

50 given 72 hours

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The government was likely to begin serving the notices last night in the first ever initiative to make public the names of "corrupt" influential politicians, bureaucrats and business men and bring them to book.

Although the government officially does not describe the 50 as "corrupt", the ACC is sure that these people hoarded unauthorised wealth, which will be confiscated after the court disposes the cases.

"The primary conclusion of enquiry says these people have acquired huge property. Legal incomes of these people do not match their wealth," ACC Secretary Mohammad Delwar Hossain told reporters after disclosing the names of the 50 persons.

"More names will be disclosed soon," he said.

Sources also confirmed that names of another 370 corrupt persons will be disclosed soon.

The government has also decided not to engage government law officers in the trial of the corruption cases against these bigwigs in lower court, fearing they may not play expected role in it. A panel of lawyers will be recruited for the task.

Although the ACC officially published the list, it had been prepared during a secret investigation initiated by different government intelligence agencies on February 4.

POLITICIANS ON THE LIST

The former ministers and lawmakers of the BNP-led four-party coalition government and top BNP leaders on the list include former communications minister Nazmul Huda, former environment minister Tariqul Islam, former housing and public works minister Mirza Abbas, former prime minister Khaleda Zia's parliamentary affairs adviser Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, and Khaleda's political secretaries Mosaddeq Ali Falu and Harris Chowdhury.

There are also alleged militant patron Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu and Mufti Shahidul Islam, former Jamaat-e-Islami MP Shahjahan Chowdhury, Giasuddin Al Mamun's brother Hafiz Ibrahim, and former finance minister Saifur Rahman's son Naser Rahman.

The leaders and former ministers of the AL include former home minister Mohammad Nasim, former chief whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah, AL Adviser Salman F Rahman, and former bureaucrat and state minister for planning Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir.

Former secretary ANH Akhter Hossain, former member of National Board of Revenue Zahurul Haque, and businessman Nurul Islam Babul are also on the list.

The home ministry published a gazette notification on February 13, saying the properties of the persons, who have been asked to submit their wealth information, will be confiscated if they do not submit it in person in 72 hours.

The 50 will have to appear in person before four assigned ACC directors at the ACC office at Segunbagicha in the capital and submit the information.

However, the government did not publish any list or disclose any name, saying the persons will be contacted individually.

The ACC will despatch the notices to their latest available addresses. If no one is found at those addresses, the notices will be hung there.

While talking to reporters at his office, the ACC secretary disclosed the names of the 50 persons, 22 of whom have already been arrested by the joint forces.

The 22 arrested persons who have been kept in jails will be served with the notices at the prisons and will be allowed to appoint representatives for submitting their statements.

Asked if the others on the list will be arrested, the ACC secretary said, "Nowhere in the notice it has been mentioned that they will be arrested, and there is no question of arresting them."

But sources said the joint forces during their crackdown searched for them.

The ACC will lodge FIRs (first information report) against those, who will fail to provide reasonable explanations, to initiate their trial, said the ACC secretary.

The government will appoint administrator to keep running the trading firms or factories of those whose properties will be attached.

After declaring state of emergency, the government promulgated Emergency Power Ordinance, 2007 and issued a number of rules under the ordinance.

According to the notice served as per the rules and the ACC Act, the 50 will have to submit a detailed statement of all movable and immovable properties under their ownership or possession, or under their family members or anyone else on behalf of them within 72 hours from receiving the notification.

The government is also empowered to sell the confiscated properties through open auctions with the court's approval and will submit the earned money to the public exchequer.

WHAT NEXT

Four ACC directors--Tankin Haque Siddique, Abdul Wadood, Jahana Parvin and Nasrin Ara Surat Amin--will receive the statements at the ACC office.

Govt to reign

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Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam also indicated the same steps at a meeting with the representatives of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry at his ministry.

He said he asked the commerce ministry to review the anti-hoarding regulations and other related laws to bring discipline in the consumers market.

As part of the initiatives to check prices of essential commodities, the commerce ministry met with the trade bodies, importers, wholesalers and retailers.

The much talked about import syndication system was discussed in the meeting where the commerce secretary said businessmen did not complain about import syndication.

"Importers who can import a large amount of goods at a time generally get some price competitiveness. It cannot be termed syndication," he said.

"Under the existing import policy there is no barrier to any body importing any goods of any quantity. So we cannot create barrier to any importer. But we should introduce more competitiveness in order to make the price situation reasonable."

He said initiative will be taken so that more importers feel free to import more products.

Opening of letter of credit (LC) has not reduced, rather statistics show that the LC opening has increased during the last three months compared to the previous three months, he said.

Businessmen told the reporters that production of some essential commodities including onion, garlic and wheat has decreased this year in India and some other countries from where Bangladesh imports.

Prices of onion, garlic and wheat may increase in three to four months when the local production will be used up, they said.

APPOINTMENT OF LAW PANEL

The advisory council committee on anti-corruption yesterday decided to recruit a high-profile panel of lawyers to deal the corruption cases in the lower court, sources said. The law ministry will appoint the panel consulting the ACC.

"The public prosecutors and government pleaders working in the existing traditional set up in the lower court will not be able to perform up to the expectation," said one source.

Since they were appointed during the previous government regime and many of them are incompetent, they may become biased towards the leaders of the previous government, he added.

The government already has information that the bigwigs will appoint top lawyers and will spend huge amount of money to fight for them.

"To contest them properly, the government needs some competent and high-profile lawyer," the source added.

To monitor progress of the cases, the government will form a monitoring cell.

The government will bring some changes to the ACC Act to increase the number of offences in the schedule.

According to the act, property of only the accused can be confiscated. The participants of the advisory council committee discussed bringing changes to the ACC Act to enable the confiscation of illegal wealth of a person from his inheritors in case he or she dies.

"If locals want to see good people elected, they will have to spend their own money," he added.

Asked to comment on Awami League President Sheikh Hasina's remarks on micro-credit, Yunus said "I do not want to get into a politics of war of words. We have had enough of divisive politics. I want to be in politics with everyone."

"There is no way I can continue to stay away from politics. I am determined...and it does not matter who says what about me," the Nobel laureate said in his reply to the reporters' questions on supposedly veiled allegations made against him in the past few days.

On February 22, Yunus is set to send a second open letter to follow up on last week's open letter to all Bangladeshi urging them to give their opinion on whether he should join politics and launch a party. His aides have refused to provide any statistics of the responses till date, but have termed the feedback as "positive".

Yunus

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Money whitening

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He, however, did not say if a list of such people will be disclosed.

A new chairman and two new commissioners for the Anti-Corruption Commission will be named in a day or two by a newly formed selection committee, he said.

The selection committee comprises one judge each from the Appellate Division and the High Court Division, among other officials.

"We want the hearing and disposal of corruption cases to be completed as quickly as possible," said Mainul, adding that those who are being arrested on corruption charges will be judged under the current laws.

"We will not touch the laws," he said, adding that a political government promulgated these laws, so no one can say we changed them specifically for their trial.

Shopping malls

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The adviser assured them of placing the issue at the next advisory council meet.

The shop owners also

demanded publication of a white paper on corruption by the power division people and also take initiatives to reduce systems loss.

Electoral reforms

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"After considering their [political parties and the civil society] opinions, we will finalise the draft and send it to the law ministry for changes in the laws," said Huda, who was appointed on February 4 as the new CEC following resignation of MAAziz from the post.

The EC in a news release yesterday said it is proceeding with an action plan for holding a free and 'meaningful' election and it is considering reforming all election laws on a priority basis.

"The required time will be taken to complete the task," the release said.

Regarding other election laws and rules, the EC news release said those will also be examined and decisions will be taken.

"We will take a decision after examining all options," the CEC added.

About the army's offer to consider their expertise in preparing voter identity cards, Huda said the army is highly professional and very efficient, and they have the required expertise.

"We have no reservation in seeking assistance from the army," he said.

The EC had moved to introduce voter identity cards for the first time in 1994-95, but failed. "We want to succeed," the new CEC said.

said there are many election laws, but there is a lack of enforcement.

About the recommendations from the civil society, the CEC said the EC received a large number of suggestions regarding electoral reforms which include separation of the EC Secretariat from the Prime Minister's Office, and disqualification of black money holders.

Replying to a query, the CEC said the EC is thinking about introducing transparent ballot boxes in the election.

VOTER LIST

The CEC said there are some options regarding the voter list, like a voter list with photographs or voter identity cards or national identity cards.

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Pranab Mukherjee

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at Bangabhaban.

He will also call on Chief Adviser of the caretaker government Fakhrul Islam Miron had surrendered to the army on Saturday night. Besides, the crack forces arrested two union parishad (UP) chairmen in Sirajganj and Bagherhat yesterday.

Apart from these arrests the joint forces of army, police and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) arrested 1,616 people across the country and seized 11 firearms, five homemade bombs and 110 bullets in the 24 hours preceding 6:00am yesterday.

On Friday night, former UP member and also a rice trader Reza Miah Chowdhury filed a case with Rangunia police station accusing nine people including former lawmaker Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury told the media on the eve of Mukherjee's daylong visit to Dhaka.

He said: "We are looking forward to our meeting and talks with Pranab Mukherjee...We sincerely believe, this can