

The AG office didn't attach the bail order to its petition as it was not required.

Mahbub Uddin Khokon said the AG office obtained the stay order on the basis of false information.

And because of this, Harun Izhar could not walk out of jail though he was originally granted bail by the HC on January 3 last year, Khokon added.

Yesterday, a three-member bench of the Appellate Division, headed by Justice Md Nuruzzaman, dismissed the AG office's petition and upheld the HC order that granted bail to Mufti Harun on January 3 last year.

Mahbub Uddin Khokon said his client had to stay behind bars for more than a year due to the AG office's placing of a wrong petition before the chamber judge.

"We earlier tried to mention this issue before the Appellate Division to redress the situation but in vain. We will make a decision on whether a case will be moved before a court seeking compensation for Mufti Izhar after he gets released from jail," he said.

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Leaders of the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh meet Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader at his office at the Secretariat yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

9,000 civilians killed since Russian invasion

Says Ukraine; Zelensky calls for faster weapons supply from West

AGENCIES

Over 9,000 civilians, including 453 children, have been killed in Ukraine since Russia's invasion last February, a senior Ukrainian presidential aide said yesterday.

"We have registered 80,000 crimes committed by Russian invaders and over 9,000 civilians have been killed, including 453 children," Andriy Yermak, head of the Ukrainian presidential staff, said at the World Economic Forum in the Swiss resort of Davos.

"We will not forgive a single (act of) torture or life taken. Each criminal will be held accountable," he said, reiterating that Ukraine wants a special international tribunal to try Russian political leaders and reparations for the destruction caused

by Russia's invasion.

The Office of the UN high commissioner for human rights said on Monday that more than 7,000 civilians had been killed in Ukraine since Russia invaded.

In eastern Ukraine, 25 people were still missing after a Russian missile strike on a block of apartments that killed at least 41 people in the city of Dnipro.

Saturday's strike was one of the deadliest attacks since Russia invaded Ukraine nearly a year ago. The Kremlin denies that Russian troops were responsible.

Ukraine came a step closer yesterday to winning the fleet of Western battle tanks it hopes could turn the course of the war, after Germany said tanks would be the first item on the agenda of a new defence minister.

Stop digital surveillance without rules

Article 19 urges govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rights organisation, Article 19, has called for a postponement on surveillance using the integrated lawful interception system technology without formulating any rules.

In a press release yesterday, the UK-based body expressed deep concern over the government's recent initiative to monitor mobile, internet and social media through controversial technologies without having specific rules.

On January 12, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan told the House that the government has taken initiative to introduce an "Integrated Lawful Interception System (ILIS)" to monitor social media and thwart various anti-state and anti-government activities.

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2 killed in row over badminton match

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Two men were killed and another was injured following an altercation over a badminton match in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

The victims Saidul Islam, 31, and Kaiser Hamid, 28, came under attack by local trader Joynal Abedin and his associates at Larpura around 11:30pm, said Md Nazmul Haque, inspector (investigation) of Cox's Bazar Sadar Model Police Station.

Locals rushed Saidul and Kaiser to the Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital where doctors declared them dead.

Saidul's younger brother Monirul Islam, who was injured in the incident, said, "Following an argument, Joynal and his associates attacked us with sticks and sharp weapons while we were chatting in front of my brother-in-law's shop."

Meanwhile, police have arrested two of the attackers while they are on the look-out for the others.

Dhamrai house fire: Fifth victim dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A female burn victim, who was injured in a fire that broke out at her house in the capital's Dhamrai on January 7, died at a city hospital last morning.

With her, all the five persons who sustained burn injuries in the incident, have died.

Hosna Akter, 30, breathed her last around 9:00am while undergoing treatment at Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery. She sustained 25 percent burns on her body, said its resident surgeon SM Ayub Hossain.

Five members of a family were burnt in a fire on January 7.

The other members of the family were Manjurul Islam, 35, a garment worker, his wife Josna Begum, 25, their one-and-half-year-old daughter Mariyam Akter, and Josna's niece Sadia Akter, 18.

Murder suspect arrested while fleeing to India

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Immigration police yesterday arrested a man accused in a murder case as he was trying to flee to India via Brahmanbaria's Akhaura land port.

Swapan Miah, 40, of Manikkandi village in Cumilla's Titas upazila, was barred from leaving the country because he was accused in a murder case in Cumilla, said Dewan Morshed, officer-in-charge of Akhaura Immigration Police.

"He arrived at the immigration office in Akhaura to request entry to India. However, the digital database at immigration identified him as being on the blacklist. He was then arrested and handed over to Akhaura Police Station," added the official.

Promises falling flat

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Articulated or bi-articulated buses are used for BRT services to cope up with the large number of commuters during peak hours, he said, adding that this makes transport more efficient, said transport expert Shamsul Hoque.

Besides, these buses would require a smaller number of employees to operate, he said.

"Since we are changing the configuration of the BRT service, we will not get the original flavour of the service," he told The Daily Star.

Besides, the regular buses will increase the operation cost and cause management problems.

Education and training are required to operate BRT buses, but the BRTC drivers will reduce productivity of the service and increase indiscipline, he added.

The project, formally known as Greater Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport Project, was originally planned to be complete by December 2016 at a cost of Tk 2,037.9 crore.

The delay was caused by issues relating to land acquisition, relocation of utility services, design changes, contractors running out of money, and the pandemic. Moreover, physical work was suspended twice.

As a result, the total project cost is now estimated to be Tk 4,268.3 crore

and the deadline is December 2024. The project witnessed 84.4 percent progress as of last month.

Meanwhile, the construction work has been making people suffer immensely, especially during the monsoons.

Once operational, the 20.5km transit will allow people to reach Dhaka from Gazipur in just 35-40 minutes.

Thanks to congestion and the battered condition of the road, the journey now takes up to four hours.

The Dhaka BRT website says articulated or bi-articulated buses used for BRT services usually have multiple wide doors for people to quickly board and exit.

The authorities originally wanted to buy 50 articulated buses and later increased the number to 120. But that plan was dropped "to reduce operating cost and considering the BRTC's bad experience in maintaining articulated buses".

Then, the decision to buy electric buses was made at the suggestion of Asian Development Bank (ADB), a major financier of the project.

The BRT in July last year invited preliminary expressions of interest, a pre-bidding process, for procuring electric AC buses.

That decision was changed again and the authorities on Saturday

floated a tender for procuring 137 diesel AC buses that are 12 metres in length. They had to change the design of the stations for these buses.

Shafiqul Islam said a preliminary study found the operation of electric buses may pose risks and it would require a proper feasibility study.

Besides, procuring electric buses will take longer, because manufacturers make them only after getting orders, he said, adding that diesel buses are delivered fast.

Electric vehicles would require charging facilities, he said, "That's why we decided to buy diesel buses."

Shafiqul said he talked to the BRTC to operate the new buses until an operator is hired, hopefully by mid 2024.

Asked why the bidding process for procuring buses had not started earlier, he said the ADB was supposed to provide funds for the buses. But the French Development Agency ended up being the financier and this change caused delays.

The authorities' plan to introduce an Intelligent Transportation System to give a fully-automated service may not be implemented before the second half of next year, he said.

"Our service at the initial stage would be semi-automated," he added.

Rohingyas accuse APBn of abuse

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On December 19, 2021, a group of seven people were arrested for possessing a locally-made one-shooter gun.

According to the FIR of the case, a team of APBn-8 was raiding an area close to camp-9 and 10 around 12:45am when they received a tip-off that a group of Rohingya refugees were going to assemble to "commit a crime".

The FIR states that when the APBn reached the spot, the Rohingyas began running away, prompting the cops to arrest them.

One of the accused remembers the incident differently. "I was called to the area by the Head Majhi. When we all got there, I was detained. Later, we were all charged with possessing a gun," the 34-year-old accused told this newspaper.

The gun was recovered in front of hundreds of people, claimed the FIR. However, the man named in the case as a witness, one Nur Kamal, told The Daily Star that he could not remember the incident.

On the other hand, while the FIR accuses them of possessing a firearm, a local media quoted members of the APBn unit as saying that they had arrested the group because they were kidnappers.

"In late October, the APBn launched Operation Root Out in response to a spike in targeted killings by armed groups. The police have arrested at least 900 Rohingyas since mid-2022. But refugees allege that corruption in the APBn has allowed criminal activities

to proliferate, while Rohingyas not responsible for crimes have ended up targeted in police crackdowns," said the HRW report.

Almost every case Human Rights Watch investigated involved extortion either directly by APBn officers or communicated through majhis, the camp community leaders, the report added.

"Police generally demanded Tk 10,000-40,000 [\$100-400] to avoid arrest, and Tk 50,000-100,000 [\$500-1,000] for the release of a detained family member. Families often had to sell gold jewelry or borrow money for bribes or legal costs."

The HRW logged responses from as many as 122 refugees. They claimed that they had been extorted for sums ranging from Tk 2,000 to Tk 7 lakh. Other than money, they were extorted for relief items like soap, rice and tarpaulins.

The report quoted a case study of one 57-year-old betel leaf shop owner who upon being arrested was asked to pay Tk 1 lakh for release. "Because we have such little income from the shop, we couldn't pay any amount to the police," his daughter told the rights watchdog.

The shop owner, now behind bars, was charged with possession of 2,000 yaba tablets and remains in jail. The HRW interviewed a witness named in the FIR, who knew nothing of the case or why he was named, said the report.

A Rohingya refugee, who claimed to have spent 70 days in jail for failing to

pay a bribe of Tk 1 lakh, told the HRW, "APBn officers keep coming to me and my family asking for bribes. They think we have some sort of a money machine. How could we pay so much money? There is no way to earn money. There is no work. We already lost all of our gold to secure my bail. We are helpless."

The HRW said that each camp should task and train non-APBn personnel to receive complaints from refugees against police officers.

It also held donors accountable stating that the 2022 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis received less than half of the \$881 million needed for the year and that donors should support projects to promote Rohingya refugees' safety and protection.

Deputy Inspector General Md Jamil Hasan, in charge of the three APBn units responsible for security in the camps, said that the HRW report was levelling a blanket accusation on the force.

"They are making these conclusions based on one or two unverified cases. They didn't even approach us for our comments on these incidents. There is no question of torturing or harassing the Rohingya refugees," he said.

He claimed that the infighting among the armed gangs in the camps was so intense that when they take actions against one group, it accuses the force of having bias towards another, and come up with claims of extortion.

Argentina's Bangladesh visit closer to reality

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details, which could be completed by Tuesday night.

"Argentina are expected to come to Bangladesh to play a FIFA friendly in June. They have quite a few conditions that must be met and we are completing the final negotiations," Manik told The Daily Star yesterday.

FIFA's executive member Mahfuza Akter Kiron, also the women's wing chairman of the BFF, informed that they were holding talks with teams such as Morocco and Japan to play against the world champions.

"We haven't finalised their opponents. We are negotiating with a few teams like Japan and Morocco for the friendly," Kiron told The Daily Star.

If the Albiceleste do come in June,

this will be their second visit to Bangladesh, with their first taking place on September 6, 2011 when they beat Nigeria 3-1 in a friendly at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Messi set up two goals for Gonzalo Higuain and Angel di Maria on that occasion while the other was an own goal. Chinedu Obasi scored the only goal for Nigeria in that match, played out in front of a 25,000-strong crowd.

While negotiations with the Argentina team are at an advanced stage, the venue remains an issue.

The BNS, which is the only internationally-recognised venue for hosting FIFA Tier-1 matches in Bangladesh, has been undergoing renovations since September 2021 and there is still quite a lot of work remaining, including the planting of new grass on the pitch, revamping

the galleries and the dressing rooms and installing LED floodlights.

The initial deadline for the renovation was extended from December, 2022 to June, 2023 and the budget increased from Tk 98 crore to Tk 155 crore, informed an official of the National Sports Council who preferred not to be named.

The last time Argentina played in Bangladesh, the BFF had to splurge around three to \$4m. It will also be another costly move for BFF as its president Kazi Salahuddin recently told media that the estimated cost for hosting the upcoming match would be around \$10m or roughly around 100 crore taka.

The BFF will hold a press briefing to apprise the media on details of the negotiations today.

More laws to control media

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Noah leaders requested that all the stakeholders are consulted before the laws are finalised.

The Digital Security Act and different other existing laws concerned are impediments to independent journalism and freedom of speech, the association leaders said.

AK Azad, Noah president and managing director of Times Media Limited; ASM Shahidullah Khan, Noah vice-president and publisher of New Age; Matiur Rahman, editor and publisher of Prothom Alo; Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star; Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, Noah treasurer and editor-in-chief of Manab Zamin; Tarik Sujat, managing director of Bhorer Kagoj; Shamsul Huq Zahid, editor of The Financial Express; and Dewan Hanif Mahmud, editor and publisher of Bonik Barta attended the meeting.

AK Azad said newspaper publishing is facing two major crises. The price of paper saw a two- to three-fold increase. Publishing is significantly more expensive now. On top of it, the VAT and tax are causing major losses to the newspapers.

Prothom Alo Editor and Publisher Matiur Rahman said the government initiative to enact five new laws alongside the existing ones concerning the mass media will raise the degree of oppression on journalists.

The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam said the government enacts different laws at different times. It is time to think about whether the government is benefitting from these laws.

"The proposed Press Council Act gives the chairman of the press council so much power that the chairman can fine a newspaper or a news agency up to Tk 10 lakh or get the individuals concerned arrested

for publishing a news or photo," he said. It is a terrible law."

New Age Publisher Shahidullah Khan said, "The mass media wants to be on good terms with the government. We shall take corrective measures if anyone points out any errors."

Manab Zamin Editor-in-chief Matiur Rahman Chowdhury said, "Political problems should be resolved through politics and as an experienced politician, Obaidul Quader has expertise in this regard."

Tarik Sujat, managing director of Bhorer Kagoj, said, "The pro-liberation Awami League government is in power. We have a lot of expectations from this government."

Obaidul Quader said, "The Awami League does not want any favour from the newspapers. We only want our due recognition. We are not against the newspapers... We do not want any animosity between us."