

Khasru, Swapan denied bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday rejected the bail of BNP standing committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury and the party's media cell convener Zahir Uddin Swapan in a case filed over the death of a constable in a clash between party men and police on October 28.

Judge Faisal Atiq Bin Kader of Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court passed the order.

Detectives detained the two in Gulshan area on November 3.

Police filed the case with Paltan Model Police Station against 164 people, making BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Alamgir a prime accused in the case.

Police have so far arrested four people, including Fakhrul and BNP standing committee member Mirza Abbas, in the case.

The same court also rejected a bail petition of BNP Organising Secretary Syed Emran Saleh Prince in another case centring the October 28 rally.

YUNUS CASE Defence continue arguments

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The defence yesterday submitted their arguments for the fourth consecutive day in a labour law violation case filed against Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus and three top officials of Grameen Telecom.

Sheikh Merina Sultana, chairman of the Third Labour Court of Dhaka, set December 14 for the next hearing as the defence lawyers could not complete their arguments, said Khaja Tanvir Ahmed, a lawyer for Yunus.

Prof Yunus, also chairman of Grameen Telecom, and its top officials – Ashraful Hassan, Nurjahan Begum and Mohammad Shahjahan – appeared before the court yesterday.

On September 9, 2021, Labour Inspector (general) SM Arifuzzaman of the Inspection for Factories and Establishments Department filed the case with the court.

PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 7				
Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 5-15	12-45	3-45	5-19	7-00
JAMAAT 5-50	1-15	4-00	5-22	7-30
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION				



Many residents in the hill districts are yet to receive the solar panels that were supposed to be distributed among them free of cost. Meanwhile, those who did get solar system facility had to pay money to a group of unscrupulous people for it.

PHOTO: STAR

In CHT, solar smile comes at a cost

Local influential people, govt officials charge money in exchange of free panels

LALITANLIAN PANGKHUA,
Rangamati

In the 2015-2016 fiscal year, the government-run CHT Development Board undertook a Tk 217 crore project to bring the entire CHT area under electricity coverage.

The project targeted to distribute 40,000 solar home systems and 25,000 community-based solar power systems in the Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari districts.

The cost of each solar system was estimated at Tk 45,000.

The project tenure was divided into two segments. The first ended in 2019, and the second ended in September 2023.

However, many are yet to receive solar power that was promised free of cost as a group of unscrupulous people have allegedly embezzled a huge amount of money by charging bribes from residents in exchange for the facility.

The racket includes government officials, ruling party leaders, peoples' representatives of local government bodies and brokers, alleged locals.

The correspondent spoke to around 300 people in the aforementioned districts between September and November.

Almost all of them alleged they were compelled to pay Tk 300-7,000 to get each set of solar panels. Meanwhile, many said they did not receive the panels even after paying the amount.

The authorities concerned, however, denied the allegations. Kamal Jyoti Chakma, assistant

primary education officer of Rangamati Sadar upazila, allegedly took huge amounts of money as bribes from residents of Babuchhara union under Khagrachhari's Dighinala upazila around two years ago.

"The villagers paid a total of over Tk 5 lakh last year in phases

Several other villagers brought the same allegations against Kamal, who could not be reached over phone despite repeated attempts. He also refused to meet this correspondent when he visited his office for three consecutive times in October,

Para village under Latiban union of the upazila.

Seeking anonymity, several others of the area said the UP chairman also took money from different temple committees to install solar power systems.

Contacted, Latiban UP chairman Bhumidhor Roaza declined to comment.

Similar allegations were raised by residents of different villages in Bandarban and Rangamati.

"Most villagers were compelled to pay Tk 3,000-5,000 for each set of solar panels," said Condilal Tongchongya of Kerangchhari union under Rangamati's Bilaichhari.

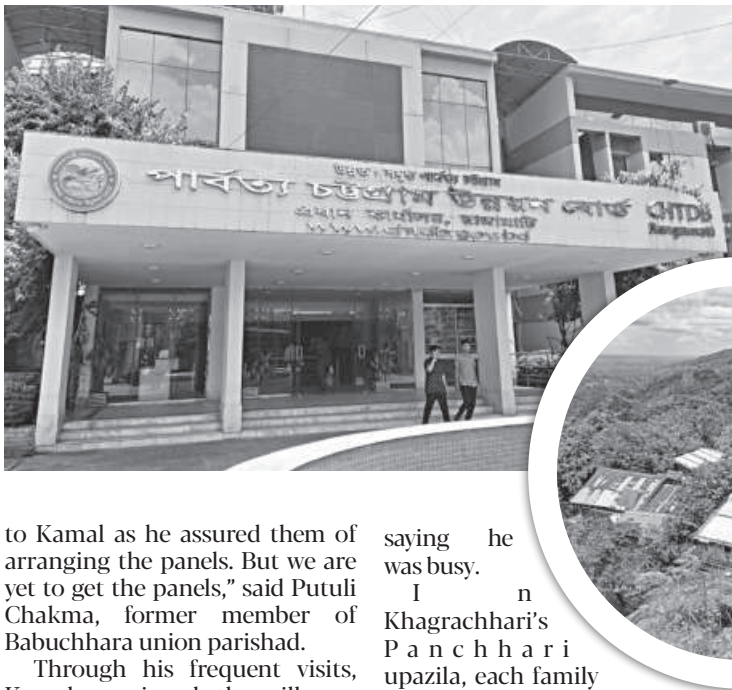
Contacted, CHTDB chairman Supradip Chakma said he was unaware about the issues as he assumed the post only two months back.

CHTDB vice-chairman Mohammad Harun Or Rashid said peoples' representatives of different local government bodies prepared the list of people to distribute solar panels among them. The lists were approved by the district administration.

"We did not get any bribery allegations. If we get formal complaints, we will take necessary legal actions upon investigation," he added.

saying he was busy. In Khagrachhari's Panchhari upazila, each family had to pay Tk 5,000 to get the solar power system, said locals.

"Our union parishad chairman took the money in advance to enlist the names of those eligible to get solar power systems. I am a jhum farmer. How could I arrange Tk 5,000? My name was therefore left out of the list," said Mobaser Tripura of Kuradiya



to Kamal as he assured them of arranging the panels. But we are yet to get the panels," said Putuli Chakma, former member of Babuchhara union parishad.

Through his frequent visits, Kamal convinced the villagers that he had a good connection with Chattogram Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) officials and promised to arrange solar panels for over 600 families in the area, said Nipon Chakma, another former UP member.

"We signed a contract with him and paid him the money. But he did not keep his word," he added.

Bangladesh now globally recognised Indian envoy Pranay Verma tells seminar

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pranay Verma yesterday reiterated that India will continue to support Bangladesh to fulfill the shared vision of peace and prosperity.



Over last five decades, Bangladesh came across ups and downs, but its achievements today have been globally recognised, Verma said at a seminar marking 52 years of India's recognition to Bangladesh on December 6, 1971.

Asiatic Society of Bangladesh organised the event at Shilpakala Academy in Dhaka.

Verma said, "We stood by Bangladesh in its struggle for liberation and today we stand ready to continue our support to the people of Bangladesh in realising their vision of stable, prosperous and progressive nation. We are working to fulfill our shared vision of peace and prosperity. The opportunities are endless."

Speaking at the event, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said, "Our relations will remain strong forever."

NOMINATION REJECTION 141 more aspirants appeal to EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Challenging the returning officers' decisions to reject their nomination papers, 141 aspirants filed appeals to the EC yesterday.

On Tuesday, 42 aspirants filed appeals to the EC on the first day. Appeals can be filed till December 9 at the EC Bhaban. The hearings will take place from December 10-15. A total of 731 nomination papers were rejected by after scrutiny.

Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan EC informed their Bangladesh counterpart that they would not visit Bangladesh to observe the January 7 polls.

A highly placed EC source said the Sri Lankan EC has sent a letter to Bangladesh CEC Kazi Habibur Awal informing its limitations.

The Sri Lankan government has restricted foreign travels due to the global financial crisis, and therefore, the Sri Lankan EC will not be able to come for polls observation, the letter said.

'Independents are definitely rebels' Says AL presidium member Abdur Razzaque

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Awami League Presidium Member Abdur Razzaque has termed the party leaders who are contesting the polls independently "rebels."

"The prime minister might have told them to contest [independently] for the sake of the election. But she didn't say that an Awami League activist should work for other candidates than the party nominated ones. In my view, they are definitely 'rebel' candidates," said Razzaque, also the agriculture minister.

Razzaque made the remarks before attending a meeting of Tangail district AL as chief guest.

On November 26, AL president Sheikh Hasina gave the go-ahead to the party leaders to run as independents to make the polls competitive and draw more voters.

The party later said any AL leader seeking to run independently must get the party nod first.

Over 400 AL independents are vying against their party nominees in 298 seats.

Cashing in on CASHEWS



OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Cashew nut cultivation in the hilly areas of Sherpur district has shown prospects of commercial success.

The pilot programme started last year under the Cashew Nut and Coffee Research, Development and Extension Project, for the first time in the greater Mymensingh region, said Dr Sukalpa Das, deputy director of Department of Agriculture Extension in Sherpur.

Under this project, some 25 farmers in Jhenaigati, Nalitabari and Sreebordi upazilas are cultivating cashew nuts on a small scale, he said, adding that the climate of the area is favourable for the crop.

This year, farmers harvested their

produce for the first time and the production capacity will increase gradually over time, mentioned Sukalpa.

"Boosting the production by expanding it among other farmers will contribute to the national economy as the product fetches high prices," added Sukalpa.

The demand for cashew nuts is increasing every year with a current annual demand of 60,000-65,000 tonnes. However, only 3,000 tonnes are produced locally while the rest is imported from Vietnam and India, said project director Shahidul Islam.

"Under this project, 25,000 tonnes of cashew nut will be produced annually after five years and the production will continue to increase," he said.



As waterbodies start to dry up in winter and small fish varieties start surfacing around the banks, dried fish producers in Lamakazi union of Sylhet's Bishwanath upazila set up stations in full swing. Around 70 such producers take up this temporary profession, employing around 1,500-2,000 workers who earn Tk 400-800 daily. Once dried, the fish, mostly comprising of tangra and puti, is bought by wholesale traders for Tk 18,000-30,000 per maund.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR